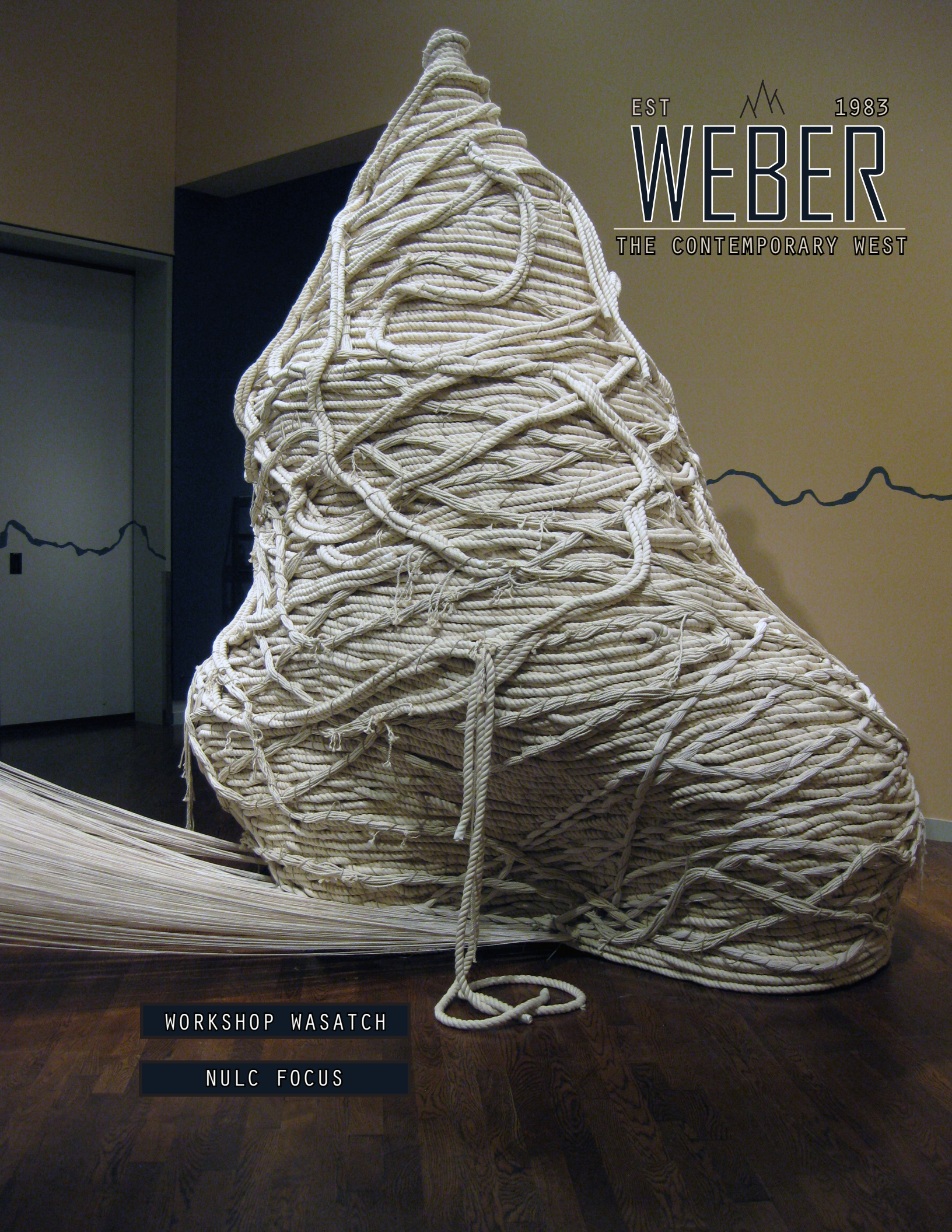

EST 1983
WEBER
THE CONTEMPORARY WEST
WORKSHOP WASATCH
NULC FOCUS

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.

Workshop Wasatch

Weber has been doing justice to its subtitle—*The Contemporary West*—since its beginnings. From a one-time in-house publication of Weber State College named *Weber Studies*, the journal has morphed into a national journal commensurate with its reach and ambition, much like Weber State University itself. And while *Weber* has been privileged to feature numerous writers and artists of international renown in recent focus issues, it has always stayed true to its roots, and rootedness, in the American West, especially Utah and the Wasatch Front.

Local and regional writers, often with a national readership, are a mainstay of the journal and give *Weber* the geographic signature readers appreciate. The feature issue *Tradition and the Individual Talent in Contemporary Mormon Letters* (1993) created a demand for a second print run, and the focus issue on Native American Literature (2013) has become a collector's item. Writers from the region, or writers writing about the region, often ground the journal and—regardless of genre, tradition, and belief—often reflect on a mythic landscape and its people(s) that combines the verdure of snow-packed mountains with sublime stretches of desiccation and desolation. Undergirded by the responsibility of stewardship and a desire to celebrate the region's unmatched beauty, western writers are cognizant that challenges of influx and population growth can be achieved only through a self-sustaining balance of ecology and the economy, environmental respect and the conscientious use of land and water.

Our Spring/Summer 2017 issue recognizes a fraction of the exciting literary, artistic, and scholarly work that is currently produced along the Wasatch and beyond. Certainly, not all of it is grounded in the West, nor should or need it be. Much like the West itself, *Weber* is capacious enough to have room for a wider, more formal and experimental range of expressions. Yet, none of our writers would likely disagree with the profoundly simple statement by Wallace Stegner, often called the Dean of Western Writers: "One cannot be pessimistic about the West. This is the native home of hope. When it fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery."

Front Cover: Pam Bowman, *Becoming*, cotton rope and string, vinyl, steel, wood, paint, caulking cotton, shown installed in 25' x 35' gallery space, 2013



VOLUME 33 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING/SUMMER 2017

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR

Michael Wutz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Kathryn L. MacKay
Russell Burrows
Victoria Ramirez
Brad Roghaar

MANAGING EDITOR

Kelsy Thompson

EDITORIAL BOARD

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

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Loreen Nariari

EDITORIAL PLANNING BOARD

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

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

LAYOUT CONSULTANTS

Mark Biddle and Brandon Petrizzo

EDITORS EMERITI

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

EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED IN BACK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME 33 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING/SUMMER 2017 | $10.00

WORKSHOP WASATCH

ART

49 The Installations of Pam Bowman

CONVERSATION

4 Christy Call, *Living Without Geological Consent – A Conversation with Simon Winchester*
11 Julia Panko, *Commemorating a Revolution – A Conversation with Colm Tóibín*
20 Kathryn L. MacKay, *"You don't know about something until you can write about it" – A Conversation with Margaret Rostkowski*
30 Sunni Wilkinson, *Letting the Arrow Hit Its Mark – A Conversation with Bethany Schultz Hurst*

ESSAY

43 Kathryn Hummel, *Purusher Desh – Men's Country*
61 Judy Elsley, *Making Text(ile)s*
67 Eric Swedin, *Columbus Was Wrong – Extract from a Work in Progress on American History*

POETRY

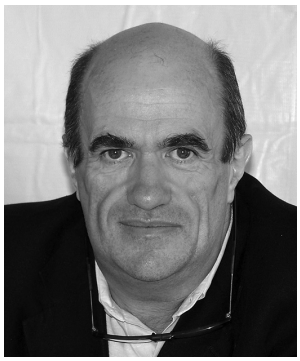
40 Bethany Schultz Hurst, *90% Contained*
75 Katharine Coles, *Summer Has No Day, Hideout, Canis Veritatem Contemplator, In Our Twenty-Fifth Summer, Away*
79 David Lee, *Postmortem*
87 Brad L. Roghaar, *What the Earth Tells Us, Gathering Small Treasures, Still Life, Two By Two*
92 Laura Stott, *Blue Nude, Chapter 1, Blue Nude Migration, Looking Up, Flesh Sings*
95 Nancy Takacs, *The Worrier*
99 Mikel Vause, *In the Churchyard of St. Thomas the Apostle, The Massacre of Innocents 1914-1917*

FICTION

102 Phyllis Barber, *Adababa – an excerpt*
111 Lance Olsen, *My Red Heaven – an excerpt*
122 Ryan Ridge, *Four Stories*

NULC FOCUS

124 Gail Yngve, *To Arrive Somewhere – A Conversation with Kay Ryan*
134 Sarah Vause, *Slavery and Racial Justice Reconsidered – A Conversation with Douglas A. Blackmon*
143 Douglas A Blackmon, *Caney Creek Bottom*



Colm Tóibín.....11



Judy Elsley.....61



Douglas A. Blackmon.....134

Christy Call

Living Without Geological Consent—

A Conversation with Simon Winchester



Setsuko Winchester

PRELUDE

At the time of this interview, Simon Winchester was traveling the country to discuss his latest book, Pacific, *a work named for the Earth's most expansive body of water, a place where, as he writes, "much of the dirty business of the modern world has been conducted." Winchester seldom stays in one place for long. A prodigious and acclaimed writer, he is a sought-after speaker. The night before our conversation, during an address at a fundraising dinner for the Ogden City School Foundation, he focused his remarks on his most famous work,* The Professor and the Madman. *Yet after leaving Utah, he was expected in New York and then in Connecticut and then finally in Philadelphia, where he would revisit ideas from his 2011 work on Lewis Carroll entitled* The Alice Behind Wonderland.

A writer with a dossier of twenty-two books and a still vibrant sense of curiosity offers the opportunity for rich and wide-ranging conversation. In no way did he disappoint. We began our conversation discussing the nature and practice of writing but settled rather quickly on the topic of climate change and on the consequences of this most extraordinary "hinge moment of history."

CONVERSATION

What is the experience like of rereading your work?

Well, it's not as bad as you'd think. I mean, I would think that I would find it very kind of juvenile. I'd written a book about the Pacific, oddly enough, in, I think, 1991, when I was living in Hong Kong, and I thought, I didn't want to read it before I wrote this book, *Pacific*, because I might be tempted to, as it were, auto-plagiarize. But I did read it the other day, and I thought, you know, it's not all that bad. I thought it would be a bit juvenile and not well thought out. It was badly organized. I can see why it didn't succeed as a book, but it wasn't as bad as all that. It's a strangely mixed experience. You'll see this sense of déjà vu, but that's not a very nice phrase. I wish I was as good as that. I haven't read *The Professor and the Madman*, and I often think, well, what would I think of that book now? And I would probably think, "Oh, I could have done so much better." So that's it. It's a confusing thing. But generally speaking, I think my feeling is that I imagine the books are going to be very bad, but they're not as bad as I think they are.

I thought it was interesting last night and you referenced it again today, the process that you have had in becoming a writer, especially the apprenticeship you had with Jan Morris. (Jan Morris, formerly James, is a respected author of many history, fiction, and travel books.) I think you said last night that there was about a two-year period of steady work with Morris before you felt an advance in your writing, a marked improvement.

I do. And I think she made me . . . and, of course, reading her books helped. I ashamedly say that other people's books sort of inspire, or educate, or prompt me to write in a certain way. For instance, Jan loves footnotes, and I love footnotes. My editor hates footnotes and is always trying to get me to take them away. But I think readers actually like them, especially if the footnote sort of goes off in a tangent, a relevant tangent. I think people find it amusing. So, in all sorts of ways I've picked up stylistic tips from Jan. And the writing—had I not had people like Jan—would have been stuck in a sort of the literary mindset of a provincial journalist. And that would have been a very differ-

ent kind of writing. So, it was Jan that made me the writer that I am, not the newspaper. Newspaper writing taught me the discipline of how to write to length and time, but Jan taught me, if you like, the stylistic flourishes that change it from being pedestrian writing into something that I hope is slightly better.

It's always difficult to have this kind of discussion because it sounds very conceited of me to talk about my writing being good writing.

When you write now, is it pretty clean when you submit a manuscript? Do you go through a lot of the revision process yourself, or do you rely on an editor? I guess maybe I am getting at the question: does it get easier?

That's a very, very interesting question [laughs]. I'd say no, actually. I'd say it gets more difficult, because you're attacking ever more ambitious subjects. If you weren't, then the temptation would be to become sort of a hack writer, you know. You want to climb a higher mountain, if you like that metaphor. So then it gets more difficult. *Pacific* is a good example. It's a much more ambitious book than, let's say, *Atlantic* was. It's a big subject! [laughs] And now I've finished, and, I think, how on earth did I do that?

After you finished Pacific*, you felt as if you couldn't do that again?*

Yeah. Precisely that way! And I look back on a book like *The Professor and the Madman* and I think, "Well, that was a very simple story to tell." To tell it well might require certain skill or something, but it's not on an awesome scale. The scale of it is not mind-boggling, whereas the scale of *Pacific* is.

Do you think of your readers when you're writing? Do they factor into the process that you go through, or is it better not to think about them?

I do know who my readers are because they're the same people who turn up at all the events that I do. So I know my reader is late middle aged, white, middle class, and probably intelligent. You know, PBS, Volvo, that kind of person. And I often think, and I think my publisher must think the same, it would be nice if Winchester's books appealed more to youngsters or something. It hasn't happened, partly because I think I don't try and write for anyone. I write for my editor and me. I don't think of my readers, but it's always the same readers who turn up. In a way, I wish my books appealed to younger people, but I think when you make that decision to think of younger people, then you start doing what you are talking about, thinking about your audience. I think whatever magic is in the book then somehow evaporates. I think it would seem very artificial. So I think I'll just go on

The ocean beneath is almost unimaginably vast, and illimitably various. It is the oldest of the world's seas, the relic of the once all-encompassing Panthalassic Ocean that opened up seven hundred fifty million years ago. It is by far the world's biggest body of water—all the continents could be contained within its borders, and there would be ample room to spare. It is the most biologically diverse, the most seismically active; it sports the planet's greatest mountains and deepest trenches; its chemistry influences the world; and the planetary weather systems are born within its boundaries.

Most see this great body of sea only in parts—a beach here, an atoll there, a long expanse of deep water in between. Just a few, mariners mostly, have the good fortune to confront the ocean in its entirety—and by doing so, to win some understanding of the immense spectrum of happenings and behaviors and people and geographies and biologies that are to be found within and on the fringes of its sixty-four million square miles. For those who do, the experience can be profoundly humbling.

—from Simon Winchester, *Pacific*

writing to who I'm writing and if young people would eventually say, "This old codger's books aren't that bad," then it will warm the cockles of my heart. No, I don't think of them, and I think it would be a mistake to think of them.

One of the things that stood out to me with Pacific *are the chapters and passages that describe changes occurring from climate change. You mentioned already that it is a big book, and I wondered if the nature of the problems that we have in the world today, problems that seem so sprawling and immense and interconnected, if this is the kind of book needed to get at those problems and just to capture, maybe even insufficiently, the scale at hand.*

I do! That's very much the intent, I think. There's two chapters, one on the environment, which begins with the coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef, which is the canary in the coalmine, if you like, and the other is Cyclone Tracy and the destroying of the city of Darwin, and follows talking about the Pacific as the world's weather generator. I think they were a way to get some sort of a handle on these massive problems, whether anthropogenic or not.

We are clearly in the grip of an extraordinary sort of a hinge moment of history. It's a hinge moment, which is difficult for most people to grasp, unless you take examples and indicate why these things happened and what the likely outcome is. The classic example is, you know, not only is the ocean acidifying and heating up and affecting the corals, but the waters are rising and people are having to leave their homes in places like Kiribati. And I think we hope we saw, didn't we, the first sea-level rise refugees claim refugee status in New Zealand recently, and the New Zealand government is considering it, but meanwhile Fiji is offering space for the people from Kiribati who may be flooded out of their homes.

I thought one of the most poignant things that's actually subsequent to the writing of the book was that the foreign minister of the Marshall Islands was in London a couple of weeks ago asking whether Britain would provide sanctuary for the Bikini islanders who had been irradiated out of their homes because of nuclear testing, moved to this miserable little island in the southern Marshalls called Kili, and now that island, because of rising sea level, is being flooded. So, they've had a double whammy of having their island destroyed or irradiated and the place they were evacuated to being flooded—both the fault of humankind probably. That seemed to me extremely poignant. And, of course, I hope the British government says, "welcome, come to Britain, if you want to." I couldn't imagine why a Bikinier would want to go to Britain, but still. [laughter]

But, yes, those two chapters are, to my way of thinking, important chapters in the way that the chapters about the transistor radio, perhaps, and surfing, are less important. So, in a way the more important chapters tend to be at the end, but that's because the events that I chose occurred later on in the story when problems like global warming became to be apparent, because they were not apparent in the

We are clearly in the grip of an extraordinary sort of a hinge moment of history. It's a hinge moment, which is difficult for most people to grasp, unless you take examples and indicate why these things happened and what the likely outcome is. The classic example is, you know, not only is the ocean acidifying and heating up and affecting the corals, but the waters are rising and people are having to leave their homes in places like Kiribati.

But ultimately we don't really care for the planet so much as we care for ourselves during our tenancy on the planet. And our tenancy is coming to an end quite quickly, I imagine. My own feeling is that humankind, just like any other species, will wipe itself out. I would imagine nuclear weapons are going to be used, probably during both of our lifetimes, certainly yours, maybe not mine.

1950s. Everything in the 1950s is much more black and white: nuclear testing, North Korea, surfing, transistor radios. But then, as you progress chronologically from 1950 to 2014, you start getting these signs of bad things happening due to environmental changes. The cyclone and coral bleaching are good examples.

There are some *good* stories. I love the rescue of that albatross by a Japanese man who single-handedly managed to save this thing from extinction. That seems wonderful. It's a reminder that we can, if we put our minds to it, achieve great things and stop some of the degradation that we've been responsible for.

You have a great description of "a gloom-dimmed world." I love that. I think I was drawn to that expression because my own research situates literature within more-than-human or ecological contexts. When I teach this stuff to students there always seems like a fine balance to be had in giving them the reality, which is "gloom-dimmed" indeed, sometimes even seemingly doomed*, and also providing stories of people and organizations doing good things. Do you have a hopeful sense about this, or are you pessimistic? Do you think we will manage this challenge?*

Well, put it this way: the planet is going to manage it. The planet is okay. Whatever we do to it, the planet will recover. So, in a sense, our concern for the environment is ultimately selfish. We want to preserve the world as it is for us.

But ultimately we don't really care for the planet so much as we care for ourselves during our tenancy on the planet. And our tenancy is coming to an end quite quickly, I imagine. My own feeling is that humankind, just like any other species, will wipe itself out. I would imagine nuclear weapons are going to be used, probably during both of our lifetimes, certainly yours, maybe not mine. Probably between India and Pakistan, probably Israel will somehow get involved. So, I think we're going to do immense damage to ourselves. Damage to the planet, but the planet will recover, but we won't. So maybe we'll be here for another thousand years. My old geology professor believed we'd only have another hundred years before we one way or another manage to destroy ourselves. And it'll be our own darn fault. But, as I keep saying, I'm a great believer in the Gaia theory of James Lovelock, which is that the planet is a self-regulating mechanism. A wonderful example of this, if you looked at the book on the Atlantic ocean, was this discovery made only in 1989, of what turns out to be the most numerous creature on this planet, which is this single-celled algae that lives in warm waters called Prochlorococcus. It exists about 30 degrees latitude north to about 40 degrees latitude south in *all* the oceans, and has this ability to absorb compounds and emitting its oxygen such that one in every five of the breaths that you and I take today is produced by a creature in the sea that we didn't know existed.

And the remarkable thing about Prochlorococcus is it loves warm water, so the hotter the waters get, the greater its range, and therefore the more carbon dioxide it will absorb and the more oxygen it can produce. So we can warm the oceans as much as we want, and it'll do great harm. But this delight-

ful little creature will be one of the things that saves the planet. So, the planet will carry on long without us. It'll shrug us off.

In your historical narratives, you're telling us where we've been and where we're at now, and trying to make a coherent portrait. You do that very well. What about the philosophies and ideas underlying these events? Is there something that you can point to and say, "This is why we're doing this to the planet. This is where this is coming from philosophically"? How do you go there in your writing and thinking?

Well, I did this book about the San Francisco earthquake and became very interested in looking at the history of earthquakes around the world, and volcanoes and tsunamis and things like that. The classic one was 1755 in Lisbon, when the city of Lisbon was wrecked totally by a huge earthquake. The view of the city fathers was that that was the work of heretics, so all the heretics had to be arrested and burned, which they were. It has to be said that there hasn't been an earthquake in Lisbon since, so maybe there is some sense . . . but I say that facetiously! [laughter]

But the one voice of sanity was Voltaire, who wrote *Candide* and said, "No, there is a rational explanation to this." So as we've come to understand and explain away these events, and indeed sought to forecast them—I mean, we can forecast volcanoes to a pretty good extent and tsunamis to a pretty good extent. But what do we do? We keep building cities, we keep building them, and we think we can outfox nature now with technology. And yet, it seems to me incredible arrogance.

The world is littered with the ruins of cities that were built where they shouldn't be built, because nature is a force that we cannot control. And we try to! We build a city like Pompeii, and with all the grandiosity of it it's destroyed in a heartbeat. We built places like Heliopolis in the desert. We build cities in deserts where there is no water. We continue to do it. We built Phoenix. We built Tucson. I mean, it is insanity.

St. George, Utah. Utah's famous for this kind of building in deserts.

Yes! We built New Orleans fifteen feet below sea level in a part of the world that we know is going to be ravaged by storms. We built one of the most high-tech cities in America, San Francisco, on the top of the dividing line between two continental plates. So we have this arrogant assumption that we can cheat nature, and our post-Voltaire understanding of the forces of nature haven't taught us humility. What it has taught us is new technologies to make our buildings stronger and more earthquake resistant, or volcano proof, or tsunami proof. That seems insane to me.

Having said that, we tend to live in places that are beautiful, as we ought to. The mountains that you have said you admire are put up by dangerous forces. So with beauty comes savagery. So this is a trade-off. I mean, if we all wanted to go live in Kansas or Nebraska where it is geologically

Prochlorococcus is a phytoplankton, a tiny plant-like bacteria that is less than a micron wide and exists at the very bottom of the ocean's food chain. Lay 100 of them end to end and they would be as wide as a human hair.

Penny Chisholm, an oceanographer, estimates that Prochlorococcus is responsible for about 5 to 10 percent of the photosynthesis on Earth today. She traces its origins back 3.5 billion years to cells with mutations that resulted in the release of oxygen into the atmosphere.

"They split water, which is H2O, and that oxygen was released into the atmosphere...," she said. "So if these cells hadn't discovered, so to speak, photosynthesis, there wouldn't be oxygen in our atmosphere, and we certainly never would have evolved."

—"Without These Ancient Cells You Wouldn't Be Here," *PBS Newshour*, March 6, 2014.

The world is littered with the ruins of cities that were built where they shouldn't be built, because nature is a force that we cannot control. And we try to! We build a city like Pompeii, and with all the grandiosity of it it's destroyed in a heartbeat. We built places like Heliopolis in the desert. We build cities in deserts where there is no water. We continue to do it. We built Phoenix. We built Tucson. I mean, it is insanity.

stable, then, of course, we'd have locusts and droughts and tornadoes to deal with. So you can run, but you can't hide, in a way.

But your basic question—if I understand it correctly—is if our philosophic approach to these things has meant that we understand them better. Well, it has, but all that it does is it makes us more hubristic in our approach. We think, "Oh, we understand it now, and we can deal with it." Well, you can't. There's a famous line in one of those great philosophy books—it's actually in Will Durant's article "What is Civilization" (1946)—where he effectively says, "Mankind lives on this planet subject to geological consent, which can be withdrawn at any time." That we ought to remember.

I've just done a geology book for children, my first time I've ever done a children's book, and it's for ten to fourteen year olds. It's a three-book contract, and the first is called ***When the Earth Shakes***. It's published by the Smithsonian and Penguin, and is about volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. And then the next volume is called ***When the Sky Breaks***, and it's about hurricanes, typhoons, and tornadoes. And the third one, we're not quite sure of. I hope that the text, with a lot of illustrations, of course, reminds readers that the business about living without geological consent is something that we should be much more respectful and wary of—the power of nature.

So it's a deliberate attempt, in those books, to talk to children?

Yes, very much so. And I'll try to remember the dedication. It was to my grandchildren, Coco and Lola. It said, "Respect Nature. Be amazed. Stay Safe. Copyright 2015. Your Grandpa." And they were tickled by it.

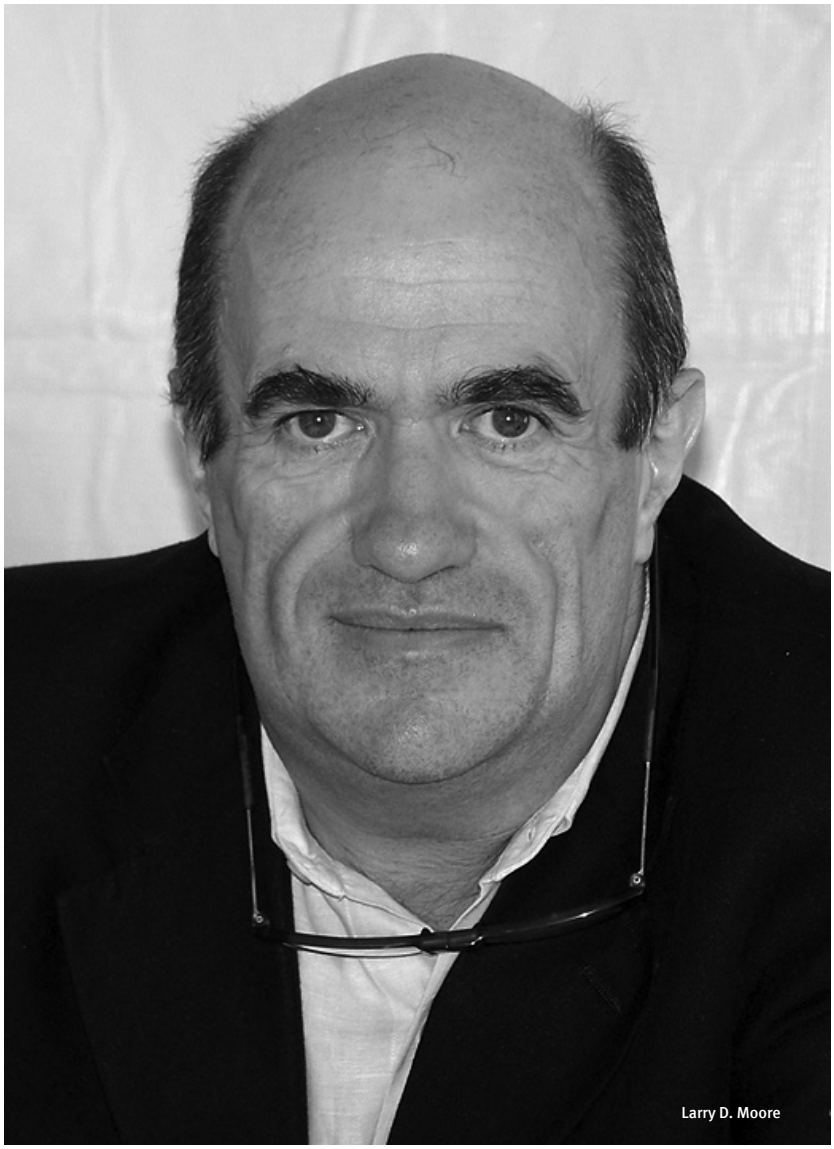


Christy Call (Ph.D., Univ. of Utah) is an assistant professor in Weber State University's English Department. Her dissertation on Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy interpreted the novels from fused frameworks of actor-network theory, new materialisms, and critical animal studies. Christy's research highlights emergent ethical issues in an age of climate change, specifically focusing on how literature and new interpretative approaches may sponsor more just ways of thinking about relations. She is currently at work on a book-length project. Her webpage may be found at www.weber.edu/MAEnglish/Call.html

Julia Panko

Commemorating a Revolution—

A Conversation with Colm Tóibín



Larry D. Moore

PRELUDE

Colm Tóibín is one of Ireland's most renowned writers. In his fiction, journalism, and other work, he is an incisive analyst of his country. His prolific writing has addressed everything from Ireland's revolutionary history, to the subtleties of life in its rural towns, to the issues currently facing the nation. Although Tóibín has been particularly eloquent on Irish issues, his work resists pigeonholing. Born in the Irish town of Enniscorthy, Tóibín has travelled widely and resided in Spain, Argentina, and the United States. His writings reflect his international, and intellectual, scope.

Tóibín is perhaps best known for his eight novels. His fiction is disarmingly understated: in sparse, lyrical prose, his careful character studies bring to life the inner workings of his protagonists' minds. His novels explore with quiet depth such themes as loss, desire, and family conflict. In Nora Webster *(2015), the title character copes with her grief as she reconstructs her life in the wake of her husband's death. In* Brooklyn *(2009), Eilis Lacey faces a choice between her Irish roots and the new identity she has begun to build in the United States.* The Master *(2004) and* The Testament of Mary *(2012) imagine the thoughts, both profound and mundane, of Henry James and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Tóibín has also written the novels* The South *(1990),* The Heather Blazing *(1992),* The Story of the Night *(1996), and* The Blackwater Lightship *(1999), as well as the short story collections* Mothers and Sons *(2006) and* The Empty Family *(2010).*

Colm Tóibín's body of work is as extensive and diverse as it is critically acclaimed. In addition to his novels and short stories, he has written poetry, plays, librettos, and a memoir, and he has recently co-written his first screenplay, Return to Montauk, *in collaboration with legendary writer-director Volker Schlöndorff. Tóibín is also a gifted essayist, journalist, and literary critic – work that has made him a leading public intellectual. He is a regular contributor to the* New York Review of Books *and the* London Review of Books, *and his recent scholarly study of the poet Elizabeth Bishop was named one of the best books of 2015 by* The Guardian, The Irish Times, *and* The New Yorker. *Tóibín's work has been widely recognized, with prizes including the Encore Award, the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, the Dublin IMPAC Prize, the Edge Hill Prize, and the Irish PEN Award for outstanding contribution to Irish literature. Three of his novels have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and his play version of* The Testament of Mary *was nominated for a best play Tony Award. The film adaptation of his novel* Brooklyn, *which was featured in Ogden during the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, was nominated for three Academy Awards. In addition to his remarkable writing career, Tóibín has taught at Stanford, Princeton, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Manchester. He is currently a professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia.*

The following conversation took place during Mr. Tóibín's visit to Weber State University, where he spoke on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Ireland's Easter Rising. On Easter Monday in 1916, armed rebels took to the streets in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland to fight for political independence from British rule. About five hundred people were killed in the fighting, the leaders were publicly executed, and several thousand Irish people – including Mr. Tóibín's grandfather – were arrested or interned without trial for their participation. These events stirred public sentiment and paved the way for the push that would lead to Ireland's independence.

I would like to thank Colm for his time and generosity. I would also like to thank my colleagues Michael Wutz, Mark Stevenson, and Lydia Gravis, with whom it was a pleasure to organize his visit to Weber State University.

Thank you for speaking with me, Colm. I wanted to ask you about the hundredth anniversary of Ireland's Easter Rising. What were your impressions of the centenary commemorations in Ireland? I've read in interviews that you felt, when you were growing up, that the Rising had the aura of legend about it – but that it could also feel very ordinary. You might be having supper at home, and someone who had participated in 1916 would be sitting in your living room socializing with your family. To what degree does that dual sense of 1916 as legendary and ordinary hold true for you today?

In the pantheon of Irish nationalism, my home town of Enniscorthy is in a strange position because the 1798 rebellion against British rule in Ireland ended there. Vinegar Hill, which overlooks Enniscorthy, was the last stand of the rebels, who held the town for some time in the summer of 1798. So there are a good number of ballads that were written in 1898 for the centenary of that rebellion, ballads that name Enniscorthy or Vinegar Hill. "At Vinegar Hill o'er the pleasant Slaney, our heroes vainly stood back to back and the Yoes at Tullow took Father Murphy and they burned his body upon the rack." Those songs would have been part of the tradition. Then, the town also had a rebellion in Easter week of 1916. In Dublin it was on the Monday, but in Enniscorthy it was on the Thursday.

So after much of the fighting in Dublin.

Yes. The fighting in Dublin was really at its height, and Enniscorthy had just four days. The big issue was that large numbers of people were interned in Wales afterwards. My grandfather was in the rebellion, and he was interned. And it wouldn't be talked about much. It was a strange generation: they wouldn't boast about it or go around making speeches about it. It would have lost its mystique somehow. It was probably much more traumatic than anyone says, being dragged out of your house and imprisoned, not knowing for how long. You'd almost need a department of trauma studies as well as a department of history to understand what this meant.

I remember watching the program "Insurrection," which was shown on Irish television in Easter week of 1966, the fiftieth anniversary of 1916. Marion Stokes, who had been in the rebellion and was one of the women who put the tricolor flag up over the town, was in our house watching the program every night.

How did she react to it?

She never said anything.

That silence again.

She was a terribly polite woman. She came, and she had sort of a formidable presence. She was polite to everybody and she knew everyone's name and she watched it and she had tea and then she went home. It wasn't as though she came in celebration of herself. She was there, and so the rebellion was part of the air. But nobody boasted about it. I think modesty was part of it. People would have thought that it would have been quite wrong to say, "Oh, that morning..." and tell us all the whole story. She didn't even think of doing that.

Has the tenor of the way people talk about the Rising changed, fifty years later?

Yes, because the IRA campaign began in earnest in 1970-71. Everyone in the south, where there was really no great IRA campaign, realized that celebrating an insur-

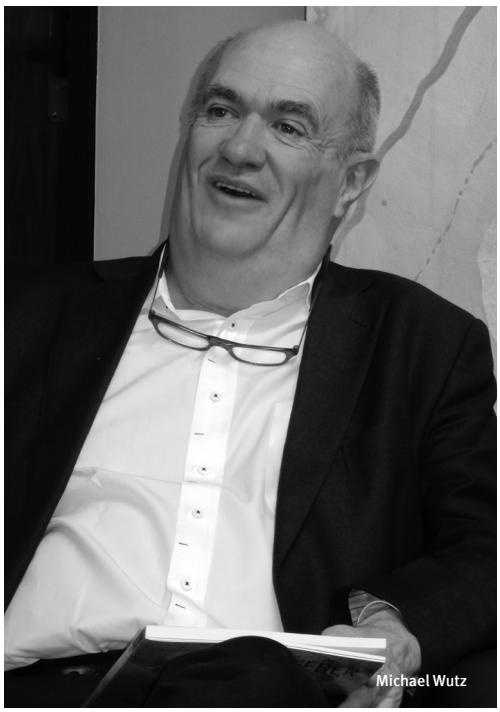
Everyone in the south, where there was really no great IRA campaign, realized that celebrating an insurrection, which had no electoral mandate, may have sent something into the atmosphere suggesting that this is the way you achieve political ends. People reeled around, trying to disconnect the then, 1916, and the now. None of that made sense, so they just stopped commemorating the 1916 part.

rection, which had no electoral mandate, may have sent something into the atmosphere suggesting that this is the way you achieve political ends. People reeled around, trying to disconnect the then, 1916, and the now. None of that made sense, so they just stopped commemorating the 1916 part. And so the commemorations of the 75th anniversary in 1991 were muted and almost embarrassed. It was in the middle of the IRA campaign, and it's very difficult to argue that one thing was glorious while you're imprisoning young men for being involved in the other.

Can you tell me about the event that you organized in Dublin for the hundredth anniversary?

The National Concert Hall asked me to create an event called "On Revolution," including writers and music, which was part of a week-long series of concerts called "Imagining Home." I invited five writers to speak. Ahdaf Soueif was in Tahrir Square in 2011; she wrote a book called *Cairo* and she's also a novelist and a Palestinian activist. We invited her to talk about what revolution meant to her and what it had done to her. We invited Eva Hoffman; she and her parents had hidden during the Holocaust in Poland and then gone to Canada when she was 14. She lost her country. She's written a number of books about Eastern Europe and about the aftermath of the Holocaust. We invited Adam Zagajewski, who is the main Polish poet. He had lost his native city, Lvov, which became part of the Soviet Union, and was moved to another city. For Irish people, this would have been an unimaginable idea. And we invited Hisham Matar, whose father was imprisoned by the Gadhafi regime, held for about twenty years, and then murdered by Gadhafi. And then also Joseph O'Neill, who has written *Netherland*. One of his grandfathers, who was Turkish, was imprisoned during the Second World War because of his activities; and his other grandfather on his Irish side was also imprisoned, due to his involvement with the IRA.

So we had those five speakers, and we also had music that dealt with the idea of revolution. We had Beethoven, and Chopin,



Michael Wutz

and I wrote the libretto for an oratorio. The music was written by a well-known composer called Donnacha Dennehy. It was about the friendship between Roger Casement and Joseph Conrad, who had known revolution in the Congo in the 1890s.

Were there points of resonance among the different talks, or between this event and your involvement with other centenary events, that you hadn't anticipated?

Well, I did a lecture at the British Museum the previous week on the history of the rebellion, which I also wrote for the *London Review of Books*. In a way, writing a libretto is like writing poetry, where you're trying to find images that have a resonance, whereas when you're writing straight history, you're looking for a narrative thread that you can analyze. It's a different part of your brain that you're using.

What was nice was that, because I did an interview to promote the National Concert Hall event at eight o'clock on the morning of Easter Sunday, I went out on the streets quite early in the morning on this big day in Dublin and I wandered around for four or five hours on my own, just looking at it.

What was the city like that day?

The weather was great until two or three o'clock. Huge numbers of people came in; they brought their kids into the city. Everything was on big screens so everyone could see. The army was the main focus. The Irish army has never been to war. There's an affection for them, a feeling that they represent us in some interesting way. We only do UN peacekeeping missions. So people spontaneously applauded the army, and people spontaneously applauded the president of Ireland, and when they wanted a moment of silence, they got a moment of silence. It was a mixture of carnival and reverence.

I suppose the ideal for the commemorations was that the Rising was one of the ways the Irish State was founded. We cannot ignore this. To ignore this would be to erase something from our history. The only thing to do is to complicate the narrative. The people who did it were very probably very brave, but in ways that were sort of strange and needed a lot of examination. But there were other people in the city going about their ordinary business who got trapped in this and were injured or killed. And so many things were happening when the Rising was happening. Some of the people in the rebellion had brothers fighting in the trenches during the First World War. Or remember that the Rising was in a city that really knew immense poverty. Look at the civilians who were killed, and also look at the different strands that made up the organization that caused the rebellion. Keep asking questions rather than just keep celebrating.

In a way, writing a libretto is like writing poetry, where you're trying to find images that have a resonance, whereas when you're writing straight history, you're looking for a narrative thread that you can analyze. It's a different part of your brain that you're using.

It's unbelievable: if you go into Hodges Figgis, which is the main Dublin bookstore, there's a wall of new books on 1916. And there's a market for them; it isn't as though there are too many. Irish taxi drivers will talk to you about books they've read on the subject. When Irish television asked Michael Portillo, who was the minister under Margaret Thatcher, to make a documentary from the British side about the rebellion, that was very popular. People were interested in what it had to say.

So the point is to expand the definition of commemoration, so that it includes all aspects of that historical moment.

Yes. I think the idea of commemoration has changed in this way everywhere. I noticed, for example, when they put the wreaths on the Cenotaph, it's not about celebrating the First World War. It's done with quite an amount of sorrow.

Another way of talking about revolution in twenty-first century Ireland is the marriage equality referendum. Just one year before the 1916 centenary, in 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote. When the referendum campaign was happening, you wrote in The Irish Times *that it allowed gay people in Ireland "to have a public debate with our entire nation about our need for recognition and equality." Where did this shift come from? It seems like a fairly radical change for a country where homosexuality was criminalized until 1993. Or is it not yet enough of a shift?*

People thought, if my son or daughter comes to me, and they're sixteen years old and they tell me they're gay, I have to be able to say something to them to help them. I do think that Irish society had softened a great deal, in any case. But the campaign itself can be a blueprint for any campaign, for any issue from gay rights to women's rights to environmental rights.

I think the campaign is very interesting in how it was run. It says a lot about Ireland, but it also says a lot about what we know now about electoral politics. The idea was, stop gay people from being an angry, marginalized group looking for rights. If you do that, you will not win. So what you have to do is go home, if you're gay, find your family, and tell them "Please work for me." A lot of Irish electoral politics is done door-to-door. You have to go door-to-door. Don't go on your own. Don't go with your boyfriend. Bring your mother or your sister and let them do the talking, and you just stand there. Stay silent as much as possible. Don't ask for rights. Tell your story.

Make it personal rather than political.

Everything personal, nothing political. Nothing abstract, nothing about human rights but about how you first told your parents, how you first felt. People thought, if my son or daughter comes to me, and they're sixteen years old and they tell me they're gay, I have to be able to say something to them to help them. I do think that Irish society had softened a great deal, in any case. But the campaign itself can be a blueprint for any campaign, for any issue from gay rights to women's rights to environmental rights. Anyone looking to campaign should look at the Irish referendum campaign and see how it was done.

So that approach is what made it successful?

The campaign won by 64 percent, but it wasn't only successful on its own terms. It also opened up things for gay people. It meant gay people could feel loved, wanted, and involved. So it was a huge liberation.

Do you feel that you have a different relationship with Ireland – politically or personally – as a result of the referendum?


Michael Wutz

I wonder if I do. I think I benefitted from the change, which may have even occurred twenty years earlier and we just didn't notice it. There was a time when it was unmentionable, of course. But you always had your friends. You would find your own world and inhabit it. And every so often you'd find out how prejudiced and belligerent the outside world was.

Also, I was operating from a pretty unassailable position. I wasn't teaching at a religious school. I wasn't a nurse at a religious hospital. I wasn't involved with a lot of homophobic workmates who would make jokes. I didn't have any of that. Other people did. Lots of people did—still do. I think the big issue now is to get kids to stop bullying each other about it.

Hopefully the campaign has gone some way towards changing those attitudes that create the kind of climate where bullying flourishes.

To shift topic a bit, I wanted to ask you about the Irish language. There's a beautiful scene in your novel Brooklyn *where Eilis is transfixed by a man singing an old song, "Casadh an tSúgáin," in Irish. And I take it that the song the mother sings in your story "A Song" is also from the Irish-language sean-nos tradition. What is the value or role of the Irish language today, given that it's a language most Irish people don't use much in their daily lives – but that persists through cultural traditions, like song?*

You have to see it, I suppose, as a human rights question before you see it as anything else. There are still people on the islands and in the west of Ireland who are at least bilingual and who probably speak Irish first. You've got to give them equal rights. But the problem on the other hand is if you say to people, "Irish is your language even if you don't speak it." That makes no sense. A lot of people think, what use will this be to my son or daughter if they're going to end up in Germany? Perhaps we should start teaching German to five year olds rather than Irish. And another group says this is our language; this is our nation's language. I've never seen anyone win an argument about it.

There's also a great sadness attached to it. Families, even people I knew, decided

Families, even people I knew, decided not to speak Irish to their children because it really would be a stigma in certain parts of the west to be a native Irish speaker. But on the east coast, you have the immersion schools, where everything was done through Irish. It certainly was a shock to me when I went to live in Catalonia in 1975. Everything was done in two languages. They were proud of speaking Catalan, but they also spoke Spanish. Why Ireland did not become bilingual is the strangest part of the story.

With a novel, there's almost a sense that everything is blank except for that one clue you're given, and the eye or the imagination or the reader fills in all of the rest. In three dimensions, with the color and the whole thing. That's what reading is: participating in the text. With film, you are having things spelled out for you. And that can be very powerful, especially watching it in a group when you realize everyone in the room is watching the same film.

not to speak Irish to their children because it really would be a stigma in certain parts of the west to be a native Irish speaker. But on the east coast, you have the immersion schools, where everything was done through Irish. It certainly was a shock to me when I went to live in Catalonia in 1975. Everything was done in two languages. They were proud of speaking Catalan, but they also spoke Spanish. Why Ireland did not become bilingual is the strangest part of the story.

Do you have hope for the future of the Irish language?

It's not as though it's going to become the spoken language of the country, but it's not going to die out.

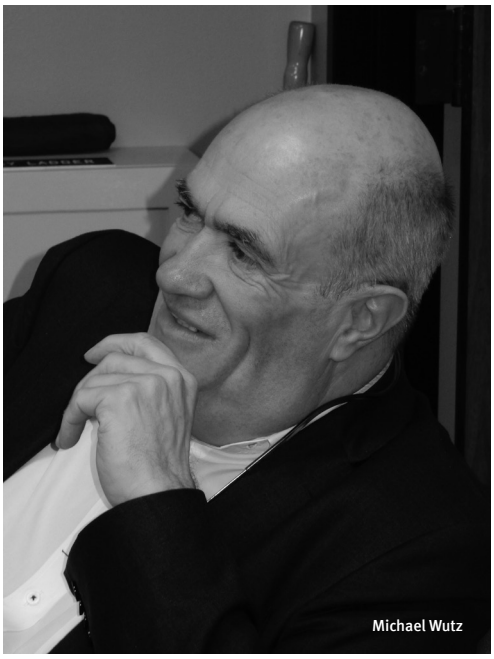
You mentioned earlier today that you are able to write in all sorts of places. That must be especially useful with all of the travelling you've been doing for the Brooklyn *movie this year. What's your writing routine like? Do you have a certain schedule that you have to stick to?*

What works well for me is if I have a month every so often for work, and then I know what I have to achieve in that month. I work really hard in that month, and I plan all the things that I need to do. I probably have half the year where I don't have to go anywhere or do anything. And if you wake in the morning in the suburbs of Los Angeles or in the Pyrenees or in rural Ireland and you don't have anything to do, writing becomes a way to solve that problem.

Do you write in longhand? Or do you type it out?

Longhand with *Nora Webster*, and then with this current book I'm typing it. I don't know why. But I'll have to go back to longhand with it.

What does that do differently for you? Does it change the pacing?



Michael Wutz

Yeah, I get things right more often when I do longhand than when I'm typing.

What's it like to see something you've written adapted for another medium? Brooklyn*'s a tremendous novel, and we enjoyed the film at the screening on campus today. What surprised you most about the adaptation, if anything?*

I think a film is so filled with details. In a novel you give people clues and signs all the time, so you don't describe everything in the room; and therefore people are constantly using their imagination when they're reading. They're learning to visualize from the words. With film it's so explicit.

I've been reading a book called Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology *by Daniel Punday. He says that one of the unique abilities of the novel as a medium is to represent absence itself. Film can't do that; it always has to show us something.*

With a novel, there's almost a sense that everything is blank except for that one clue you're given, and the eye or the imagination or the reader fills in all of the rest. In three dimensions, with the color and the whole thing. That's what reading is: participating in the text. With film, you are having things spelled out for you. And that can be very powerful, especially watching it in a group when you realize everyone in the room is watching the same film.

So it's a different experience from having everyone reading the same novel.

If you have a group all reading a book at the same time, they're all going at different paces, so it's kind of unimaginable. But when a group is watching a film it's almost like something in a theater. Something can lift for the group because so much has been made so clear that everybody is getting the same message, more or less.

Colm, thank you very much for speaking with me today.

Thank you.



Julia Panko (Ph.D, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara) is Assistant Professor of English at Weber State University. Previously, she was a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities at MIT. She has published in journals including the *James Joyce Quarterly* and *Contemporary Literature*, and she is currently working on a book about information culture and the novel.

Kathryn L. MacKay

"You don't know about something until you can write about it"—

A Conversation with Margaret Rostkowski



PRELUDE

Margaret I. Rostkowski's first published novel, After the Dancing Days, *was listed by the American Library Association as a "notable children's book" in 1986, and that same year it won a Golden Kite award from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. The next year, the novel garnered the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award (young adult novel).* After the Dancing Days *continues to be used in schools today, with lesson plans, readers' theater scripts, and reading quizzes to accompany the text. Rostkowski published two additional works of young adult literature:* Moon Dancer *in 1995 and* The Best of Friends *in 1989.*

Margaret is currently the co-director of the Wasatch Range Writing Project (WRWP) at Weber State University, one of the sites of the National Writing Project. The mission of these projects is to enhance student learning across curricular and grade level areas by improving writing in all areas and mediums. WRWP provides professional development for local teachers and is connected to the Weber Reads project in creating lesson plans for all grade levels using authors and subjects chosen that particular year.

Margaret Irene Ellis Rostkowski was born January 12, 1945, in Little Rock, Arkansas. She moved with her parents to Ogden, Utah, where her father had taken a job with the newly established St. Benedict's Hospital. After graduating from the Helen Bush School in Seattle, Margaret attended Middlebury College in Vermont. She earned a BA in history, graduating with high honors. She and her mother then moved to Kansas, and Margaret earned an MA in teaching at the University of Kansas. She married Charles Rostkowski and they eventually returned to Utah where they hoped to be more successful in finding jobs.

CONVERSATION

I began teaching in the Ogden schools in 1974. I applied to teach history and they told me women never teach history because history teachers have to be coaches. And so they asked, "Can you teach English?" And I thought, "Oh, why not? I need the work." So I was in the Ogden School District for thirty-four years and taught until 2007.

Margaret, how did you become a writer?

I think I was always writing little stuff. I was a voracious reader. I read, read, read all the time. I read *Little Women* when I was ten. That's the date in the book that I got when I was ten and I read it immediately. I also read *Anne of Green Gables*. I was reading things very, very young, and I read them voraciously. I read all the *Lad: A Dog* books and all the *Black Stallion* books, and I read historical fiction. I would walk down to Ogden's public library, the Carnegie Library down on the corner of 26th and Washington Boulevard, and go to the basement where they kept the children's books and I checked out books like *Clara of Philadelphia* and *Betsy of Boston*. I loved those books. I loved the history, and I think that's one reason I wanted to be a history major. I read *War and Peace* the Christmas break of my tenth grade year and really liked it. No joke. [laughs] I've read it twice since then and I want to read it again.

I've just always loved to read. Well, you've seen my house. It's full of books. But I never thought I'd be a writer. I remember thinking, "Oh, you can't do that." But then,

fortuitously, in 1981, I became part of the Utah Writing Project thanks to Bill Strong at Utah State University. I still remember it. He came to Ogden High and I went to the meeting thinking maybe this would be interesting. I was teaching English at Mount Ogden Junior High, and Bill Strong talked about this four weeks in the summer where you write and write and write and write and you learn about teaching writing. And I thought, "Oh I'll apply, but I won't get accepted, because everyone else will want to do this." Well, I did get accepted and it changed my life. It was the biggest step, professionally, I've ever taken. And we wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote.

That's what the writing project is: teachers as writers, writers as teachers. And that's our mantra. If you are teaching writing, you must be a writer. I always say you can't teach basketball unless you play it. And so that year, I came back to the classroom filled with the spirit of the writing project. I had my students write and I wrote with them. I was writing, writing, writing, writing. I was priming the pump.

In January of 1982, I woke up one Sunday morning to the soundtrack to *Chariots of Fire*. I had seen the movie, loved the movie. I loved World War I because of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which is a book that influenced me profoundly. And I'm not sure when I first read it, but I love that book. And there's a scene in *Chariots of Fire* where the two athletes are coming to Cambridge. They get off the train and they come down the stairs loaded with their tennis rackets and their golf clubs and everything. And there are two men waiting at the bottom of the steps who help the athletes load their lugggage into the taxi that will take them to college. And the camera focuses on those two men; their faces have been destroyed. One of them is wearing goggles and some kind of wire thing holding his face together and the other one is deeply, deeply scarred. And the two athletes stare at them in horror, but they get in the taxi and they drive off. The camera focuses back on these two disfigured men, and one of them says to the other: "we fought the war so that shits like that could go to college."

I never thought I'd be a writer. I remember thinking, "Oh, you can't do that." But then, fortuitously, in 1981, I became part of the Utah Writing Project thanks to Bill Strong at Utah State University. . . . He came to Ogden High and I went to the meeting thinking maybe this would be interesting. I was teaching English at Mount Ogden Junior High, and Bill Strong talked about this four weeks in the summer where you write and write and write and write and you learn about teaching writing. And I thought, "Oh I'll apply, but I won't get accepted, because everyone else will want to do this." Well, I did get accepted and it changed my life. It was the biggest step, professionally, I've ever taken.

And so the music and the memory of that scene came together in my head. I sat down that morning and wrote the first chapter of *After the Dancing Days*: the scene at the train station where Annie goes with her mother and her father comes home from the war. That was the beginning. And I outlined the rest of the book that day and wrote the last chapter. That all changed, thanks to a very fine editor, but that was the beginning. It was based on a lot of reading, and I'd

always heard the stories from my mother about her uncles who fought in World War I. There were several of them: Uncle Charlie and Uncle Frank and Uncle John, and they all came home, fortunately. But that had been a big part of the family story, which is a big thing in my family, telling family stories. And I have photographs of my mother sitting with one of her uncles. So it's a combination of factors. That's how it started.



Left to Right: Carolyn Leuenberger, Lawrence Maxwell, Charlotte Leuenberger—Margaret's aunt, great-uncle, and mother.

Let's talk about how you found your way from being accepted by a publisher to getting an editor. Nowadays, it seems that everyone is just publishing online, but you had a really fine editor. In looking at your papers, Margaret, I'm stunned by the multiple drafts and these poignant letters back and forth between you and your editor, the many times her comments say, "Margaret, you can do this. Don't despair. You can keep after this. I know I've written lots of comments, but it's really a good text. Keep after it." Describe that process.

Well, I had some incredibly lucky breaks. First of all (and I just have to mention this) I had a good friend (Terri McCulloch) who was a first-year teacher at Mount Ogden and she was working at Smith's grocery store because she wasn't making enough to live on as a single woman and a first-year teacher. But she had an electric typewriter. All I had was my old manual typewriter from high school, and she would come over Saturday night after working all day at Smith's and pick up what I wrote and she would take it home and type it. So I had a beautiful copy.

And I saw a tiny little article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* that talked about the Utah Original Writing Competition. The deadline was in April. I had worked all spring and all summer on this book. And to add just a note, my husband and I adopted our first son, David, and he arrived in February of that year. So we had a six-year-old boy who didn't speak English and I'm trying to work on this novel. Chuck would take him swimming on Saturday and I'd sit down and write another chapter. And then in the summer I got him enrolled in a daycare program at Polk School and I'd sit down and write. I'd ignore the dishes and everything else and write another chapter. The Utah Competition gave me a deadline to get the book finished. And I thought, "Nothing will happen; it won't win, but it'll give me a deadline to get the book finished." So I finished it up.



Michael Wutz

I did not trust the United States mail. So my mother and I drove the manuscript to Salt Lake and the Utah Arts Council, which was then in this beautiful build-

ing next door to the Governor's Mansion. I walked in with this manila envelope in my hand, and a very elegant woman was sitting there. Behind her were a stack of manila envelopes, and I, trying to be friendly, said, "Oh, is that what you've gotten so far?" And she said, "That's what we've gotten today." So I handed her my manuscript thinking, "Well, goodbye little book."

A month later I got a phone call: "You've won first place in the young adult competition." So after that I sent it off to Atheneum, because that was a publishing house whose books I respected. And I got a very nice letter back from the main editor of YA books. She said, "We can't use this, but this is a promising book." I didn't know that that really meant something. So I didn't do anything else. I was busy teaching and dealing with this little boy who had come into our lives.

The next spring, I got another phone call from a nice man telling me I had won the publication prize from the Utah Arts Council. It was an award of $5,000 to go to a publisher who would take on a winning manuscript from the competition. The Arts Council and the legislature had decided this was appropriate because Utah writers can't jet off to New York; they don't have access; they don't know how to get a publisher—just as I didn't.

Lucky break: First to enter the contest, then to get that award. Third lucky break: Ivy Ruckman, who is a very fine Utah writer of children's books, was one of the judges. She called her agent, Ruth Cohen, and said there was a manuscript which needed to be published. Cohen sent the book to Linda Zuckerman, who was at Harper & Row. And Linda sent back a three-to-five page single-spaced letter, talking about all the things that were wrong with the book. And she ended by saying, "I don't know if this writer can revise." But she also said she was interested. So we agreed to work together.

Harper was very tempted by the $5,000, and it's important to know that because with that money they were able to do some great publicity and acknowledged the Utah Book Award. I met some of these people later and they mentioned that there were discussions about whether or not there were newspapers in Utah into which they could put an ad. I mean, these are New York people! They're so damn unaware of the rest of the world, I've learned. They did put an ad in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *The Standard Examiner*, and *The Deseret News*.

After the Dancing Days won the International Reading Association First Book Award; it won The Golden Kite. It got on all kinds of lists such as the American Library Association, Best Books for Teenagers. *After the Dancing Days* got so much attention out of good publicity. The other reason was that it was about a subject that had not really been written about much for that age group. I saw a list of books about World War I: *All Quiet on the Western Front, Johnny Got His Gun, The Singing Tree* by Kate Seredy, which was a book I read as a child and loved, *Tree by Leaf* by Cynthia Voigt, who is a fine young adult writer, and *After the Dancing Days*. That's the company this book was in. *After the Dancing Days* is perfect for seventh and eighth graders. I mean, Annie is thirteen.

I just happened to write it about World War I because of the movie and my uncles . . . and this picture. I found this in a textbook years and years ago of photographs about WWI. I kept this by my typewriter as I was writing.

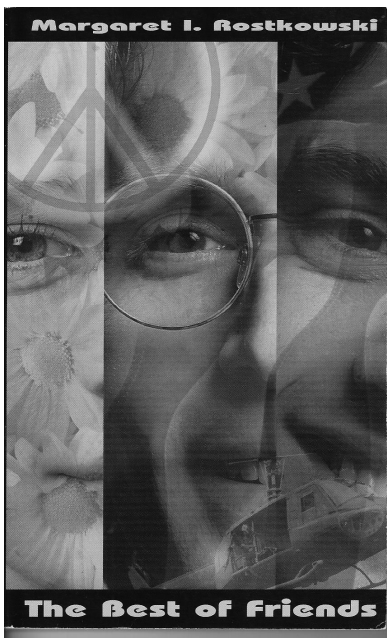


Men who were disfigured in battle in WWI.

To get back to this process of turning a manuscript into a book; again I'm stunned by the materials you have in your manuscript collection at Weber State. There are ten drafts of this book in box one; there are six drafts in box two. The title changes: Gallant Under Fire *becomes* After the Dancing Days. *You stay with it. You keep going and produce another draft, and then you get the letters back.*

I remember when I got this draft back after I made the huge changes. Number one, Annie started at age eight. And Linda's first suggestion was: she has to be older to understand all of this. And it just made sense. And I was eager to have her comments. I think a lot of writers want to have someone tell them what more could be done. I see this with students. And they want to have critical comment. They want to be pointed in a direction. And that's the way I felt: I was hungry for it. So I had to do a lot of changes. I had to move the mother offstage quite a bit. Before that, she was center stage. And Linda kept saying, "This is Annie's story. It's got to be about Annie. This is YA [Young Adult]. Kids are not interested in what's going on with the mother."

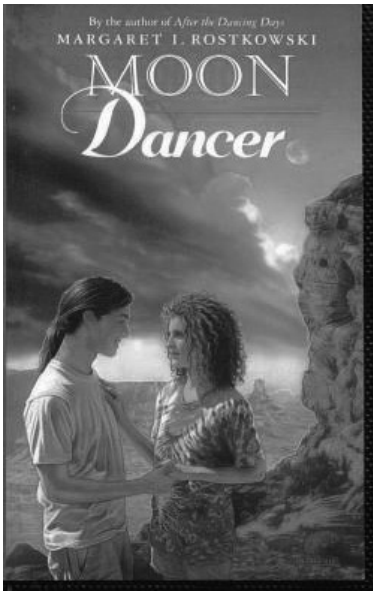
So, I did those suggestions: changing the structure of the story, getting rid of some characters, adding a couple of other characters. Then I got this back. It was covered in comments in very fine pencil: "add," "detract," "this word doesn't work," and so on. And I remember reading these and sitting on the couch and crying. Because she was telling me to get rid of some of my best writing. My flowery stuff. "This doesn't advance the story." That was good to hear. It was hard to hear, but I did it. I trusted her, and I think that's the important point. I trusted her and I really took to heart the things she said, and I think that's probably the most important thing. I think, first, a willingness to work with an editor, a willingness to revise.



Here's what she said about the first chapter: "I think I may have mentioned this before, so bear with me. I feel the need for eye contact between Annie and one of the wounded men, perhaps this man on the stretcher. What would she see in his face? How would that make her feel? These are crucial questions because the answers provide her motivation as a character in the book. Also, these men haunt the next ten or more pages. These images should haunt the reader, too. This is one of the primary motivating images in the book. It should stay with us for the rest of the story. I think you're trying to spare your reader, but you don't need to."

And so, she wasn't leading me astray, because that meshed with what I was trying to do. I've met with other writers whose editors have wanted them, say, to turn a historical novel into a romance. You know, make Annie eighteen and have her fall in love with Andrew. I wouldn't have trusted Linda if that would have been her suggestion, because that was not what I was trying to do. So I think that trust is important, and that willingness to revise, to make your book better. And I learned different things from each book that I wrote, and I did all three with her. We almost parted company over *Moon Dancer* because she really did not

understand backpacking, the canyon country; she did not understand what I was doing in that book. She understood the two books about the wars, WWI and Vietnam, but that one we almost parted company over. But we stuck with it.



Margaret, I have to tell you that ironically, of your three books, that one is my favorite. And it has to do with my own experiences backpacking, climbing in red rock country; for me that is so vivid. We do bring to everything we read all of our own experiences and then we measure the book against those experiences and sometimes it works for us and sometimes it doesn't. That text really works for me.

It didn't do very well, but I loved it. It is based on Josie Bassett. I knew about her and I knew about how she died. So she was part of the story, and I still claim that it was the women who put those paintings on the walls. Who else was out up there?

After the Dancing Days *was published in the 1980s, there was an increasing interest in young adult fiction and an increasing appreciation of that genre. You and I both know that there were certain books like the classics: the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, the* Anne of Green Gables *books. But this was writing for young adults, those who, we might say, are on the cusp of leaving childhood, and it was a genre of literature that really developed after WWII.*

I looked at some statistics: in 1997 there were 3,000 young adult novels. Twelve years later there were 30,000 titles. And in 2009, the genre had 3 billion dollars in sales. What is intriguing is that more adults purchase young adult novels these days than young adults themselves. You commented that maybe they're buying them for young adults, but there's lots of evidence to suggest that they're reading them. You and I have read the Harry Potter series, and I read The Hunger Games *because it got such media attention and I wanted to find out more about it. And I think J.K. Rowling is as good a writer as you, but I don't think* The Hunger Games *is as well written as your books. And then there are all those vampire books*

They have swamped the market with books like that. They really have. I could not get published today. Linda even admitted to Ruth that *After the Dancing Days* would not be published now. It had so many strikes against it: it's a historical novel; it's not a romance; it is kind of a dark book.

But when I look back, it's interesting because this surge in YA began when I started teaching. *The Outsiders* came out in 1968. I think that's one of the very first really fine young adult novels. It's a fabulous book. I taught that all the time at junior high. And you then had this growth of what they called problem books: *My Darling, My Hamburger*, the first book to deal with abortion. All of the Judy Bloom books, you know, they were so important. Gary Paulson was one of the writers, and Cynthia Voigt is another fine writer. She had a whole series about a family. She had one book where the boy goes out to Vietnam and dies. Paul Zindel is a fine writer. Ivy Ruckman wrote a great book about one of the catastrophes in Zion, in The Narrows, about kids down there. Barbara Williams is from here. She was a very fine YA writer.

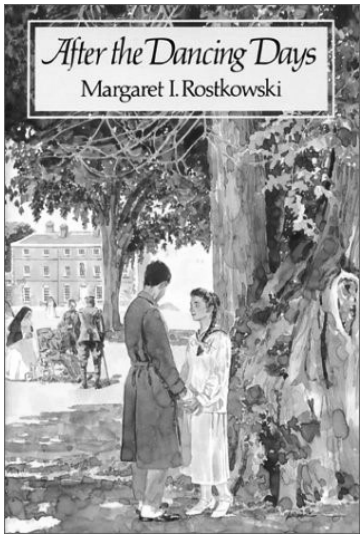
I always felt that there was great integrity in the YA and children's publishing world, that the writers, the editors, the illustrators, the publishers were people of integrity. They were publishing books like The Snowy Day, *the first book to show children of color. They were publishing books with strong female characters. They were doing all of that very early.*

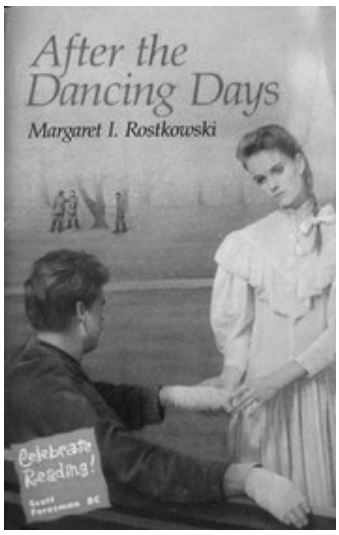
There was so much good stuff coming that you could really use it in a classroom. There was historical fiction; there were books about relationships. There was some fantasy that was good. I mean, name after name after name. And you don't hear about them anymore.

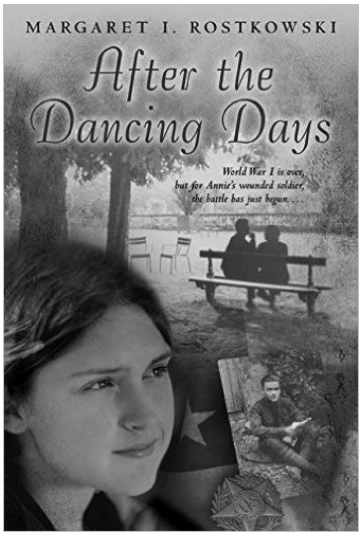
I got $3,000 for the purchase of *After the Dancing Days*, and this is an award-winning, already established novel. I got $10,000 for *The Best of Friends*, paperback and hardcover and it was almost immediately dropped because Rupert Murdock had just bought Harper & Row and turned it into HarperCollins. And they were slashing their backlist, anything that wasn't selling right away. They didn't do a good job. They didn't market it well. It's gone, and that's what happens to most of the books right away.

So, I think those figures are disturbing because they speak about the loss of integrity of the YA novel. I think the vampire books are awful. I always felt that there was great integrity in the YA and children's publishing world, that the writers, the editors, the illustrators, the publishers were people of integrity. They were publishing books like *The Snowy Day*, the first book to show children of color. They were publishing books with strong female characters. They were doing all of that very early, and then along came this garbage.

I feel very strongly about it and I feel that it's a sad thing. There are still good books being published, but they don't get the attention. You go to Sam Weller's bookstore, to the YA section, it's all fantasy, vampires, and dystopic. You don't find something like *After the Dancing Days* there. You don't find good historical novels. Once in a while, one will come







Writing to me should be a part of every curriculum. The history teachers should be using writing; the science, the math, even the P.E. teacher and the cooking teacher should be having students write because that's how we learn. You don't know about something until you can write about it, I think. . . . The passion for writing has been replaced by the misplaced modifier and the incorrect comma, and that's what people think you're talking about when you're talking about writing.

to the front, or one will win a big award; but I think YA books of quality are hard to find.

Now, teachers might still be using them because teachers are still the best market. *After the Dancing Days* has done so well because of teachers.

After the Dancing Days has been so very fortunate. It just slid into that niche, sort of accidentally. Maybe intuitively I knew this, because I was an eighth grade teacher and it's being taught in eighth grade. But look at this cover. I don't know if you ever saw the first paperback cover. It is horrendous. He's standing here and she's standing here and she's got this dreamy look on her face and she's holding his hand and she's got a lacy dress. And the kids would look at this and say, "ew!"

The re-issue has a great cover. It's kind of a mimic of that original design, but this tells you how they're marketing it. They're marketing it as a historical book, and she's a little young for thirteen, but that's okay. It was reissued, and my agent wrote to me, "This is great news. This means that they see it as a keeper, so they're freshening it up by giving it a new cover." So that's a lot of how they caught onto the best way for this book to be used. It's a textbook book, and I love that. I thank teachers and librarians for that. But, it's not sitting in bookstores. You can order it, but it's not sitting there amongst the other YA books.

I wonder if you would talk about how you, not just through the Writer's Project or through your teaching, are committed to helping people write. You haven't published anything for a number of years, but you haven't lost your enthusiasm for writing and your commitment to helping other people write. Talk to me about that.

I really love working with teachers. And I've been fortunate to be able to do that without going to the dark side of administration. Writing to me should be a part of every curriculum. The history teachers should be using writing; the science, the math, even the P.E. teacher and the cooking teacher should be having students write because that's how we learn. You don't know about something until you can write about it, I think. We've lost that in the American system. It's in the British system. They write all the time, but in the American system I think the grammarians took over and correctness replaced everything. The passion for writing has been replaced by the misplaced modifier and the incorrect comma, and that's what people think you're talking about when you're talking about writing. Instead of the stuff Linda was doing with me: clarity, what are you trying to write? what is your purpose here? who is your audience?

Again, it was so very fortunate for me that the Writing Project came along at that point in my life that I could do it. I could commit to it. And it continues to be so important to me because I've seen teachers be changed by writing; their passion for teaching is renewed through writing.

So many teachers are now beleaguered by all the tests and the rules and all of that.

However, they come back from the Writing Project as I always did, with this renewed excitement about teaching. So I think the project is incredibly important. It's struggling mightily right now; the money's not there; it's drying up. We're having to look for grants, so it's more important than ever that we continue it. I think there's a shift in the educational community away from the testing. Even Arne Duncan [U.S. Secretary of Education, 2009-2016], before he left, said we are doing too much testing. Testing to me so often harms learning, and I think you learn through writing. You don't learn through studying for tests.

I'm heartened that lots of people are buying lots of books. Book sales are up and we've got a new book store here in Ogden. But I wonder: are people still reading and writing? Or maybe they're reading and writing in different ways.

I think you're right. My grandson doesn't read, but he is a devourer of things on the Internet. He understands that world; he lives in that world. And it's a different kind of learning; it's a different kind of communicating. I can't evaluate it in terms of better or worse. I just think it's different. I completely don't understand it, and I think that's the problem. It's so different and because of that there's a chasm between that generation and ours.

There's a wonderful Writing Project teacher at Roy Junior High, and she has the entire seventh grade read *After the Dancing Days*, and I come and visit them. And these are children of that world [of the internet]. But they love this book. They talk about it; their questions are so good. It shows they've really thought about it. They talk about it with compassion and understanding. Every time I am asked something I've never been asked before. So they're still reading this book, which is a very traditional book. It's a twentieth century book. It just has all of those earmarkers that I grew up with; so that's the kind of book I wrote. But young people are still able to understand it and like it. So I think there is a place for these books.

Well, thank you, Margaret.



Kathryn L. MacKay is a professor of history at Weber State University. She has published articles on folklore and Native American and women's history. She is an associate editor of *Weber—The Contemporary West* responsible for the Reading the West section.

Sunni Wilkinson

Letting the Arrow Hit Its Mark—

A Conversation with Bethany Schultz Hurst



PRELUDE

Born and raised in the West, Bethany Schultz Hurst is a fresh voice and rising figure in contemporary poetry. Her work has garnered awards and much recognition, including finalist for the Yale Series of Younger Poets, the National Poetry Series, and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Most notably, she won the 2013 Robert Dana-Anhinga Prize for Poetry for her first book, Miss Lost Nation*, which explores the myths, ironies, and cultural crises of the American West as well as the inward, more personal struggles of the people that live in that landscape. Her poetry is both playful and contemplative and resonates with what the poet Richard Blanco calls an "unmistakable one-of-a-kind voice." Her poems have appeared widely in publications such as* Drunken Boat, The Gettysburg Review, Smartish Pace, Crab Orchard Review, New Ohio Review *and* The Best American Poetry 2015.

Hurst received her BA in English from Colorado State University in 2000 and her MFA in Creative Writing from Eastern Washington University in Spokane in 2003, after which she started teaching at Idaho State University. In 2008 she became an assistant professor of English and received ISU's Distinguished Teacher Award. She lives with her husband and their young son and daughter in Pocatello, Idaho.

Acknowledging that place plays a large role in her poetry, Hurst has said her writing "explores the issue of creating concepts of identity and home within the context of the American West." The first part of this interview took place via email in the summer of 2015, and the remainder in person in the fall of 2015 at the Salt Lake Public Library.

CONVERSATION

As a book, Miss Lost Nation *(MLN) takes in a wide cast of larger-than-life female characters: Washington's mother, Wonder Woman, Bathsheba, the Wicked Witch of the West, and the physically dwarfing character of Atomic Woman, who looms over buildings. What draws you to these identities as a poet? What do you find compelling about giving them a voice?*

I think it is the largeness of the characters that attracts me to them—their largeness, whether in a physical or mythical sense, coupled with their opacity as characters. Though the women are physically big and/or seem powerful, they're also mostly portrayed in singular, contained moments. I do think Wonder Woman is an interesting and complex character, but her image—that patriotic bikini—does tend to upstage her characterization. These are women who are looked at, like Bathsheba being spied on, but whose perspectives are not often inhabited. In our cultural consciousness, they are reduced to one-note roles, glossy posters, a pair of striped stockings. In the poems, I like staying with the characters after their mythical moment has passed—after George Washington's mother discovers he's chopped down the cherry tree, for instance, or the Wicked Witch after her scenes have been filmed—to expand their presence. Because I think the speakers in *MLN* are interested in what is concealed behind a façade, what happens beyond a single historical moment.

MLN is steeped in history, particularly western history, so that makes sense. In fact, it seems that many of the speakers in the poems not only look at what's behind the façade but even participate in that façade. I'm thinking of "Moon Landing, Faked" where the speaker not only acts out this great deception on national television, but also clenches a pencil in his teeth to convince himself that he's smiling. Also, in "Every Couple Before Us," the speaker says she's David's date because his "pregnant girlfriend was too embarrassed to go out," as if they're this fake couple. Are these speakers also playing out a role – they may just be more self-aware than many of us?

That description of the speakers seems right to me, that they participate in the façade while also being aware of the façade. On the one hand, I feel like many of the poems, especially the ones with more adolescent speakers, focus on a moment when a particular speaker becomes aware of the façade. "Oh, hey, wait a minute. I'm not really on a date; I'm just a substitute girlfriend-mannequin." But I also think the speakers' awareness reflects what I think it can feel like to be a citizen: we all (unless we're totally off the grid) participate to some degree in a cultural performance, so how do we reconcile that performance with our acknowledgement of its sometimes faulty or problematic foundations? I think the speakers want to feel secure, want so badly to belong, so they engage. But then they also see how suspect the performance is, and are unsure how to upend or interrogate it while maintaining some measure of personal security. So the speaker in "Moon Landing" knows the show is a sham but can't summon the will to quit it. I think that the speaker is misguidedly clinging to the hope that if he or she can complete the performance, even as it calls for the destruction of the speaker's own body, it will yield something of personal worth.

I recently re-read an interview with David St. John where he said, "We need all poetry," meaning that all of it matters. If I remember correctly, you once said that Richard Brautigan was one of the poets who first sparked your interest in poetry. What about those less "intellectual" poets (generally left out of required reading for MFA programs) who often capture our imaginations first?

I think I like "we need all poetry" as a statement better than "we all need poetry." Yes, Brautigan was one of the poets who really drew me to poetry early on, along with E.E. Cummings. And I guess both of those poets have at times been dismissed as maybe too sentimental. It's been a long time since I revisited Brautigan's work, but I'm grateful for the way his poems taught me that tone can be complex. He could straddle seemingly opposed emotions so easily. I think we can look at the poetry that first captured our imagination and ask ourselves what it was about the poems that was so compelling. Playfulness with language? Sound? Intense focus on imagery? And then we can seek poets who further challenge and compel us with work in those elements. What first appeals to us may

In our cultural consciousness, they are reduced to one-note roles, glossy posters, a pair of striped stockings. In the poems, I like staying with the characters after their mythical moment has passed . . . to expand their presence. Because I think the speakers in Miss Lost Nation *are interested in what is concealed behind a façade, what happens beyond a single historical moment.*

tell us a lot about who we are as readers and writers. Does that answer the question?

Yes, but that brings up another question. Do we, then, write what we read, or do we ever read a certain way (appreciate or are drawn to particular forms or styles or sensibilities) but write quite differently?

Can I answer "both"? My son is two and is now starting to make up his own songs. Most of the melodies are off-key derivatives of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," because that's the tune he knows best, the first one he heard from his stuffed elephant in the hospital. So yeah, I think to some extent we may start by singing variations of what we're most attracted to, which is often what we've already heard. We write what we read. But hopefully we also learn to innovate or contradict and define our own sensibilities more distinctly so that our work can be something other than response in kind. So then we can appreciate particular aspects of others' work without necessarily responding from a similar aesthetic.

There is a genuine playfulness in this collection that gives a sense that everything can fit into poetry, nothing is really off limits. Thomas Jefferson is here but so are Rocky and Bullwinkle, Stevie Wonder & Johnny Mathis, and an opening line about a roll of toilet paper. What role do you see humor and playfulness playing in your own poetry? Or in poetry in general?

I remember how delighted I was in high school to discover that poetry can be funny. I'd thought it was all very serious descriptions of birds and/or flowers and was running out of steam. I'm most drawn to poetry that subverts or recontextualizes our common understandings—what has been termed as "defamiliarizing." And jokes do that: they are funny because they fulfill a pattern or anticipation but in an unexpected way. A good joke sets you going in one direction and then suddenly loops back to a minor detail or a different definition and it all makes sense because your focus has been shifted. I like that kind of sense-making, and humor is one way to accomplish that in poetry. I also have a mortal fear of taking myself too seriously. My poems have the same fear. That could be a flaw: if humor is deflecting all of the arrows, where's the risk? Why do the poems matter? I hope that my poems work to lower the shield every once in a while, to let the arrow hit its mark. I see that happen in the work of poets like Dean Young and Bob Hicok and I admire that very much.

We write what we read. But hopefully we also learn to innovate or contradict and define our own sensibilities more distinctly so that our work can be something other than response in kind.

I can see in your own poems that your humor also appeals to the reader, gets them comfortable, and wins them over before you start to introduce heavier matters. I'm thinking of "Crisis on Infinite Earths" where the opening is about boring t-shirts and Comic Con but by the end of the poem we've traveled through some real loss & self-awareness. Do you think humor also helps to hold the weightier matters at bay for a moment so that we can look at all sides of things? Maybe understand grief better because of the humor?

Yes, maybe an advantage of using humor as a shield is that it does protect us and create some useful distance between "weighty" subject matter and the speaker or reader's perspective of it. If we're thrown right in the middle of grief, we can't always navigate it well because we're too vulnerable. So though too much humor—too much

irony—runs the risk of deflecting all of the arrows of genuine feeling, elements of humor can allow us to stand far enough away from an event or emotion to gain a fuller understanding of it.

Place seems to play a really big role in this collection. It's like another character that shapes a lot of the activity and the speakers themselves. Where did you grow up?

(Laughs) I grew up in Colorado, right along the front range. And I think that that particular location does show up in poems, maybe not literally, but in the idea of border because there's the mountains in a straight line on the west and then to the east is the prairie lands. So you're right in the middle of that, and it's really interesting that you're right in the middle of that really dichotomous geography. And another part of that location that has stayed with me is that I lived in one of the fastest growing counties in the United States at the time.

Which was…?

It was Douglas County. And that's on the outskirts of Denver, maybe about twenty minutes outside of Denver. So it went from a small, kind of ranch town of about 5,000 people to just a part of Denver in the time that I was living there. I watched a lot of the wheat fields and prairie lands become tract housing and subdivisions, and so I think that tension between open space and development is something that shows up in poems too. Maybe not explicitly, but that setting and those kinds of contrasts between mountains and plains and construction, rapid construction and wild space.

Well, that makes sense. I'm thinking especially of "Disarmament" where the speaker goes down into this silo.

Yeah, a missile silo...

And there are potentially dangerous, man-made pieces she's brushing up against. And then she comes up and it's almost like this redemption back on the prairie land but something's changed.

Yes, kind of a resurrection, but more disappointing.

That's interesting to point out. But the speakers resolve to, I guess, bear out the bad things that happen. I noticed too that the landscape and the climate play a big role in that they are often a negative force that the speaker has to push against: the freezes, the tsunami, the floods, and a lot of damaging things happen.

Right, and I think that is something that obviously happens everywhere, but particularly in the West it seems like there is so much potential for disaster. And also fire, forest fire, seems like a constant threat.

So do you think there's more vulnerability then in that kind of a landscape?

I don't want to . . . I'm more familiar with the dangers of this particular landscape. But I do think that maybe with the openness of prairie land there's something that makes you feel like you're more vulnerable. And sometimes the responses to disaster might take more time because of geographic isolation in the West. But I don't want to say that the West has ownership over that because we know that's not true. But that is something I grew up with, having flash floods and tornado warnings and forest fire warnings, and all of that. So I guess there is kind of a sense of disaster looming all of the time.

And the West plays such a big role in this book. And, of course, you cover America in general because it's sort of bookended – the collection – by poems about Washington's mother and the Thomas Jefferson poem, but at the heart of it, it seems to really be West-

ern myths that you play with. I'm thinking about "On Being Tied to the Railroad Tracks" and some of the old western movie stereotypes that you play with. What draws you to that? Because there are so many people from the West that don't go there. What makes you go there?

I think part of my attraction to those kinds of myths is the fact that I do feel distant from them in some ways. Those kinds of westerns were playing in the background as I was growing up. And they're often cultural reference points for people outside of the West. But I do feel like they are a performance that I haven't necessarily participated in, but that I'm supposed to have some role in since I'm a resident of the West. So I'm interested in being presented with a script, in a way, that doesn't feel adequate to actually represent what the West is. So in "Tied to the Railroad Tracks," I was thinking about the helplessness of the heroine and the melodrama like that, how I think often the speakers in the poems feel helpless to respond to some of the problematic cultural legacies of the West. So maybe that's one place where I thought, "Okay, I can see how those performances can overlay in some interesting ways."

That makes sense. You have to have some distance from something in order to feel comfortable playing with it. You didn't do contemporary western because we've pretty much just got strip malls and every city looks the same. Instead, you're playing with the stereotype of something much older, so maybe that distance helps.

I think that's right. There's enough space that I feel like I can play with it and look at it from different angles. I'm still trying to figure out how to respond to more contemporary depictions and how those line up or don't line up with my own experience.

Is that one of the primary ways you identify yourself, then, as someone from the West?

Yeah, I think it is. My extended family is more midwestern than western, but I've spent most of my time in the Western half of the United States, so I do feel like it's part of my identity. And I think that where we grow up impacts how comfortable we feel in particular spaces. I was talking to a friend from the Pacific Northwest, and he feels vulnerable and exposed in the West because of the openness, whereas I am drawn to the green lushness of the Pacific Northwest, but I also feel kind of claustrophobic, and I want to be able to see where I am and be able to navigate that. I did a corn maze and I got really upset because I couldn't see where I was. I had to take an emergency exit half way through. (Laughs) I'm used to vista. So, I do think that "place" impacts us on many different levels.

That reminds me of "Disarmament" where she goes back and it's like she can breathe again. But it doesn't glorify anything. It's very realistic that way.

And I think in "Disarmament," that's the acknowledgement that maybe the West isn't as transparent or as open as it seems. There are secret or hidden infrastructures in place as well, so even though there's an idea of the openness and frankness of the West, there's a lot of its history that isn't as forthcoming. There's a lot of . . . I wouldn't want to say conspiracy, but, you know, with things like missile silos and weapon stockpiling, and now nuclear waste disposal, these are all happening in kind of secretive places of the West.

Nuclear test sites.

Exactly. So even though it seems like everything's viewable and visible all of the time, that's not necessarily the case.

A darker story underneath. Well, when you sit down and write, is this sense of place a touchstone for you that you feel helps you to find some creative energy, or is it something that sort of pops up uninvited because it just comes?

I don't think I've ever sat down thinking I'll write about a place. In a lot of the poems in *Miss Lost Nation* I mined memory, and the speaker keeps returning to adolescence in a lot of ways, so I did kind of mine my own adolescence for some of that material. And I guess just because my own adolescence was informed by place, it's just there as a companion that I can't shake. I don't think it's ever been a conscious subject that I've addressed . . . I'm trying to think if that's true. (Laughs)

It's kind of hard to tell where your own work starts and where it goes. Lost Nation *seems like a place that is at once very real, very concrete but at the same time very removed. Is it based on a particular place? Is there a real "Lost Nation"?*

There is a real Lost Nation, and it is where my father grew up. It's in Iowa, a tiny town of about 600 people, and we would visit maybe once a year in the summer. And so maybe it did take on kind of a mythical status for me, and I think about it often, but it became kind of a romanticized memory a lot of the time: catching fireflies and all of those wonderful midwestern kinds of things. So, yes, it is real, but I can see how it has dreamy edges to it in how it shows up in the book.

It feels very mythological because of how it envelopes the whole collection. Someone is attached to this place, but this place is so old. You get the sense that in Lost Nation *the diners are old, the people at the diners are old, that they're burying people in the freezing cold. Whatever place this is, it feels very aging, so the speaker is loving it and not part of it at the same time. Which seems so ironic: lost nation. What a great title, and here it is a real place.*

I felt like that was a gift, and I realized the connotations of that and how much it does take root in the book. How can it not be the book title? I actually came up with the title *Miss Lost Nation* before I had the title poem "Miss Lost Nation," so maybe that's one I did write with place in mind because I knew I had to get that town name a poem of its very own. It literally was an aging place. I think that a lot of the citizens are older. I don't think there's a very strong youthful population there anymore. And then, of course, the time I spent with my grandparents there, moving from their farmhouse into a retirement home. I was seeing that process of aging, so those two things become kind of tangled up together.

Yeah, the rest home seems to almost take over the town, at least the way it impacts the speaker in that poem. And there's a sense that there's a beyond too. It moves from the very concrete presence of seeing the billboards and the restaurants and then moves into a sense of the other world. That's a movement that seems consistent through the entire book.

That's interesting. And aging is kind of its own "lost nation" too, I think for the speaker and for American culture. That's another thing that we're often distant from. People go to age somewhere, like a retirement home; it's not something that's always a part of daily life.

And it goes along with the idea of belonging and not belonging. Never really belonging even though the place has had such an impact.

If you have cable and you're ever watching the SciFi channel, they did a remake of "Children of the Corn," and it takes place in Lost Nation. I think my uncle's barn cat is wandering through a scene at some point. I tried to write a poem about that, but I couldn't do it. (Laughs)

I noticed that besides just humor the speakers use wry understatement to cope. For example, one of the best endings was in "Neither Here Nor There." The speaker

says about tragedy, "sometimes irony isn't right and neither is sincerity." And then she describes eating jello at a funeral lunch and says, "I don't know how to feel about that." When you revise your poems, is there something that you're looking for specifically as far as voice that you like to pull out?

I don't know if I revise specifically toward understatement or that kind of distancing the speakers often revert to. I think that might be one of my knee-jerk reactions, so they're in there already. And I lately have been trying to revise against that because I think it's becoming too easy to do. But I think that in ***Miss Lost Nation*** that kind of understatement often serves to protect the speakers; it's almost like their armor in a way. So when there is that kind of vulnerability and that loss that comes up, then the speaker will immediately step away from it with that kind of understatement. Which I think can be an interesting movement, but it can be a danger to a poem in that it can step too far away from the emotional center, which is why I'm trying to get that on my radar now. Not everything has to be deflected. Maybe the armor doesn't need to be donned in every single poem. There can be other ways to respond to incongruity, like jello after you've buried someone you loved very deeply.

Except that, aren't these real things we deal with? How many times do you just wallow in the loss? You notice things like the jello or the roll of toilet paper, or the oddball things that are still there. It feels like a realistic way to cope.

I think that's just maybe the nature of what we observe in times like that too. I'm thinking, Charles Baxter in one of his essays talks about a widowed image and how an everyday object takes on weight like that and how it can do so much work in a story or a poem. I think I'm attracted to that idea, an image that is suddenly imbued with more significance. And it really needs to be. That poor jello doesn't ask to be carrying all of that, but it has to.

But it's a way for that person not to carry all of the weight themselves . . . to kind of spread it around a little bit.

Yes, we've turned jello into a hero. (Laughs) Which is appealing.

When you're writing now, you said you're trying to do some different things than you did in this collection. Where do you see your work going? How do you see your own writing changing at this point?

I think that with ***Miss Lost Nation*** the poems were often looking inward, trying to maybe resolve the speakers' response to something that's deeply personal to the speaker. That's not always true, but I feel like there is a more inward direction in those poems, and I think now I'm kind of bored with that. I don't have any more adolescent horror stories to mine.

You've already written the sleepover . . .

So now I'm looking out in different directions. The speaker is still very, very present in newer poems of mine. I have a hard time writing a poem that doesn't have a pretty realized speaker driving it.

I don't think that's a weakness.

I hope not because I've tried many times to take that out, and it's something I should keep trying to do because we should try to do things that are hard for us. But that is my default setting. I do think that my newer poems are looking outward for subject matter a little more, rather that always being retrospective or introspective. Does that make sense?

Of course. That seems to be a very natural intuition, though, to mine your childhood. But you've done it in a way where you sort of try on different people. It's personal, but then you've also got the Wicked Witch of the West. There's a smattering of all kinds of characters that deal with those things, too.

Yeah, I'm pretty uncomfortable with actual autobiography, so trying all those different outfits can really help, again, give me some necessary distance.

How would you describe the reader that you write for? Does it change, or do you feel like it's a pretty consistent reader that you have in mind?

That's a good question. I guess that reader is some version of myself, which sounds really egotistical. But I want someone who's drawn to absurdity in a way. So I'm always targeting that kind of reader. Even if my poems aren't explicitly absurd in nature, I think just an appreciation for incongruity and strangeness. That's the reader I always have in mind.

I'm reading The Poetry Home Repair Manual*, and Ted Kooser says you always have to have a reader in mind, and I thought, "Well, that's a revelation." I don't know that I'd ever really thought about that conscientiously.*

I use that in my class, and I pair that with an excerpt from Richard Hugo who says something in ***Triggering Town*** like, "You should never worry about a reader. Look over your shoulder. Is anyone there? No. Good. Keep writing. If you want to communicate, use the telephone." So I think, maybe I'm somewhere in the middle in not thinking of a particular person. Is it in ***Franny and Zooey*** by J.D. Salinger where Zooey is telling Franny that they should always be thinking of this one particular woman, and that's who you're doing everything for? And that's a lovely idea, but I don't have that person. But I do want to have a reader. I don't want my work to be so private and closed that it only has appeal to myself.

In the title poem, you have a line that says, "Every tree was a story." The speaker is referring to the way her grandfather has a sense of nostalgia for everything in his town, but also the reality that everything really does have some story behind it. This seems very consistent with the collection because there are so many characters. Some of them we know because they're cultural icons and some of them are people in some town we've never been to. But each one of those has their own unique story that's worth examining. Have you considered branching out of poetry and moving into the fiction world and fleshing out stories a little bit more?

I haven't really. I really like poetry's form. If I did branch out into a different genre, I think I would be more drawn to lyric essay. I have trouble with plot, I have big troubles with plot. And I know not every story has to be plot-driven, but I am more attracted to how the lyric essay moves because it's a movement that seems really familiar to me from poetry. But I do like the idea of finding more space and expanding pieces instead of them having to be super concise and compact.

I'm drawn to poetry because I better understand how I can use it to interrogate assumptions and to take as subject the unreliability of narrative. I can step into a persona but also look behind it. When I was a kid taking piano lessons, I always loved playing grace notes because they seemed to create an in-between sound you couldn't otherwise make. Poetry is another way I feel like I can get access to a space in-between.

And I'm thinking of that line—"Every tree was a story"—how, yes, every character has a story, but in that poem, I think the speaker's kind of struck by how the grandfather probably doesn't know the story behind every tree, but really wants to, and so he's making a claim over every tree. Maybe in his desperation to make meaning of his life, right?

To belong to a place? To sort of own something in the world?

Yeah, and so it's at once a sweet nostalgic move but also kind of creepy for the character to lay claim to everything and say, "I know the history of every tree in this town." I think I'm drawn to poetry because I better understand how I can use it to interrogate assumptions and to take as subject the unreliability of narrative. I can step into a persona but also look behind it. When I was a kid taking piano lessons, I always loved playing grace notes because they seemed to create an in-between sound you couldn't otherwise make. Poetry is another way I feel like I can get access to a space in-between.

Thank you for your time, Bethany.

Thank you.



Sunni Brown Wilkinson received an MFA from Eastern Washington University. Her work is found or forthcoming in *Sugar House Review, Rock & Sling, Tar River Poetry, Gulf Stream*, among other journals and anthologies, and has been nominated for two Pushcarts. In 2008 she was awarded the Sherwin W. Howard Poetry Award from *Weber—The Contemporary West*. She currently teaches composition and creative writing at Weber State University and lives in Ogden, Utah, with her husband and three young sons.

Bethany Schultz Hurst

90% Contained

Not every baby animal makes it out of the forest.
Only in cartoons do they all bound to safety before
the fire. What's the life expectancy of a fawn

anyway? After a while it just becomes a deer
destroying your roses. In the suburbs,
we were miles from the forest, but ash

blew past the boundary when it burned.
The toddler I babysat pointed and said: Snow.
We made believe. Back then I felt excited

when mistaken for a mother. I pushed that stroller
straight toward the burning mountains.
Even cartoons admit that mothers die and

fathers are shadows moving beyond the trees.
The next morning the ash was only
fallen ash. The morning after, it was gone.

Now the grass in my yard is tinder, but mice
stay on, gnaw holes in the garden hose.
Aren't they running for the river yet? My cat

sleeps through the flinty summer but that's
because I call myself his mother. I fixed him.
Because he never knew the wilderness,

he's older than any cat should expect.
Settling down on his worn-out haunches
takes him a kitten's life. In the mall I watch

a boy skitter behind his mother on legs
he isn't sure yet are his. A lone wolf howls
on his black t-shirt, no pup or pack, and

the moon blazes on his chest like a heart
no boy could contain. The mother disappears
behind paper shopping bags and I know what

happens next. He'll never get out in time.



Johnny Automatic

Kathryn Hummel

Purusher Desh—Men's Country

It seemed strange that, after coming to Bangladesh to write a book about women, I found myself living in a house of men.

– Hanifa Deen

By the time I made my third trip to Bangladesh, I was convinced I had accumulated enough time there to start thinking about writing about women—and to start thinking I was learning about the country. The primary lesson: there are the men. Men were present in almost every element of my public life in Bangladesh and occupied many aspects of my private one; my writing life was also fraught with their presence. In my field journal, men became a repeating theme, almost a refrain:

> Today in the field: more men . . .
>
> I'm supposed to be writing about *desi* women but the men keep getting in the way . . .
>
> My very bleakest view is that I'm well and truly on the outside and I'm only on the inside with men . . .

I was both a lover and a fighter of the ubiquity of men. Time spent in their company often went against my conscious self as well as my writing aims; counter to my participation on the outside came the inner desire to retreat. The only place where I could immerse myself in purely female company was at the beauty parlour, as well as a one-off production of *The Vagina Monologues*, a first in Bangladesh and for an exclusively female audience. Women I expected to draw away (and draw me away) from the overwhelming force of men.



FreeImages.com/Kashna Rahman

Seldom in the company of women and men together, I began to see Bangladesh as polarised by gender; my balance became upset as I pitched sideways between one and the other. Later I found that my perception of this polarisation was the actual cause of my giddiness. For while I was thinking about writing about and making *adda* with women, the time I spent with men in Bangladesh was not any less interesting or intimate, just not as meticulously recorded. Field research is, after all, life research; life overtakes both fiction and nonfiction and cannot be contained by binaries any more than it can be by the page. If skilful or merely lucky, a writer can only seek to reveal how much his or her narrative reflects the complexities of life, how much

> the nature of I, i, you, s/he, We, we, they, and wo/man constantly overlap. . . the line dividing *I* and *Not-I*, *us* and *them*, or *him* and *her* is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak. (Minh-ha 94)

Categories leak and layers meld. If narrative works a way though the layers of my Bangladesh with women and men and shows the dependence of their stories in the creation of my own, it also serves to rebuild them. What follows is a series of sketches that attends to the primary lesson of Bangladesh and makes more complete what it was like to write my experience there—as a woman amongst men.

I

Faiz and I often met in Dhaka; our encounters were never calculated. On every occasion we exchanged a few polite sentences—in English, since Faiz was of the English-medium class—though I cannot be sure if we ever understood each other's words. Our minds, full of impressions, had the interesting effect of obstructing our speech, as if we were having a conversation a few realms apart, able to see and hear but still unable to grasp each other's meaning. One of our deepest encounters occurred at a book launch in Dhaka. I was an interloper, a non-member of the club, and Faiz, an established figure of the literati, cordially deigned to ask how I was, how my work was, how I found Dhaka.

I replied that I was fine and my work was fine, though we were both troubled by the hostility directed towards us in Bangladesh.

"I'm surprised," Faiz answered. "Most visitors I talk to only say how warm and hospitable Bangladesh is."

I uttered something banal about individuals and their unique experiences. At the same time the more interesting thought occurred to me that during their honeymoon with Bangladesh, every visitor must feel the same welcoming acceptance. Those who have outlasted both their honeymoon and their visitorship have a different perspective.

"What NGO are you working with?" Faiz asked next.

"None. My research has nothing to do with development," I replied, repeating almost the same phrase I had used in conversation with him months ago.

"Oh! Really!" Faiz was surprised again. "I thought you were working on women and development." There existed in Bangladesh an unwritten decree that this was one of the only issues a *bidesi* woman could research and only via the pathway of a non-government organisation.

I paused for a moment before explaining what I was doing in what I thought was a distinctive way. I

wasn't adding to the international development discourse, but writing a version of the stories certain women told me about their lives, as well as the story I wanted to tell about my version of Bangladesh: a mix of past and present, narrative and ethnography. There is always pressure to be applied to a boundary of knowledge, which I hoped would come from me, though not as a foreigner nor a Westerner nor even as a woman; just through words, their emotion and their weight. During this speech Faiz watched my face as I talked, looked into my eyes, followed my hand gestures. He nodded a few times and when I finished, he said:

"It sounds wonderful. But you still don't understand Bangladesh well enough to write about it." It was another idea, somewhat justifiably fixed, that every foreign researcher in Bangladesh wrote about it inaccurately but had it received as definitively.

"I'm not claiming I do understand," I replied, feeling another flush of repetition in my words. "I'm just writing as I experience it."

Our conversation waned. Perhaps we had some idea of how far away from each other our meanings fell. There seemed nothing more to do, no other course to take, than to nod and smile, stay silent and drift away.

II

Suffering becomes complicated in context. In real life it is used to justify hatred. This is more natural than hating merely to hate but can be more difficult to name, even if you try, like Shamsad, through the medium of fiction:

> This isn't going anywhere. At least it's not going anywhere I planned it to be. But did I plan it to go anywhere? I don't remember. . . .
>
> Oh the "blame-principle!" Go on. Blame someone to hide your inability. Blame the important to cover-up the impotence. Roar in anger . . . . (Mortuza 112)

I wasn't adding to the international development discourse, but writing a version of the stories certain women told me about their lives, as well as the story I wanted to tell about my version of Bangladesh: a mix of past and present, narrative and ethnography.

The reality of impotence is a dilemma postcoloniality does not thoroughly address. When I tried to name what I suffered in Bangladesh, Bangladesh replied that the power I had should only make me careful and sensitive. I had to interrogate my reactions to determine whether they were linked to an atavistic notion of superiority. That was enough to make me doubt my convictions; in every case, I was encouraged to adjust.

> On the District Line, while passing through East London, I saw some graffiti of the British Nationalist Party (BNP) haunting the pillars of the motorways. "England for the English." I began to think of Shubhash Bose, Khudiram, and the Bande Materaam chants, and their Swadesi Andolone aimed at driving the colonisers from their native land. If they were our heroes, these BNP men ought to be credited as their heroes. Has the nature of colony changed? The nature of imperialism has changed for sure. (Mortuza 115)

It was my responsibility to keep my *bidesi* mind clear in applying history to the present, to show the remnants of colony inscribed on me *had* changed. To prove I was one no longer drawing a divide and retreating to the dominant side of it. As this demand grew stronger, my tolerance flagged. The actions and ideas I raged against universally were always reduced to an attack on Bangladesh, always provoked the same wounded defensiveness and always cast me back to the colony. It was an injustice I felt more because I could not voice it.

> [H]ow is it related to my space? Well his space has burst into mine. I'm either with him or against him. And there is nothing in-between. . . .You better be watchful. So I watch others. I blame others for watching me. I'll be a fool not to watch. (Mortuza 118)

With the ease of a writer who knows his audience will be sympathetic, Shamsad proclaims that the worst thing he was called in London was a "Paki." With the caution of a writer whose experiences have been dismissed as trivial, I murmur that among the worst I was called in Dhaka was "prostitute."


FreeImages.com/Vivek Chugh

The experience of Bangladesh taught me that postcoloniality may continue to silence truths, confine words and render subjectivity invalid. It may also demand of the defiant voice: "And *who* the *hell* are *you*?"

> Good question. There was no one else to begin with. At least there isn't! Aren't you forgetting someone? Or something? (Mortuza 112)

III

My landlady, Yasmeen *apa,* never approved of my friends in Bangladesh. Cockroaches, she told me, referring to my student activist and artist friends. But aside from the cockroaches, who had time for me? They were the only ones whose lives matched the hours flapping emptily around my occupation. Once Yasmeen took it upon herself to set me up with a nice boy she knew, who was so nice that that is really all I can remember about him. Her gesture was the kind with good intentions planted in duty rather than affection. You accepted it like an unwanted but polite child—gentle protests were useless, forceful ones were rude. These situations muddled my instinct, so even as I was carried forward by emotion I never discerned until later that it was a reluctance as heavy as stone.

Similar circumstances had led to my being driven around Shahbag by Yasmeen's university friend Roton. Yasmeen introduced him as a good person for me to know, in the platonic sense—Roton was married with a grown-up son and daughter. Although Roton's whole

The experience of Bangladesh taught me that postcoloniality may continue to silence truths, confine words and render subjectivity invalid. It may also demand of the defiant voice: "And who *the* hell *are* you*?"*

being seemed buffed by wealth, what I noticed the most was his full head of coarse, well-brushed black hair. Roton drove to the cafe opposite the Sonargaon Hotel, a place that was rumoured to serve the real coffee I craved. The prices were too shamingly extravagant for me to invite any of the cockroaches to, even if they could be persuaded to step over the threshold of such a neo-capitalist hangout. Roton did not pick up on my unease as we passed the cha stalls at Shahbag where I normally took my refreshment; there was no question at all of me being compromised. Until Roton asked what my thoughts were on sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage. What did I do?

A warning should have flashed through my mind, sounded in my ears, stabbed at my heart—however warning signs are physically received. Come a warning did, but accompanied by considerations like: "I'm a visitor" and "This is across language and culture," and "Maybe it's harmless curiosity, maybe . . . ." My mind floated between worlds: where I come from and where I was living, what was happening and how I was interpreting. Normally I avoid the company of crowds to pick up the thread of my instinct and where it should be leading me, but here I was with a man who had just asked me about sex in the middle of a traffic jam with noise all around me. The instinct that was strong enough to break to the surface was that of the shy former fat girl who never seriously thinks she's the object of attraction.

To Roton's question I replied that a woman should be able to choose what she wanted, what felt best for her, without incurring blame. What I did worked for me but might not for a different woman, his daughter, for instance.

Do you want to have sex with me? Roton asked, with a steady look. Whatever reaction crowded my own expression must have been quite clear to him, for Roton quickly withdrew his inquiry. *I'm joking*, he said.

What came to the surface this time was not anger or overblown disgust but an awareness of my swift disempowerment, like a skilful disembowelling—the offensive sleaze, the denial, the laughing off, the blame on her hysterical imagination if a woman protested. It unfolded with sharp edges, the realisation of this power and how it can work for men, how it can work against women, in Bangladesh—and beyond. Emotion is my protest against the assumptions of thought that conceal the revelation of instinct. Against myself, these words came: this is no place for a lone woman.

I saw Roton once again at a wedding Yasmeen took me to, a fully-fledged capitalist affair at the Hotel Radisson. He wore a dark suit and in the heat, his complexion remained

matte and his hair in place. I wore a mermaid-green sari and a mouthful of lipstick, the last at Yasmeen's insistence, and stood out like the tall, hastily-groomed foreigner I was. A brief greeting was all I offered Roton. In return, he told me I looked beautiful, which is the sort of thing a kindly uncle might say.

"Purusher Desh" is an excerpt from Kathryn's forthcoming non-fiction collection Broken Lines: Writings from a Disrupted Lifetime in Bangladesh *(Mumbai: Leadstart).*

Works Cited

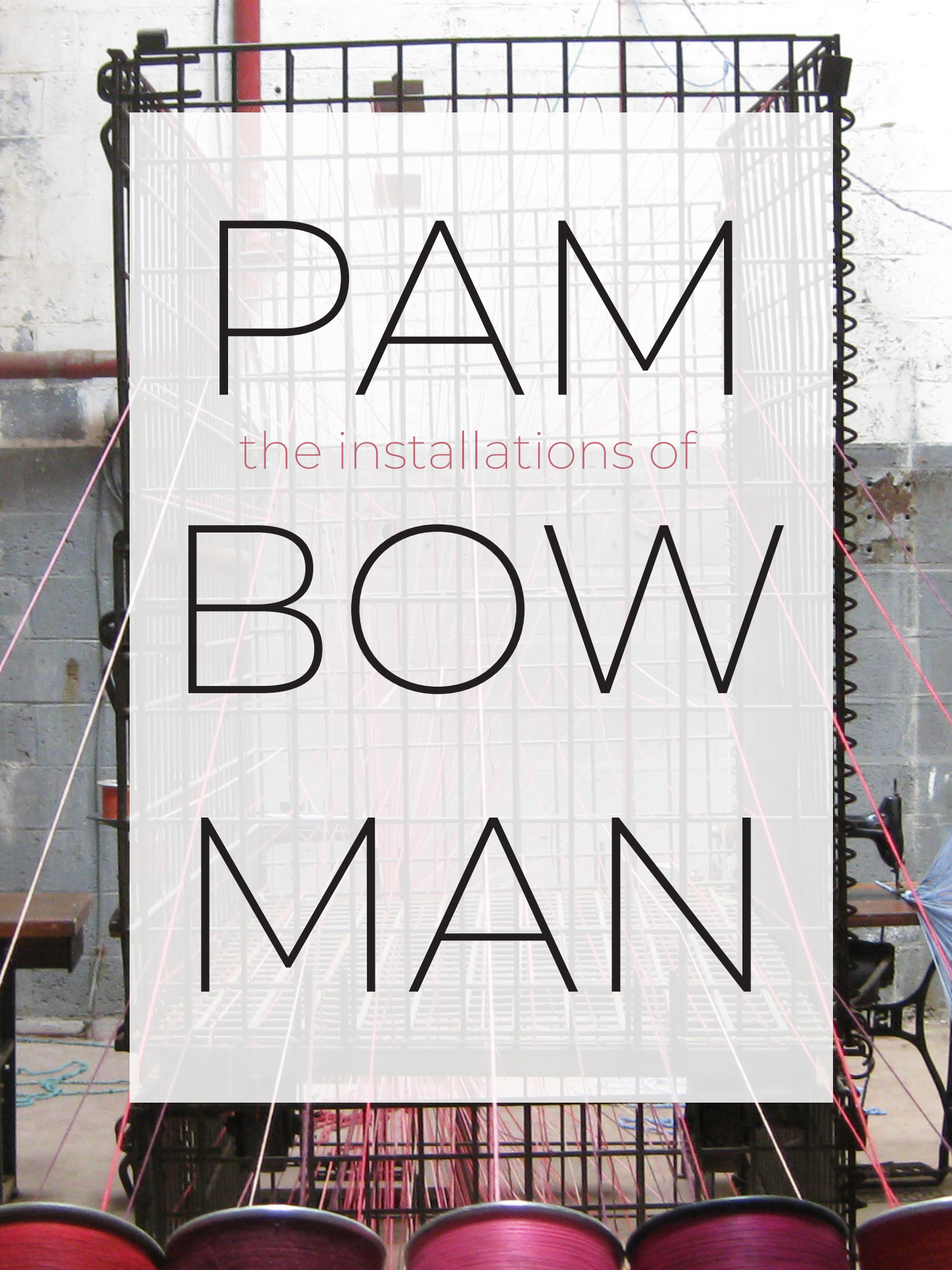
Deen, Hanifa. *Broken Bangles*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1998. Print.

Minh-ha, Trinh, T. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. Print.

Mortuza, Shamsad. "Confessions of an Overseas Student: Poco-Light, Academic Emulsion." *The Daily Star Book of Bangladeshi Writing in English*. Ed. K. Islam. Dhaka: The Daily Star, 2006. 111–19. Print.



Dr. Kathryn Hummel is an Australian writer, ethnographer, poet, and the author of *Poems from Here*, *The Bangalore Set* and *The Body That Holds*. Her work has been recognized internationally, appearing in publications including *Meanjin*, *Transnational Literature*, *Tincture*, *Cordite*, *Gulf Times*, *Himal Southasian*, *The Letters Page*, the anthology *How Does One Dress to Buy Dragonfruit?*, and the acclaimed online journal *PopMatters*. Awarded the *Meanjin*/NEC Essay Writing Competition in 1997, Kathryn received a nomination for the Pushcart Prize in 2013 and was listed as a finalist in *The Atlas Review*'s Open Chapbook Competition in 2016. Kathryn is the founding editor of Friends with Drinks, a website featuring creative responses to drinking and place, developed during a Digital Writer's Residency with the SA Writers Centre. Based in Australia but inspired by her multicultural and bilingual background to travel, Kathryn has also lived in Bangladesh and India. Her activities can be tracked at www.kathrynhummel.com.



PAM

the installations of

BOWMAN





Through natural, relatable materials and laborious, repetitive processes, my installations give voice to the mundane and ordinary. They reveal with magnitude and grace the extraordinary results of simply living.

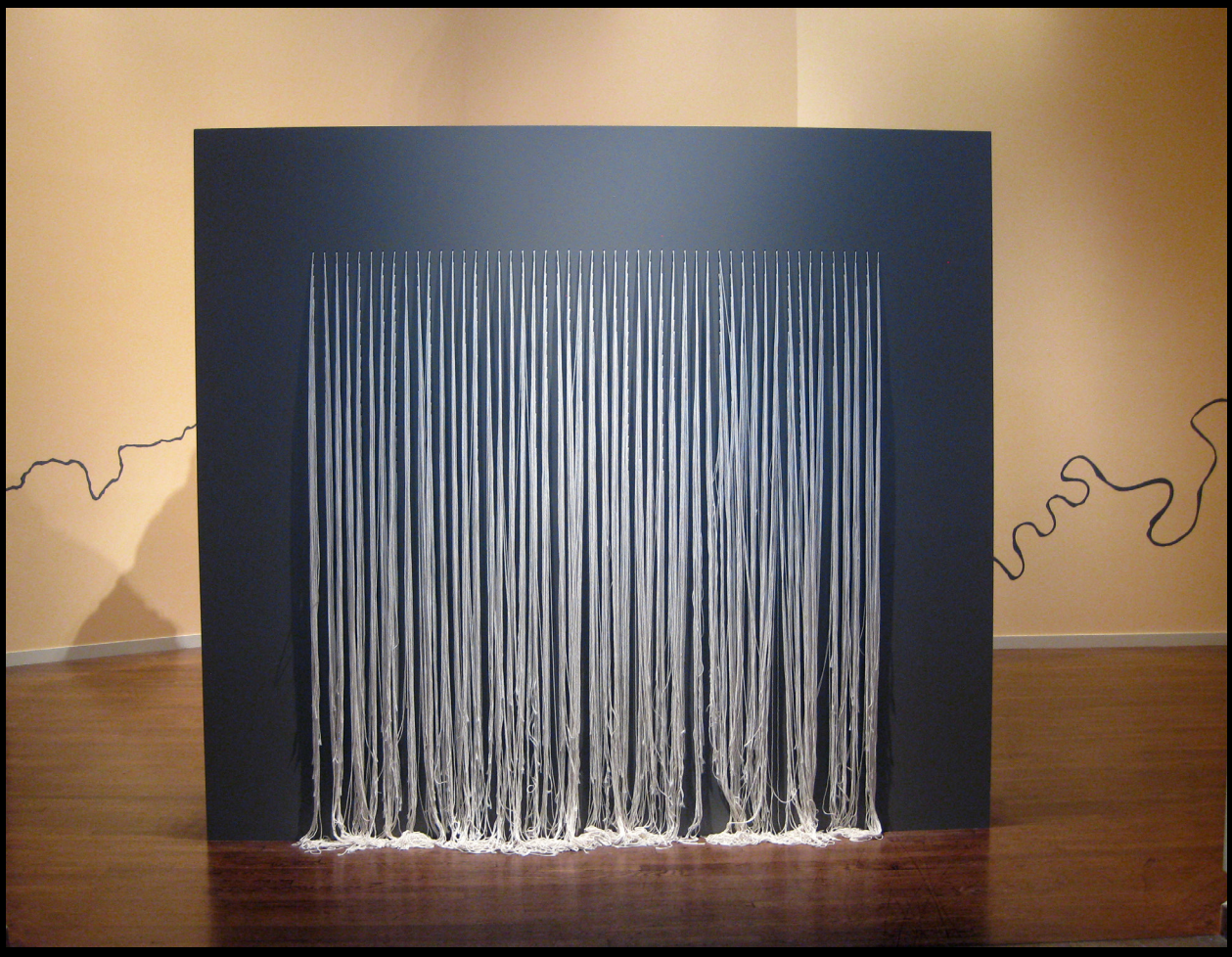
-PAM BOWMAN

I endeavor to express the value of the human experience through installations that incorporate natural materials and traditional, labor-intensive processes. I am particularly interested in exploring how our repetitive tasks and efforts compound, interact, and contribute to a greater sense of purpose.

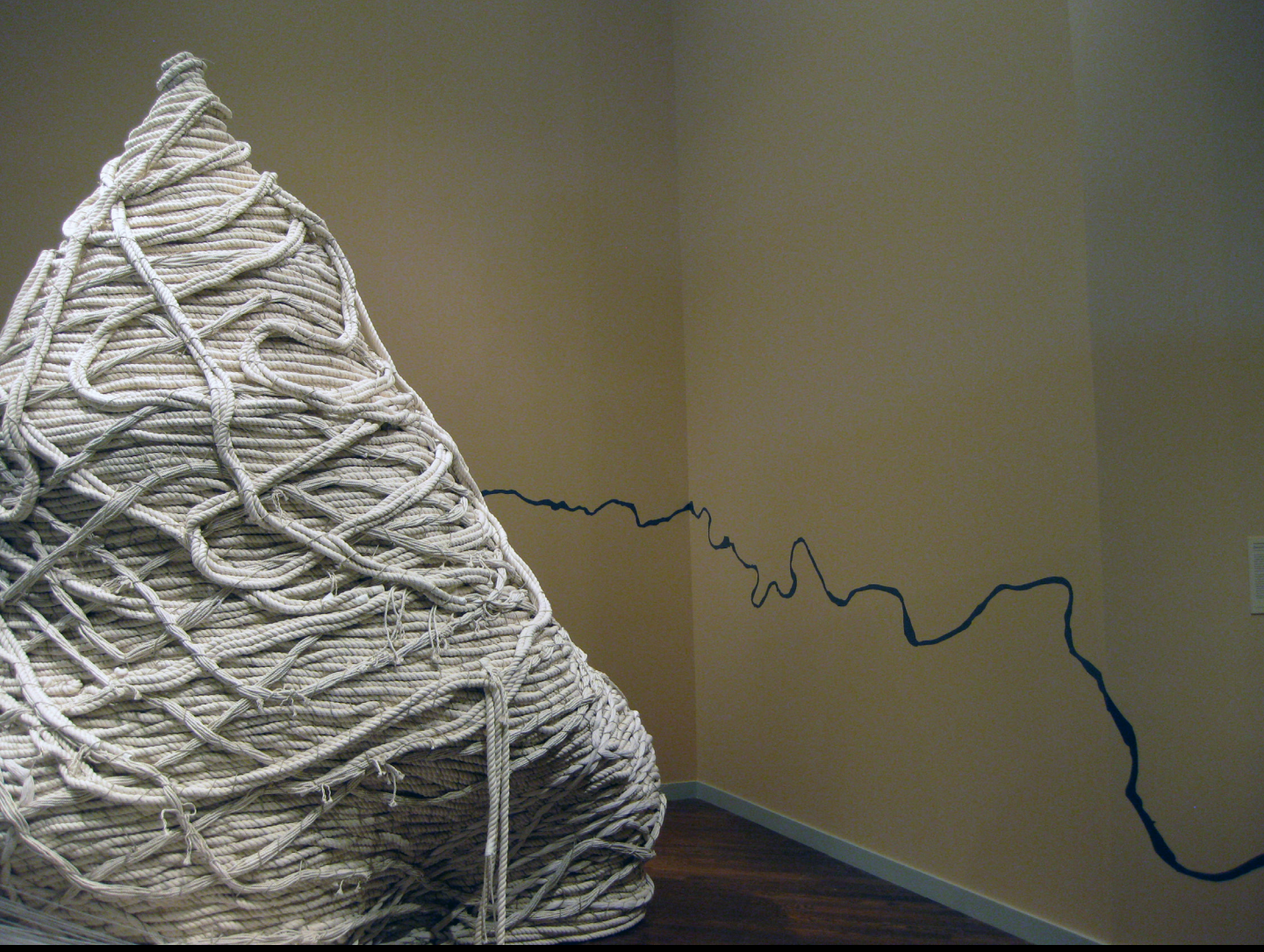
Materiality is the foundation of my installations. Natural materials and fibers relate to the earth, to the lives of men and women throughout human history, and to the work they need to accomplish. String, cordage, and rope are particularly meaningful as symbols of tools helpful to perform work and as signifiers of accomplishment.

The repetitive and labor-intensive processes I use to manipulate my materials reflect the tasks of living and the steady, continual efforts of life. Many of these processes relate to traditional fiber techniques such as weaving, braiding, and quilting. These techniques are reminiscent of ancient repetitive work necessary for home and life. Their historical association with work and

Arttruck, string, rope, steel, card stock, 8' x 8' x 24', 2009



Becoming
Cotton rope and string, vinyl, steel, wood, paint, caulking cotton
Shown installed in 25' x 35' gallery space, 2013



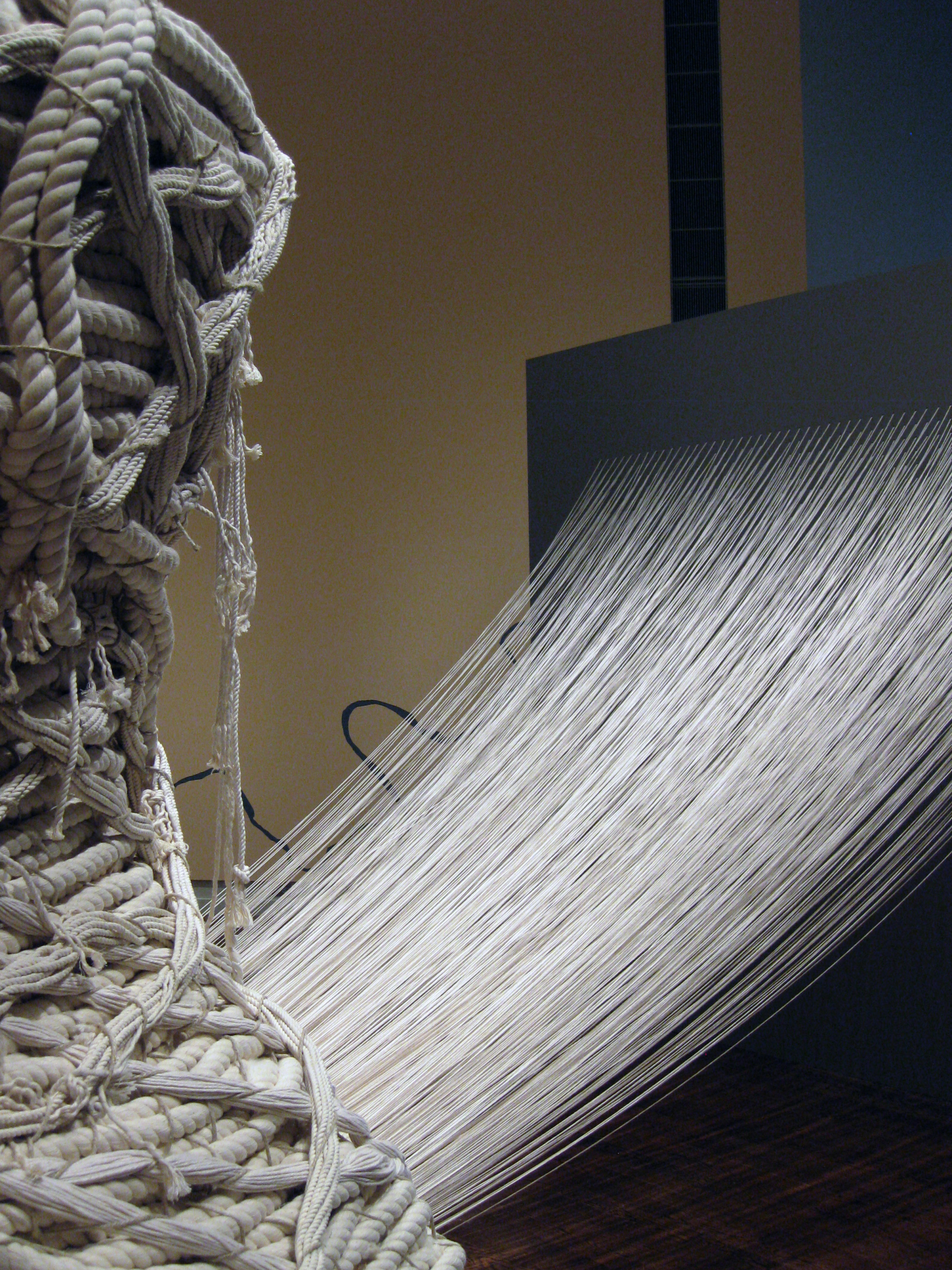
Becoming
Cotton rope and string, vinyl, steel, wood, paint, caulking cotton
Shown installed in 25' x 35' gallery space, 2013

meticulous constructive processes provide a powerful metaphor for the human experience.

Through small, sustained efforts over time, routines and relationships contribute to the learning and progress of an individual. The rhythms, routines, and rituals of life intrigue me. Daily routines and interpersonal relationships are repetitive. They are interlinking tasks we perform that create patterns.

Pam Bowman was born in Salt Lake City in 1953 and grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska. She received a BA in Interior Design in 1977 and a Master of Fine Arts with an emphasis in sculpture and installation from Brigham Young University in 2005.

She has exhibited her work extensively throughout Utah and in California, Arizona, Cambodia, and Nanjing, China. She was named a Visual Arts Fellow in 2016 by the Utah Division of Arts and Museums.





(Clockwise from left)

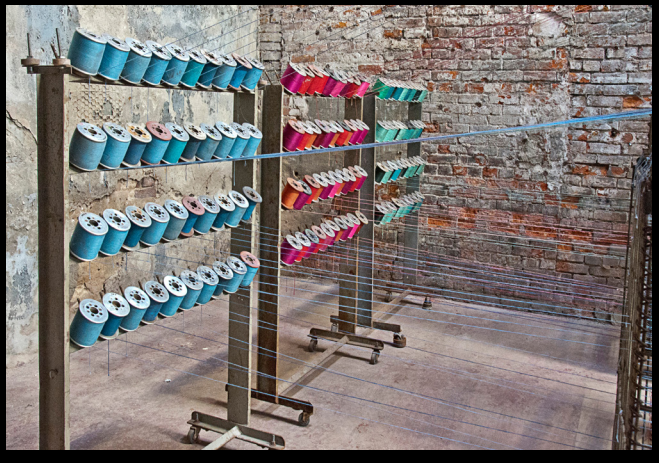
Becoming
Cotton rope and string, vinyl, steel, wood, paint, caulking cotton
Shown installed in 25' x 35' gallery space, 2013

Collective III
Caulking cotton, dye, steel, wood
Dimensions variable, 10' x 6' x 16' as shown, 2015

Inclusion
Handmade cotton rope, steel, cotton string 6' x 12' x 6", 2015







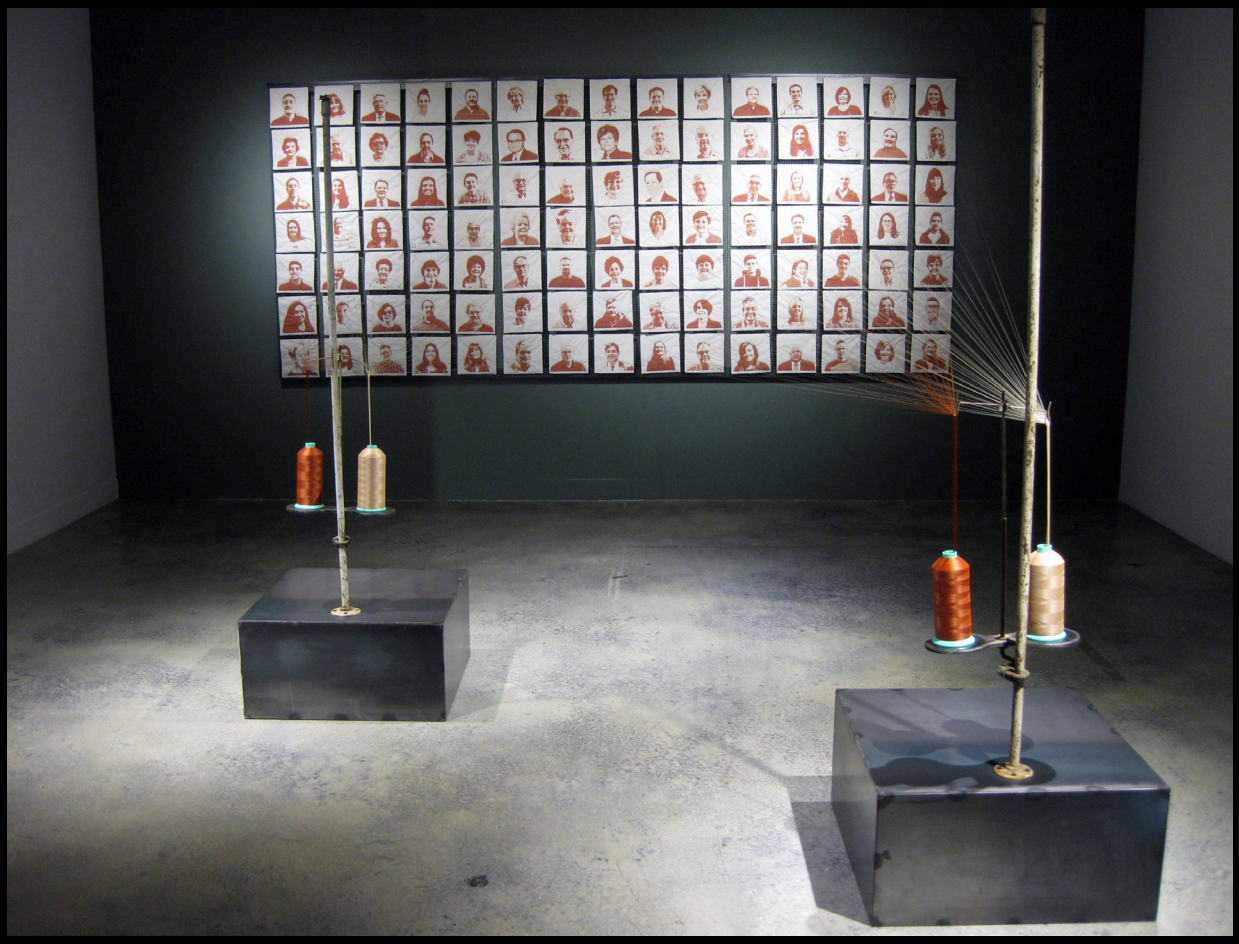


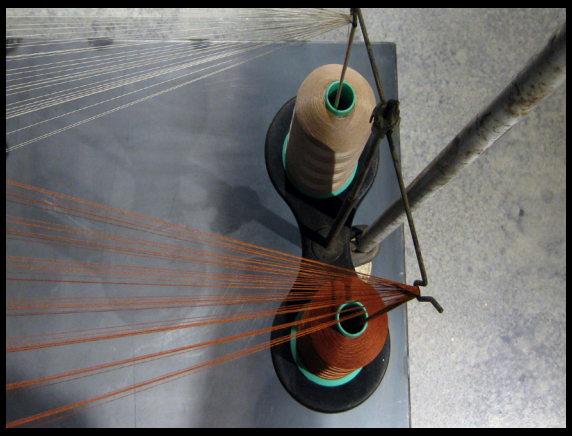
Seamless
Dyed cotton, cotton warp thread, handmade rope, found historical objects
Shown installed in 25' x 30' exhibition space, 2012



Webwork
Loom, cotton string, cotton rope
3.5' x 6' x 19.5', 2015







Aggregation
Cotton fabric and batting, thread, found objects, steel
Shown installed in 18' x 20' gallery space, 2015



Aggregation
Cotton fabric and batting, thread, found objects, steel
Shown installed in 18' x 20' gallery space, 2015

Judy Elsley

Making Text(ile)s

I start with a white space: anything could happen in this blank. I know there's something I want to say, but I have only a vague sense of how to say it, and no idea what form will best express my ideas. Revision after revision, I labor at my project, sometimes feeling elated, sometimes downcast, often frustrated. Many times I ask myself why I'm doing this when it's so demanding, so hard. But I'm driven to do it, and months after I start, I come as close to saying what I mean as I can. I reach the limits of my technical ability and creativity. Now it's time to share what I've done with others, put this private enterprise into the public arena. I'm nervous, but I do it, and I get feedback. More revising. Eventually, I publish my work; I'm finished. And then I start again, with another white space and another idea to express.

As an English professor, the process I've just described articulates my writing process, whether I'm engaged in an academic paper or a personal essay. However, it's just as true for the work I do dyeing and printing on cloth which I then make into art quilts. Quilting and writing may seem worlds apart, but for me, they're intimately linked in both process and purpose.

Whether I'm starting with the blank computer screen, an empty journal page, or a piece of white fabric, I begin in the same place: Everything is possible, at least in theory. In reality, I'm limited by my skills, as a writer or cloth maker, as well as by the life and experience I have had. I've come to understand, however, that those limitations are also my strengths. My way of looking at life, and the skills I have learned, give me a particular style or voice, whether on paper or cloth.

It takes courage to make a mark on that blank space, to launch the ship in this direction rather than that, but I'm reassured by the knowledge that the real art of writing or cloth making is not in that first mark, but in the many, many revisions I will make after that. In writing, I work on draft after draft of a paper, focusing, changing, rearranging, cutting, adding. The process takes not only courage, but perseverance, determination, and an ability to ignore the little voice in my head that says, "Why bother?" I often agree with George Orwell's assessment that "Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness." The same, of course, is true of cloth work. I show off my successful pieces, but few people see the shelves of dreadful, muddy messes that just proved the little voice was right.

My writing and cloth making is mostly autobiographical. I may not know that as I'm writing my dissertation or an academic paper, but when I step back, I can see that wrapped in all that theory is a personal statement of some kind. I may be the only person who knows what it is, but it's there. As educator Donald Murray says, "I suspect that no matter how I tuned the lyre, I played the same tune. My writing—and yours—is autobiographical."

The following two quilts show my text(ile) process in action. I usually begin by writing a short essay, which I then inscribe on fabric. I am constantly aiming to integrate the verbal with the visual as I "edit" these quilts, so the writing becomes an integral but not dominant element in the visual, and the visual illustrates the meaning of the words.

It takes courage to make a mark on that blank space, to launch the ship in this direction rather than that, but I'm reassured by the knowledge that the real art of writing or cloth making is not in that first mark, but in the many, many revisions I will make after that.

Memory

I'm on a boat with my father, and I am not happy. The surroundings are unfamiliar, the floor moves up and down, and I'm angry with my father. So I start to cry. Perhaps I scream. It's embarrassing for him because he doesn't know what to do with me. I want my mother, but she's not there and he can't make her appear. I am so angry and scared that I throw my favorite doll, Rosebud, at him.

That's my first memory. I must have been just under two years old, and my father was taking me from Northern Ireland to England because he'd just got a new job teaching English at a boys' private school in Bedford. When he first looked for teaching positions, there was nothing available in England, so with a wife and new baby to provide for, he took a post in Macherefelt, Northern Ireland. He was English, middle class, professional, and therefore obviously Protestant. Though my father was agnostic and my mother Jewish, our family lived in the Protestant part of town, socialized only with other Protestants, and bought at Protestant shops. My parents couldn't wait to get back to England. The job in Bedford was a step up, but the timing couldn't have been worse: my mother was nine months pregnant with my brother, so she stayed in Ireland to have the baby, while my father came ahead with me to start the new life.

But the tantrum on the boat is not my memory. It's a family story, told over the years by my father, familiar enough now that my mind has created a gauzy and vague memory of the event. I've inherited my father's story as my own memory. I now "remember" my parents' time in Ireland with crisp authenticity because I've seen the photos and heard the stories enough times.

How do I know the tantrum on the boat is not my memory? Because my memories are sharp, detailed vignettes that tend to fall outside the family stories. My most vivid memories are not known to my parents. We share almost

no common memories, even when we shared the events. I remember it one way, because of my particular mindset, and they remember it another way because they wore a different set of mental spectacles from me.

So I think I remember my mother placing a brick at one end of my brother's baby carriage because he was so heavy that he needed a counterbalance to prevent the carriage keeling over. But I don't remember that. That's my mother's memory, a story that supports her belief that my brother was a bothersome child from the beginning. I think I remember how difficult it was to learn to read, how frustrated I got. But that's a family story, too, illustrating how slow and underdeveloped I was as a child. The most commonly referenced family stories tend to reify the roles we were supposed to play: Nick as the difficult child, me as the good but slow one.

Here's a real memory. I know it's real because it's about desire. Desire would not have been an acceptable subject for family stories, so this one is definitely my own: All the kids on our street, Queen's Crescent, had hula-hoops, and I wouldn't be satisfied till I had one. Then it was roller skates, and then ballet lessons. Yes, those are my memories. Wanting and wanting, thinking life would be perfect If Only...

Desire shapes childhood. I remember the amazing munificence of the American gifts we received at Christmas. This was the early 50s when WWII shortages were still in effect in England. Our American relatives would send a stream of lollipops, each wrapped in cellophane, each connected. We hung them from the top of the stairs, and they reached all the way from second floor to the first floor. Or the huge box of impossibly big chocolates. The odd thing was that this candy, so much and so large, tasted overly sweet as it caught the back of my throat. The pleasure was in looking at its size, not in eating it. How could something that looked so desirable actually taste of disappointment?



Michael Wutz

My memories bespeak strong feelings – anger, desire, power – that had no place for expression or acceptance within the context of the family. So they lived, like unconscious seeds, in my mind. And when I was old enough to leave home, they blossomed into rebellion. I spoke those emotions, lived them, owned them. I became me.



I remember the first time I realized I could hurt someone else. My mother burst into tears, worn down by the constant fighting and bickering between my brother and me. I was surprised. Why was she crying? This was between Nick and me. How was she involved? That's definitely mine because it's about power, and particularly power over someone else. That wouldn't have been part of the family pantheon of stories either. A little too close to savagery.

I remember playing on the front lawn listening for the drone of my father's motorcycle, before the family could afford a car. That drone meant we could all eat lunch. It was an indicator of the many years where I knew my father by sound. I learned to read the anger in his voice so I knew when he'd reached his limit and would spank one of us. I learned the sound of his footsteps on the stair and down the hall that meant I should turn off the light and hide the book that I was illicitly reading after "lights out." Yep, those memories are mine.

My early memories are little wild things, minor rebellions against the family stories set down by my parents. My memories bespeak strong feelings—anger, desire, power—that had no place for expression or acceptance within the context of the family. So they lived, like unconscious seeds, in my mind. And when I was old enough to leave home, they blossomed into rebellion. I spoke those emotions, lived them, owned them. I became me.

The Goddess of Compassion

Let's take a situation of difficulty and see how we might discover our Buddha nature even there. One person was on a home visit with very critical parents. The Goddess of Compassion took over her body and instead of fighting them, she simply sat down to watch TV with them and tried to love them anyway. As the Goddess left, she whispered in the ear of the frustrated daughter, 'Don't go home too often.'

—Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart*

In May 1978, my father had such a serious heart attack that he spent the next six weeks in the hospital. I was twenty-six. Every day, my mother and I would go to the private school where we worked, me the teacher and she the office manager. When school was over, we drove twenty miles to the hospital in the next town to visit my father. Then we drove home, sank into our beds and did the same thing the next day. Day after day, week after week, our lives rotated around those hospital visits to the point that I moved back into my parents' home because my life was no longer my own. Jackson Browne's song "Running on Empty" aptly described my life at that time.

My father came home mid-July, just as the school year was ending. I was



planning a vacation abroad, an opportunity to escape the deadening routine I had lived for the previous few months. A few days after my father got out of the hospital, while I was visiting them, my mother said, "Your father wants a few words with you."

As I climbed the stairs to their bedroom where he was resting, I thought he would thank me, but no.

"Do you realize," he said, "how sharp you are being with your mother?"

"Yes, I do," I replied.

"Well," he continued, "she was very distressed when you told her you wanted to get out of the situation here."

"And what am I meant to say?" I asked. "It's the truth."

"You are being awkward and unchristian," he concluded.

I tiptoed out of their house and wrote a line of the "f" word in my journal for that day, too angry to articulate my thoughts and feelings. But that's as far as I dared go. He was a sick man, and I didn't want to be the cause of another heart attack.

At the time, my anger was focused on my father, so I imagined other ways I could have countered him. For example, I could have said, "I've put my life on hold for you for the last six weeks, and the first thing you do when you get home is reprimand me? You should be grateful for the support I've given both of you. I'm going to walk out of this room now, and when I return, I expect you to thank me."

But that wouldn't have changed anything. He once said, "I like to think I'm always right." He would have considered my words and actions odd and unreasonable.

Years later, I realized it was my mother I should have faced, not my father. Why didn't I go back downstairs and say, "How dare you send me up to be scolded for my behavior to you? If you have an issue with me, speak directly to me."

Or, I could have left the bedroom



Years later, I realized it was my mother I should have faced, not my father. Why didn't I go back downstairs and say, "How dare you send me up to be scolded for my behavior to you? If you have an issue with me, speak directly to me."

as soon as he began, gone down to get her, inviting him to continue his accusations while she was in the room, too.

"Is this what you think?" I would have asked her. She would have backed off, he would have blustered, and nothing would have changed. The Goddess of Compassion would have shaken her head sadly, and said, "Don't go home too often."

Now I think that, conscious or not, my parents were working in collusion. My father had accused my mother of loving me more than him while he was in hospital, as if love works as a hierarchy. She bonded with him by betraying me. Together they linked arms metaphorically by calling me sharp, hurtful, unloving, and—the *coup de gras*—unchristian.

If I'd been a Bigger Better person, something I never achieved in terms of my parents, I would have laughed because nothing was going to change. I would have said, "Yep, I'm sharp and sometimes hurtful. And you know what else? The Goddess of Compassion is right: I really shouldn't come home too often."

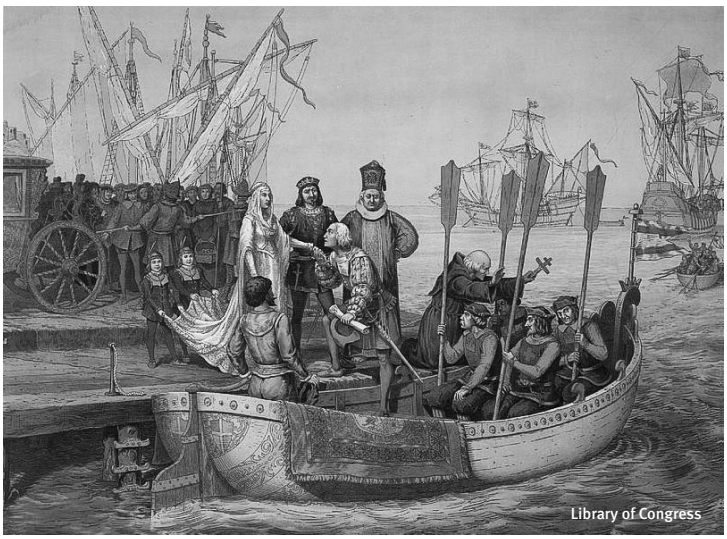


Judy Elsley was born and raised in England. She moved to the U.S. in 1979, living on the Arizona/Utah border for a few years before going back to school to earn a Ph.D. at the University of Arizona. She wrote a dissertation on the semiotics of quilting, and many of her publications focus on the literature and social meaning of quilts in American culture. Judy taught English at Weber State University for twenty-six years before retiring in 2016.

Eric Swedin

Columbus Was Wrong—

Extract from a Work in Progress on American History


Library of Congress

Columbus was wrong. Everyone knows that, but so often, school children are apparently still taught that Columbus was right: the explorer knew that the world was round while all those other wrong-headed primitive people in Europe thought that the world was flat. The children are also taught that sailors on ships were terrified of going off the edge of the world, falling into a bottomless abyss. Why do these stories persist? I believe it is because we find comfort in believing that people in the past were more ignorant than us and that we are now smarter than them. While I subscribe to the idea of progress, this is not an accurate portrayal of progress. People in the past were not stupid, nor were they less intelligent, and telling ourselves stories about the past that make us feel superior to people in the past is not only foolhardy, it makes us feel complacent.

The story of Columbus is more interesting than the flat-earth myth. Mariners and scholars in Europe knew that the world was a globe. Mariners knew this because anyone who has watched a ship go out to sea will observe the hull disappear before the sails, and sails on approaching ships are visible from shore before their hulls become visible. Obviously the surface of the world was curved, and logically, a continuous curve is part of a sphere. Eratosthenes (circa 276 BCE to circa 194 BCE), an ancient Greek philosopher, even came up with a clever method to measure the circumference of our world by measuring the angle of the sun overhead at noon. Exactly what his measurement would equal in modern terms is still disputed because he measured the distance in stadia, the length of a stadium, which was not a uniform measurement. Even so, his measurements were close to the actual number, a world 24,901 miles in circumference.

People in the past were not stupid, nor were they less intelligent, and telling ourselves stories about the past that make us feel superior to people in the past is not only foolhardy, it makes us feel complacent.

As we now know, other peoples from the Old World discovered the Americas before Columbus. We know with certainty that the Vikings did so. The Vikings were in an expansionist mode at the time, probably prompted by a period called the Medieval Warm Period, which lasted from 900 CE to 1300 CE, when average temperatures rose in the northern hemisphere by a couple of degrees Fahrenheit, increasing agricultural yields in Scandinavia, increasing population, and making Arctic voyages easier (Morris, 371). While Viking sagas had described a voyage west from the Viking colony on Greenland, many scholars believed the journey to be mythical, rather than recounting an actual voyage to a new land named Vinland. In 1960, archaeologists discovered the remains of a Viking settlement in Newfoundland at L'Anse Aux Meadows, dating from about 1000 CE. How much farther down the coast did the Vikings explore? We just don't know, perhaps as far as the Hudson River, perhaps no more south than Newfoundland itself. The settlement was only temporary and conflict with the local natives, called Skraelings, drove the Vikings away. It's a fascinating story, but the primary point to remember is that while the Vikings found the New World, they did not pass on this knowledge to other peoples, other than through the sagas, written down over two centuries later, and knowledge of the New World was lost.

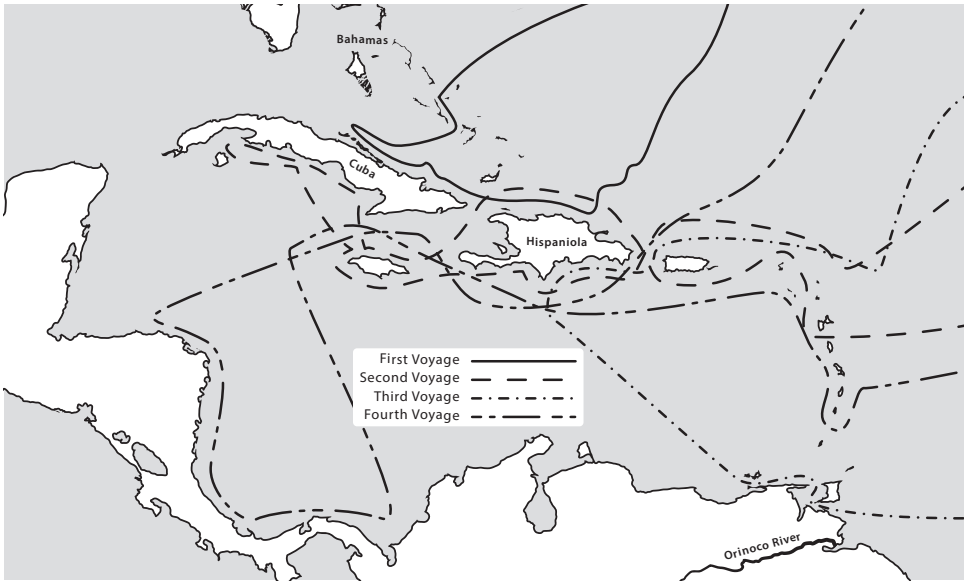
Other scholars have proposed contact with the Americas by ancient Egyptians or the Irish, and even built modern replicas of historical boats to sail across the Atlantic Ocean and prove that such voyages were possible. It's one thing to sail across an ocean using ancient or medieval maritime technology, yet with modern navigation tools, and quite another to be ancient Egyptians or medieval Irish monks and sail across an unexplored sea towards an unknown fate. Other scholars and pseudo-scholars have proposed contact with the Japanese, the Chinese, the Basques, the Turks, or the Phoenicians. While plausible, any sort of sustained contact is unlikely for two reasons. First, we have no archaeological evidence that has stood up to sustained scrutiny; and second, we have no evidence of the exchange of diseases. As we will see when discussing the Columbian Exchange, diseases from the Old World decimated American populations, and we have no indications that this happened earlier. In fact, if American native populations had already been exposed to Old World diseases, they would have not been so vulnerable when Columbus came. The Vikings did not cause such epidemics because their long boats came through chilly northern climes that killed off much of the diseases or their animal hosts. Medical doctors eventually came to realize that the longer sailors are at sea, the healthier the crews become. With the exception of scurvy, caused by the lack of vitamin C, disease microbes at sea tended to work their way through the crew during the early part of a voyage and all the survivors built up antibodies to those diseases (Friedenberg, 36). Long voyages of occasional contact with the New World would have tended to protect the native Americans from disease because

the healthy crews would have been more likely to be disease-free.

Christopher Columbus was not aware of these medical considerations or that unknown lands existed on the opposite shore of the Atlantic Ocean. Born in Genoa in 1450 or 1451, we know little of his early life. He obviously became an accomplished sailor, was a man of some learning, mostly self-taught, and like so many of his fellow Christians, very devout. He became convinced that God wanted him to discover a new path to the nation of Cathay (China) to create new opportunities for trade and missionary work. By spreading the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the heathen Chinese could be converted into Christians (Granzotto, 55-56).

Columbus studied the great works on geography and concluded that the distance from the Canary Islands off of Africa to Cipangu (Japan) was only 2,400 miles (Morison, 68; Granzotto, 52-54). The question was not whether the world was a globe or not, but the actual size of the world. Columbus thought that the world was really only about 16,000 miles in circumference, while most other learned men thought it was about 25,000 miles in circumference. Despite the weight of scholarly opinion against Columbus, his earnest certainty earned him high-placed friends who advocated for him with Queen Isabella (1451-1504). The learned men were correct, but Isabella decided to fund an expedition of three ships because the risk was small and the potential rewards were so grand. This one decision created a large and powerful overseas Spanish Empire that would take over four centuries to fade.

Columbus and his three ships left Palos in Spain on August 3, 1492, and stopped at the Canary Islands to reprovision and make necessary repairs. The Canary Islands provided a taste of the impact that Europeans would have on the Americas. Portuguese, Italians, and Spaniards had each made efforts to explore the islands and establish themselves there among the native Guanches. During the Fifteenth Century, the Spanish gradually conquered most of the islands, suppressing Guanche opposition.



Map by Joe Salmond

With the islands conquered, the Spanish began to colonize the islands with settlers in 1496. Though the Catholic Church sent missionaries to convert the Guanches, seeing all souls as worthy of the divine salvation offered by the church, Spanish settlers were seeking economic opportunity. Through a mixture of force and coercion, Guanches worked on sugar plantations. Alcoholism among the remaining natives was frequent, a common reaction to the experience of culture shock, as their native culture faded into a new system in which they had little power and few skills. A limited number of African slaves were even introduced to work in sugar mills. The settlers intermarried with the Guanches and over the centuries, people who identified as pure Guanche gradually disappeared. This system of economic exploitation was similar in many ways to the peasant-based feudal economic system in Spain (see Fernández-Armesto). Spain and Portugal also had slavery. In some places as high as a tenth of the population were slaves, many of black African ancestry, though there were also slaves from Spain itself and other nations of Europe. A 1444 Portuguese expedition into Africa revived the practice of slave-raiding rather than just purchasing slaves. Spain and Genoa were also already involved in the slave trade (See Wheat; Russell 239-243).

On September 9, 1492, Columbus and his three ships headed directly west into the uncharted ocean. Columbus sailed on the *Santa Maria*, a square-rigged ship, while the other two ships, the *Pinta* and *Niña*, were lateen-rigged caravels. The white sails of Columbus's three ships had red crosses on them, reminding themselves and other peoples how profoundly Catholic Christianity permeated every aspect of their lives.

After little more than a month at sea, with his crews growing nervous, he stumbled across a small island in the Bahamas on October 12 and landed the following day. He named the island San Salvador, the exact location of which is still disputed. The local natives were Taino, part of the Arawak peoples who inhabited islands of the Caribbean Sea. In his report to the King and Queen of Spain, Columbus described the natives as innocents, "so ingenuous and free with all they have," easily sharing goods in a way that was alien to the Spaniards. Columbus also thought, "They ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I see that they repeat very quickly all that is said to them; and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, because it seemed to me that they belonged to no religion" (Las Casas, quoted in Morison, *Discovery*, I:230). Columbus took six natives as prisoners to return to Spain with him, hoping that they would learn Spanish and be able to communicate with their captors.

From our modern perspective, the kidnapping of the Indians is horrifying. That is not how the Europeans viewed it.

The modern ideal of human rights existed for Europeans in two earlier forms: the Christian Golden Rule to treat others as you wished to be treated, and the feudal ideal that even peasants had certain limited rights, if only the right to desire that their social betters provide their part of the feudal bargain. Collecting Indians was similar to collecting samples of exotic plants or animals.

Their own culture was highly stratified, with profoundly unequal relations among people of different social levels. The modern ideal of human rights existed for Europeans in two earlier forms: the Christian Golden Rule to treat others as you wished to be treated, and the feudal ideal that even peasants had certain limited rights, if only the right to desire that their social betters provide their part of the feudal bargain. Collecting Indians was similar to collecting samples of exotic plants or animals. The Indians were part of the land and they had no rights when faced with the desires of the Europeans.

Columbus was certain that he had reached an island just outside of eastern Asia. Because the locals were brown-skinned, and he knew from his readings that the people of India were brown-skinned, he assumed the locals were Indians. The mistaken name stuck, even after it was apparent that a new world had been discovered. The Taino were destroyed over the following century, mostly by the diseases that the Europeans inadvertently brought with them, but also during the Spanish drive to colonize the Caribbean and their efforts to turn the Taino into a compliant workforce. In many ways, the Spanish colonists treated the Taino as Spanish lords treated peasants in their own homeland.

Over the following 96 days, the three Spanish ships explored the Bahamas and also discovered Hispaniola and Cuba, claiming all they found as possessions of the Spanish Crown, by right of discovery. Columbus kept trying to match what he was finding with what he expected to find. He knew that off the eastern coast of China was a large island called Cipango (Japan). At first he thought that Cuba was Japan, then he decided that Hispaniola was Japan and Cuba was part of the coast of China. Until his death, Columbus maintained Cuba was part of a continent, even though the natives told him it was an island (Thomas, 311). While he was finding small gold ornaments and jewelry on the natives, he could not find the grand cities and oriental peoples that Marco Polo's writing had described.

The *Santa Maria* ran aground and had to be abandoned. Columbus built a fort on Hispaniola called La Navidad, so named because it was founded on Christmas Day, and left 39 men to live there. They were assigned the task of finding the source of the native gold. Columbus had traded small objects for enough gold to return with a considerable treasure for the Spanish crown. The gold and opportunity for conquest excited Spain. Having just finished the Reconquista of Spain, in which the Christians had driven out the Muslim Moors, men who would have once found their fortune in fighting to reclaim land from the Moors found new opportunities in a new land to acquire land and fortune.

On Columbus's second voyage to the New World, launched on September 24, 1493, the expedition had expanded from three ships to seventeen. Over a thousand colonists accompanied the expedition,

If the Americas had been located several thousand miles to the west, would Columbus be an obscure footnote in history as some fool who took three ships to sea and disappeared, perhaps because his crews starved to death? Columbus was fortunate that the Americas existed exactly where he expected to find land.

including Columbus's two brothers eager to join the success of their older brother. The expedition explored the Lesser Antilles island chain, discovered Puerto Rico and Jamaica, and explored the coasts of Hispaniola and Cuba more thoroughly. This was no voyage of discovery, but strictly commercial in its intent. New lands, claimed in the name of Spain, asserted a right of conquest. All lands so claimed now belonged to the Crown, all resources were owned by Spain, and the people were now Spanish subjects.

Columbus discovered that all the men left at La Navidad had been killed by the natives and the fort burned. The locals complained that the Spanish men had broken up into predatory gangs and robbed gold and women from them, so they had counterattacked and destroyed them (Morison, *Discovery*, I:427). Columbus founded another settlement, which he named Isabella, after the Queen. By royal command, Columbus was the leader, but the settlement quickly descended into frustrated recriminations because gold was hard to find and supply ships bringing food from Spain were delayed. The aristocrats who had come to participate in the conquest of the New World were offended when Columbus insisted that they work. The fact that Columbus and his brothers were foreigners and thought of themselves as in charge was also deeply resented by the Spaniards. Adding to the misery, many Spaniards were dying of syphilis, acquired from the native women (Thomas, 147, 148).

Native weapons were no match for a man in armor, with a sharp long sword, who might even be mounted on a horse. Horses had disappeared long ago in the New World. Using their superior weapons technology, and assisted by native allies who found substantial advantages in siding with the newcomers, the Spanish easily overwhelmed Native American opposition. The Old World diseases working their way through the native population assisted the conquerors, probably killing a majority of the natives.

On his third voyage to the New World, Columbus reached South America, near the modern island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, just off of Venezuela. He realized that he had come across a continent, because the volume of fresh water coming from the Orinoco river was too much for a simple island. He speculated that he had found Paradise, the Garden of Eden, because the biblical land was thought to still exist at the farthest point in Asia. He was still of the opinion that Cuba was part of the Asian continent. On his fourth and final voyage, Columbus sailed along what is now Panama and Nicaragua.

If the Americas had been located several thousand miles to the west, would Columbus be an obscure footnote in history as some fool who took three ships to sea and disappeared, perhaps because his crews starved to death? Columbus was fortunate that the Americas existed exactly where he expected to find land.

What if Columbus had not found the New World? What if Columbus had not existed or had not been inspired to seek out a new path to China? Finding the New World was inevitable. With sufficient maritime technology and aggressive sailing, the New World would have been found, almost certainly within a few decades of when Columbus first found it. A Portugese expedition, seeking to round Africa, stumbled across Brazil in 1500, only eight years after Columbus had discovered the New World. This occurred because the wind patterns near the equator tended to push ships across the Atlantic Ocean to South America.

The Chinese had built a trading fleet in 1405 under the command of Admiral Zheng He 87 years before Columbus's first voyage. This extraordinary man had

Neither civilization knew about the New World, but the New World was much easier to find from Europe, with the Atlantic easier to cross and stepping stones in the form of islands available, while the distances to cross the Pacific Ocean were twice as far, with stepping stones in the form of islands limited to the harsh Aleutians. Geography did not favor China in expanding to the East, even if the Chinese had been so inclined, while geography did favor the Europeans to expand West.

been captured as a child by the Ming armies and castrated before being placed in service to the imperial family. In seven great expeditions, from 1405 to 1433, Zheng He explored throughout Southeast Asia and probably along the coasts of the Indian Ocean all the way to Madagascar. The expeditions went west, following well-known traditional trading routes, not to the east, towards the New World. Beyond Japan was only the cold region of the northern Pacific Ocean, offering few prospects for trade or expansion. Changes in the imperial government led to the fall of the faction which Zheng He belonged to. We do not know how he died, perhaps at sea on his final voyage, but the fleet was burned on its final return to China.[1]

By almost any measure historians and archaeologists can find, China was more advanced than Western Europe at the time of Columbus. China had much larger cities, had more inventions, and more interesting trade goods. Europe had substantial incentives to find trade routes to China, seeking out spices, silk, and porcelain. Europe offered nothing for Chinese traders other than gold or silver, though the Chinese were impressed by Western clocks and eyeglasses. Neither civilization knew about the New World, but the New World was much easier to find from Europe, with the Atlantic easier to cross and stepping stones in the form of islands available, while the distances to cross the Pacific Ocean were twice as far, with stepping stones in the form of islands limited to the harsh Aleutians. Geography did not favor China in expanding to the East, even if the Chinese had been so inclined, while geography did favor the Europeans to expand West. Even though they were more advanced, China was also still trying to recover from the Mongol invasions that had ravaged their lands two centuries earlier. The West did have one technology superior to the rest of the world—the most advanced cannons in the world. Incessant warfare among European states and within those emerging nation-states between monarchs and the aristocracy had encouraged the development of better gunpowder and better metallurgy to make the cannons (Monson, 420).

Some scholars have pointed out that Columbus did not "discover" anything, because the natives of the New World already knew it was there. This is just sophistry posing as profound thought. In the end, Columbus is an important figure in history because he found the New World and told everyone else in the Old World that a new land existed. Unlike in the case of the Vikings, the discovery was not lost, and the discovery had enormous impact.

Notes

[1.] The book by Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered The World*, caused a splash with its provocative assertion that the Chinese discovered the New World before Columbus, but there is no evidence to support this. In fact, if the Chinese had discovered the New World before Columbus, then Chinese sailors would have been the ones to bring Old World diseases to devastate the New World, including syphilis, as a reward. That did not happen.

Works Cited

Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. *The Canary Islands After the Conquest: The Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Friedenberg, Zachary B. *Medicine Under Sail.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002.

Granzotto, Gianni. *Christopher Columbus: The Dream and the Obsession: A Biography.* Trans. Stephen Sartarelli. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985.

Menzies, Gavin. *1421: The Year China Discovered the World.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus.* Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1942.

—. *The European Discovery of America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Morris, Ian. *Why the West Rules—for Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.

Russell, Peter. *Prince Henry "The Navigator": A Life.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

Thomas, Hugh. *Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, from Columbus to Magellan.* New York, NY: Random House, 2003.

Wheat, David. "Iberian Roots of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1440–1640," *History Now: The Journal of the Gilder Lehrman Institute.* <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/origins-slavery/essays/iberian-roots-transatlantic-slave-trade-1440-1640>



Eric G. Swedin is a Professor of History at Weber State University. His doctorate is in the history of science and technology. His publications include numerous articles, six history books, four science fiction novels, and a historical mystery novel. *When Angels Wept: A What-If History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* won the 2010 Sidewise Award in Alternate History. Visit his website at www.swedin.org and his blog, "Alternatives: Histories of the Past and Future," at www.eswedin.blogspot.com.

Katharine Coles

Summer Has No Day

And so is endless any
Given afternoon, and who can tell

One from the other, the roses heavy,
Bearing their burdens into twilight

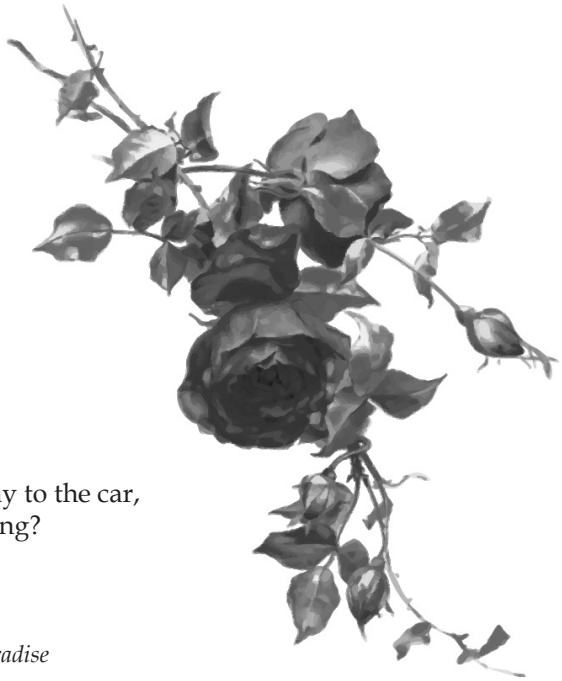
And spices lading them, as if thorns
Could make an arch

Architecture, unbreakable. The cane
Does not break, the flower

Does. A shatter on the walk, dark
And bruised. Wasn't it fresh

This morning? Didn't we, on our way to the car,
Stop a moment and breathe its passing?

With a title from *The Other Side of Paradise*



Firkin

Hideout

Two children are hiding in the dark hollow between lilacs, two stolen bone cups tipped over in the dirt, spilling red punch, white lips aglow in the shadows of leaves.

Oh, if their mothers find those cups missing from the whatnot shelf behind polished glass doors, mothers who know nothing on purpose.

Things to be looked at, never touched.

Deep in fragrance and kissing, neither knows what is who.

Laden, spilling over they are their bodies.

Ask me to imagine one body I love. I can't

Call it my own, can't call out the body that is present or gone already though it seems through a trick of time, a sleight of hand, still right here.

Canis Veritatem Contemplator

Pursue the usual avenues—genetic
Testing or Meyers-Briggs
Or plain old talky
Talky talky, resort
To dream, theory, calculations
Written on a napkin
In some beerhall. So
I'm not a dog as such. Results
Come in and someone
Reads them to us, we all
Sniff each other's butts, still
Nothing's settled. The universe
Is built to deliver answers
One at a time, not tell us
What they mean. Or
Where would we be.

In Our Twenty-Fifth Summer

The crickets were early. Cicadas

Suddenly click in the trees, ten-

Thousand panicked clocks reminding us

It's been—thirteen years

Already? Seventeen? I never

Do remember and who can

Think in such racket, tick tick tick,

Tock tock, extravaganza

Of sex and biting off more

Than can be chewed. So begins

Another cycle, another, each

Anniversary coming to make

Its own mark. What year

Did I decide he didn't need

To understand me? As if we could

Arrive even periodically at

Such knowledge, could ever

Say this, then this, then this

And be proved right.

Away

There are reasons for wanting distance.

The impulse may begin with a blade of grass or the brash sweep of goose-honk over the ear. But how did it carry you here? No tree, no well or pasture, no moss soft for your step. Only ice and stone shifting underfoot, opening and closing. Only sky and stars, present or absent, cold either way.

Sometimes you know you could die of anything, and you do not shiver. Having been borne across deserts, through forests, over mountains and water to be here, you are light and strong as a gust of wind.

Somewhere, an engineer is imagining a sail, an engine, ways to give you wings. Press a key: escape.

Here the eye pinpoints and the birds are eccentric and personable.

Not a legless beast nor microscopic lichen belongs to the home you've left; not an ear recognizes your voice above the wind, and you still love everything, bedazzled.

Who says this isn't the world.

You have not withdrawn. You have plunged in deep.

Who can say what will call the heart, or fill it.



Katharine Coles's sixth collection of poetry, *Flight*, was published in 2016 by Red Hen Press. Her fifth poetry collection, *The Earth Is Not Flat* (Red Hen 2013), was written under the auspices of the U.S. National Science Foundation's Antarctic Artists and Writers Program. Selections from her poems have been translated into German, Spanish, and Italian; individual pieces have also appeared in Dutch and Chinese. A professor at the University of Utah, she has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

David Lee

Postmortem

After the Obsequies

1


U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

What I remember of the past first
is a day during those days
when I wanted to sing opera,
a day when everything happened
that I cared to be inside the happening thereof:
rain crushed through the live oaks
in a wild sprint, then circled
into the meadow like a band of Comanche warriors
flashing bows and spears, come in bright warpaint
to carry me away to join Cynthia Ann Parker,
the sky filled with attack screams
and distant drum roar,
just as quickly the meadow empty
and quiet, storm moving
away like a stampeded remuda,
the world all bright color
and me right in the middle
living my life inside a rainbow

Then a three quarter waxing moon, half risen,
wallowed in the tank with a modicum of enthusiasm
and emphasis, like the teenage girl I was,
alone, shy, and waiting for no one
under the fall of perpetual nightjars
Lords of the Dance
carving traces in the sky
with their joyous roar in the feathered twilight

and into that memory traipsed
Charles E. Carr, Jr. the Second, who was my first
and only suitor to whom
I was conquest and chattel,
the fact of which I was reminded
weekly and at times daily,

not to mention his boast
thrown to anyone who cared to listen
that he won me in a Gin Rummage game,
a man who had the commanding presence
to fill any room he entered
like the effluvial waft
of digested butter beans
telling me, "bull bats, Merlean,
insignificant night birds
that never even learnt to sing,
that's what this is all about. Bull bats.
Seen one, seen 'em all."
And, with the end of magic in my life,
I became his wife.

2

It wasn't all that long after the wedding almost nobody came to when I remember the air that one morning, still, like it was holding down something dying to let it finish its work, and if I made any movement, even turning my eyes just a little to see if anything around me was alive or even breathing, I could feel little pocketswells of cold like current spots swimming in a lake skybolted above the earth, but standing perfectly still I was in a hole in the universe with nothing moving, only the suspicion of death walking an invisible circle around me, then the hardest thundersmash I've ever known lifted and pitched me against the ground. I couldn't breathe but still I tasted what seemed the color of green and my blouse stuck to my flesh like my grandmother's jalapeno jelly, melted chili pepper rivulets down my back and I remember thinking that's where my wing sockets could have been and now they're cauterized. My hair tingled like I'd just shampooed with yucca root and wild mint and it stood up with gooseflesh shivers that washed over me as if I'd fallen into a deepwater well. When I looked up, all the laundry on the clothesline had little halos on them and I laughed out loud, glad Charles hadn't put any of his underwear in the basket that week because he would have seen it as a personal miracle. That was when I heard the music, the whole sky singing and throbbing and all the trees with all the bright colors I could ever imagine dancing their sparkling leaves to the rhythm and I knew somehow right then before I had any time to think about it I was the only one who could hear it. And there he was standing right beside me and the first words he said were, "Where you been, Merlean? I was walking all over and couldn't find where you was at. Didn't you hear that lightning? You shouldn't be laying on the ground like that when it's looking like storm, you could get struct dead and rained on. You better get on up now and come in the house and think about fixing some dinner." And I saw a daylight moon

right above me pulling apart the thickets of clouds so it could look down and see something it was hunting for, almost like it was searching out the earth's tide pull-trigger and I knew I was re-alive and that I'd walked through the doors of a crypt nestled in the back of an ancient cemetery from once before a time. And the breath of musty air wrapped me up in the fragrance of a salvation I'd never dreamed of, like everything I knew and believed up to then was bound up in the rusty leather smell of a closed book on a Sunday morning that never was and I was a child again with all the world before me, and I knew there was nobody in my life I could ever tell it to until this day. And I got up and followed Charles into the house. Fifty four years ago.

3

In the spring of '54
I bottled fourteen quarts
of tornado

every time he made to leave home
he would find them
in the back of my closet
and open one

the house looked
like two, three year olds
and a teething puppy went through

this one time looking
for his reading glasses

behind Piggly Wiggly's
he found a copy of last week's
TV Guide
wanted to see what he'd missed

I guess I made them
for his libations
the missing excitement

since he said, "It aint
no color in my life."

4

I waited outside on the sidewalk that day
he went in to Bob Collier drugstore
ordered himself a limeaid
with Roy Rogers grenadine syrup
and a straw

concentrating so on his drink he walked
into a street post a half block down
spilled Roy Rogers all over his front
stood on the sidewalk and yelled,
"Well God damn Merlean."

The closest store was Maxine Durrant's
I went straight in to the panties counter
when I looked back he was standing
staring with his ruined shirt and empty soda cup
through the glass door

I picked up a pair of bright red ones, French lace,
shook them out, held them up
turned toward the door with them over my face
counted ten, lowered
he was gone

Maxine said,
"What are you doing, Mary Lynn?"
I told, she giggled like Alison in "The Miller's Tale"
so long she locked the door
pulled down the shade

she went to the back
brought out each of us
a paper cup of good time
she said, "It's an occasion
for us to have a girl party."

5

He went all over town haranguing, wrangling
and bargaining like the Scotchman he was
when Charlie sent him that birthday check

because anything he bought for him
would somehow be taken as a personal offense
and had to sign the card Charles E. Carr, Junior III
so he wouldn't feel the slight to his patriarchy
that money burning a hole in his pocket
he conned Gordon Hamilton down to sixty five cents
under Bill Edwards Hardware for a silly electric razor
never even knew Gordon Hamilton called me
to bring in the sixty five cents from my personal egg money
being perhaps the only chincier man in town

so proud of his brand new Braun electric razor
he'd made such a good financial deal for
and then like some Texas deus ex machina
whatever god looking down with a sardonic sense of humor
that day smote him with a case of shingles
there wasn't anything Dr. Tubbs could do
a thing about except prescribe calamine lotion
and tell him he was forbidden to shave
until the disease had run its course

forty days and forty nights Charles E. Carr Junior the Second
sat in his chair and watched the television set
rooster crow to midnight shut down I learned to pray
to come quickly like Christ's Second Coming
until I knew every program on either one
of the two channels we got from Lubbock
he didn't even have to call from the barcalounger
when it was time for me to come in
and change from seven to eleven or vice versa
it was as ingrained in my memory as catechism
or my time of the month, the whole world
inside that house turned to black and white
Howdy Doody to Lucille Ball to Friday night fights
which I would have loved to sign him up for
against any world champion mean and available

I remember the day when I received the revelation
and understood the true meaning of the Biblical flood
how that story had not one thing to do
with the man named Noah but with his wife
who had to endure forty days and forty nights
locked up in that boat with him and all those animals
being at twenty-four seven beck and call
barn swamper, feeder and nurse mom-maid
mother-in-attendance, cook and bottle washer

with nothing more to look forward to than
getting off that damn ark after it quit raining
and start being pregnant again so that
he could fulfill his duty to replenish the earth
thank god the good Lord had changed
his mind about the subduing it part
that would have been one too many for her
and the other thing of it is, we never even
got to learn what her actual name was
I doubt Noah ever mastered the pronunciation

the whole time he sat in his chair
with that razor in his lap like it was
the Ark of the Covenant to see him through the desert
of his personal affliction and could I please
bring him another sody pop or a sandwich
or run down to Piggly Wiggly and get him some
chocolate chip cookies he had a sudden craving for?
only interrupting his meditation on injustice
and the television set to hold that razor
up to his ear and turn it on so he could listen
to another source in the world capable
of producing an immaculate meaningless whine

6

Philippians 1:21

And he said, "Bretheren,
Now is the time of mourning,
The time for weeping of tears,
But this, too, shall pass and go away
As we learn the Plan of the Lord's Great Will revealed
That yea, it cometh to pass each and every one of us will one day
Die and pass and go away and be dead and gone…"

and I thought Holy God
Jesus Christ and the Catholic's
Holy Mary Mother of God
if that's the best he can do
the Apostle Paul hater of women notwithstanding
I could be preacher
at this church

7

Coda: Last Call
In the darkest cleft of midnight
a tiny wisp of silence cowered, concealed,
hidden by a cowl of wind

So
grief, like love,
is work
that has to be done
and
I have no clue
how or whether
to begin

I read once
I don't know when or where
or why I remember
that Rossini
said he only felt grief
twice in his life:
when his mother died
and when he was on a boat
and a roasted chicken
stuffed with truffles
fell into the water
lost and gone

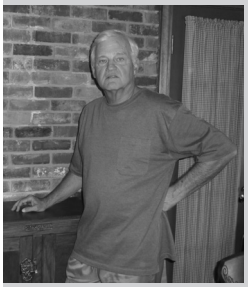
I know I grieved when mama died
again when Honey my best friend dog died
once more when Charles, Jr. left
for school and I knew
he would never ever really be
my little boy again
but before God I do not know
if what I feel now is grief
or something else
I don't understand
can't name

I've never known the taste of truffles
but I've lived a life
cramful with trifles
like

a bowl brimful to sopping over
with a concoction whose magic ingredients
I can't remember
slipped out of my hands into the sink
a potsherd broken away, everything spilt
and I don't know which to mourn
the lost recipe
or the bowl
and because I just don't
feel like bawling or cursing
or starting over another supper
I can only stand and stare
at the suption draining away
into a whirl

Lord God
it's one of those alone
hard red wine nights
foreshadowing a bloodshot tomorrow morning sky
spiral broken moon splinters scattered
all over the floor and on the furniture, lying
like breathing, open-eyed antimacassars
daring me to come sit anywhere near
pushing me out the back door scared
into the big alone

Oh, but breathe in the waft of a ghost rain
under a waxing cat scratch moon
floating through live oak
listen to the memory of a waif cinder maid
singing *Una Volta C'era Un Re*
and beneath me
exactly between my feet
a perfect moon-scarleted primrose
glistening in the rekindling of the night



David Lee, retired, splits his time among Mesquite, Nevada, Boulder, Utah, and Seaside, Oregon, where he scribbles and wanders available byways and trails, all at about the same rate and pace. He is currently in intensive training to achieve his goal of becoming a world class Piddler. "Postmortem" is from his new book, *Bluebonnets, Firewheels, and Brown Eyed Susans: Women of Bandera 1948-1962* (Wings Press). During fall semester 2016 he was a guest faculty member in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Brad L. Roghaar

What the Earth Tells Us

(for Laura and Beck)

Hyacinth and orchid, bougainvillea, clover
and lace.
Flowers belled or not belled, clustered or alone,
closed, open or opening.
Juniper, cedar and fir, the palm frond and eucalyptus,
the pine—the small giving nature of wheat grass.

(Do they not believe in their own scent?)

The mollusk, the starfish, the sea anemone,
caddis fly, dragonfly, muted moth.
Sparrow, pheasant and finch,
the cormorant, kingfisher and heron.

The smooth stones of any river
and the insistent pull of water on this very beach.

Listen:
Everything has voice, but some things too tender to speak.
We move toward a breath that we all share—
it is as it should be.

(Would we wish it otherwise?)

Even so there are many things still unspoken:
between mothers and sons, between fathers and daughters—
between you and who you love, next to you.

All around us, now, the moving world speaks for us.
The earth says simply:
"Forget about metaphor. Look at my face—
these flowers, my beach, my grass,
my horizon where it meets the circle that surrounds
all of you and makes everything possible.

"There is no need to reconcile with me.
I will have the moon rise every night,
Just for you—believe it.



"If you should be sad, lonely, unsure,
look for me here in the eyes of *these two lovers.*
Remember your own reflection, and see yourselves
in the joyful moving circle of their eyes—
each bright iris—tonight."

(Is it true the only unfinished number is one?)

The earth says,
"Let me sing you my one song—the rhythm I planted
beneath your rib and surrounded with oxygen:
'Lub-dub,' 'Lub-dub,' 'Lub-dub.'

"Your heart forgets its own necessity and
willingly opens your world. Let it speak when
the world draws its shade and appears to forget you.
It is not so—look around you and wait:

"Green reeds in still water, the spectrum
of color in all my fish, the swell of the ocean's breast,
my shoulder in a thunderhead.

"Concentric ripples in a pink seashell,
the same as the ripples in any mountain lake,
or the warm sand of this beach sculpted by
my tide—all concentric circles—perhaps
much less fragile than you might think.

"Look next to you—look into the circle of
that iris that looks back—believe what you see."

Everything beautiful in this world eventually folds
its hard edge into itself—smoothes to our desire
and waits for breath—waits to move.

(Is this not how we know about love—
when one body wants to leave itself
for another?)

The earth says,
"Lucky sons and daughters, look at *these two lovers*;
look at them this evening—all evening.
Their message is 'Yes,' 'Yes,' 'Yes,' —and it is
my message they speak."

(Would we not have this exactly so?)

The earth tells us:
"Everything passes in order to return,
and you can keep all of tonight—in memory—
my greatest gift."

(Would we not do well to do so?)

Gathering Small Treasures

(for Priti)

It is a fine breeze that rises, soft, and crosses
from the east,
follows the bright warmth of its own full sun
to settle, unannounced and comfortable,
in the west
among the tall grasses that stand or bend
beneath the white blanket of snowfall that settles
to melt again.

Sometimes this breeze might carry a treasure,
wrapped neatly within the gentle fold
of a green garment, edged
with gold embroidery,
light as a candle's flame, quiet as the morning
before the small birds of comfort
come to be awake.

And things happen—some so sad that no tongue
can open the vowels,
no breath will carry it for fear that the measure
of our own weak endurance will visit, uninvited,
and never leave.

But other things also—abundant like still water
over the thin and cool lip
of a full cup,
or the miracle of petals, perfumed and binding,
tight around a secret—
things that stay by grace and by desire, invited,
and never really leave.

At times we will gather between us
all that we hold close.
We will drink from the cup and from what only
seems far away.
We will call all our treasures, invited and green,
back to us.

Still Life

(the nature of generosity)

Consider the still life,
So many painters have:

The round alabaster bowl, heavy
and deep in the golden light
coming as it does, soft, from
some steady source.
It demands attention,
sliding as it does, easily,
into the casual eye—
the whole of the whole of it.

There is the pear, green and yellow,
the ever so slight blush of pink.
Nothing else quite like this
unbalanced but perfect shape,
the sensual curve of itself.
And it knows its own appeal—
it can be selfish in this way.

And the grapes, purple and round,
each one full of itself,
clustered in a kind of deranged balance.
They exude their own transience,
mischievous, ready to disappear
one by one—
juice their entire substance.

Perhaps the orange, green at the poles,
the warm promise of heat between them,
the navel poking out in shameless fertility,
and the small even dimples smoothed
to a polish—
too fragile to the cold.

But, there is the apple—always—
red or green in all possible shades,
somehow heavier and harder
than all the rest.
Dappled, bright, shiny and substantial—
quiet in all its solid sufficiency.

The apple makes the center.
It gives to the still life—
the apple,
in all its shared generosity.



Firkin

Two By Two

(to Sharon)

Can you see the quiet nesting
of the trumpeter swans somewhere in Yellowstone—
those two startling white messengers

frozen a moment above the jagged edge
of a great, bright collage—a clear lake
and a clean sky—those two timid birds—

those two halves of love? Suspended they bisect
the blue eye of god—a day almost gone—
the darkness held at the edge and kept there.

Do you see that they are more than this?
They are the kinetic proof that things may move—
two by two—the broken progeny of earth

may recover in a flight of full purpose.
The arms and cracked ribs of love
can open and breathe full again

like the open wings and fragile bones
of those two swans—captured again—
two by two—in the warm arc and embrace of the sky.

They quicken like breath, folding from memory into now—the
insistence of breath—
the breath that should always quicken between us—

hot and impatient.



Brad L. Roghaar is Faculty Emeritus at Weber State University where he taught literature and creative writing for over 30 years. A former editor of *Weber Studies: Voices and Viewpoints of the Contemporary West*, Brad currently serves as Ogden, Utah's, first Poet Laureate. Brad's poetry has appeared in many journals and magazines. His first book, *Unraveling the Knot: Poems of Connection*, won the Pearle M. Olsen award, and he was named Utah Poet of the Year. His latest manuscript, *A Simple Stand of Aspen Trees*, is a collection of poems dealing with places of retrieval. Brad recently returned from China where he was invited to read his poems as part of the 2016 International Scholars Forum at Shanghai Normal University. Brad and his wife, Sharon, live in Ogden, Utah, where Brad pursues his passions for writing, traveling, backpacking, and skiing.

Laura Stott

Blue Nude, Chapter 1

It has bothered me all my life that I don't paint like everybody else...
—Henri Matisse

We do not pretend

to know what she is thinking in her pose,

what colors she will suppose

to slip into
when she dresses—

blue feet, blue thighs,
blue breasts, blue eyes—


Katheryn Stott

Blue Nude Migration

Look, the blue nudes walk across the desert—

the western US is dotted with their indigo bodies.
They move slow, they stumble
down the dunes.
They wait in the cool gloom
of desert palm.
They dig their toes blue
into the crust of yellow earth. And all the cactus—so much
of it—and all that bare, blue skin.
It is high noon. Are they hungry? Are they sad?

One rides on the shoulders of a friend—
she can watch their sea of blue nude.

Artists have come to watch.

They've brought their sketch pads, their cameras.
Some have brought their harmonicas.

The blue nudes tilt their heads bashfully
down, or let their arms sweep dramatically
by their sides.

Where are they going? a young woman asks,
gesturing toward them, paintbrush dangling
out of her mouth like a cigarette.

What will we do without them?

A coyote sings. Soon it will be night—
as the blue nudes continue,
their steps matching the moon's

pull to earth, disappearing
in the mountains of blue dirt.

Looking Up

What about these blue nudes in the sky?
The pair of them, painted like night,
like romance.

Out of snow-covered houses
animals from dreams
rise like fish to feed

or roll like a moon
down the village road.

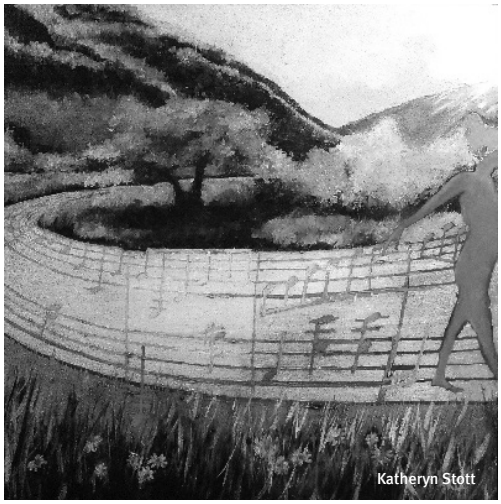
A night bird flies close to the couple's love.

The woman's hair is long and black and moves
like still curtains disturbed
by a cat.

Petals fall from her bouquet,
unto her bright arms
and off into the everything—

Flesh Sings

She painted music naked. Titled them
Blue and Green or *Pink and Blue*.
The folds of notes a river,
long hair, melody,
the base in straight lines.
What is composition but what we see
in a summer storm? But what we see
in our own bodies, letting
these arms swing in the breeze,
the ocean, time, the moon's cats,
setting light, the blue
and green music. So it begins to rain.
The landscape gathers itself together
and a soul rises from the grass.
What are these folds painted
in the self? Flowers in the garden,
the turn in song, rhyme, iris, morning
glory, skin.



Katheryn Stott



Laura Stott is the author of the book of poems *In the Museum of Coming and Going* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2014). Her poems can be found in publications such as *Copper Nickel*, *Bellingham Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Cutbank*, *Sugarhouse Review*, *Rock and Sling*, and the anthology, *All We Can Hold: Poems of Motherhood*. Her "Blue Nude Migration" series is a poetry and painting collaboration with her sister, Katheryn Stott, a visual artist. A recent exhibit of the collaboration was shown at the Ragged Edge Art Gallery in Gettysburg, PA. Outside of poetry, Laura spends as much time as possible with her family in their garden or in the mountains of Utah. She is an Instructor of English at Weber State University and is on the board of Writers@Work.

Katheryn Stott is a professional artist who divides her time between Utah and rural Pennsylvania. She is represented by the Red Raven Art Company in Lancaster, PA. She teaches art in her home as well as piano. She loves to garden and cook and enjoy nature as often as possible. She graduated from Brigham Young University with a BFA in 1993. To learn more about her work visit, www.katherynstott.com.

Nancy Takacs

The Worrier

vanishing bees

Where have they gone?

To an altar
that bans them,

to a well tower
in a canyon,

to a meeting
where nothing but
the glaciers are melting.

Where do the bees live?

In "Shall We Gather at the River,"
and "Came Back Haunted."

What do they do?

Play practical jokes.

They swarm on the bells,

stick to a driller's tongue.

Why do they play them?

In the bee world, love never dies.



Johnny_Automatic

The Worrier

yellow-headed blackbirds

Will they arrive this year?

No, not this year.

Why aren't they coming?

The city sealed
our open ditches
to save the snowmelt.

The birds lost all the wet furrows
for their nests.

What do you miss about them?

Their boldness,
their citron hoods
and raven bodies.

We waited for their arrival,
listening for their strange calls
in the crabapple.

Our son was always the one
who heard them first.

What were their voices like?

Catmint and poppies.

Iron caught in the throat.

The Worrier

scars

What is that scar on your thumb?

It's a gray desert road, with small tracks.

How is it wandering?

It goes far into a valley with pink mountains.

Who lives there?

The snake who is always eros.
The lizard who flexes
in my shadow.

What about the wells
and the whine
of their pumping?

They bring up the county's money.

Do you love scars?

Yes. They are
the wash that became deeper
after last night's rain.

The swirl of limbs
after a flash flood.

What happens to your skin?

It believes in the creamy flowers of sage.
It forgets about the past.

Where do you love silence?

Two mule deer
rubbing against a pinyon.

My hips flexing
through globemallow.

Where did you get that scar?

My dog stepped out of the car once,
caught his foot in a leg-hold trap.

How did you save him?

My husband sprang the trap
while I held his head.

I was bitten.

Where are you?



Firkin

Sitting on a rock like the head
of a crocodile,
listening to the echoes
of falling sandstone —
Kayenta, Wingate.

Where are you now?

Looking for dinosaur tracks,
fossils of snails.

Are the wells far enough away?

No.

What reverberates inside you?

The rhythm of the pumps
and too many roads.

The wound that closed
so I hardly remember the pain.

My dog running
on all fours
for another six years.

The perseverance of crows.

Why do you love scars?

They believe in the immortal.



Nancy Takacs won the 2016 Juniper Prize for poetry for her collection *The Worrier* recently published by the University of Massachusetts Press. The poems here are part of this collection. Her work has appeared most recently in the *Harvard Review*, *terrain.org*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Kestrel*. Nancy lives in Wellington, Utah.

Mikel Vause

In the Churchyard of St. Thomas the Apostle

The paths of glory lead but to the grave.
– Thomas Gray



Some call me Electra
But my name is Sylvia
Cold Yorkshire ground
Holds my bones
Carried north from London
Still smelling of gas
The oven smaller
Than those used by the Germans
But just as deadly

I empathize with Jews
Packed in cattle cars
Taken from their homes
To the camps
With the promise
That work will set them free
In my case it was art

Daddy daddy
Panzer-man
Cleft chin
Aryan eye
Champion of biology and eugenics
Swastika arm raised in a Hitler salute
Finger nails like Nazi bayonets
Scrape death across Ivy League blackboards

Star crossed at Cambridge
Ted seven years your name was mine too
We spoke through poetry
Yet my despair
Like "An owl's talons clenching my heart"
Was inescapable except

After these many years
They still come with hammer and chisel
To free me
Attacking your name
Leaving a scar on my marble stone
Like the one on my cheek
My "marble heavy" badge of honor
Key to eternity

The Massacre of Innocents 1914-1917

Death held no wonder.
—Wade Davis

Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die.
— Herbert Hoover

In Toronto
St. Paul's gray walls
Hold Books of Remembrance
Roster of the dead
Fresh-faced boys
Queens Own Rifles
Lost "Racing to the Sea"

Young eyes dead lights
Search the heavens

Of Passchendaele
Body parts mashed in mud
Of "no man's land"
Trenches gas-filled graves
Scarecrows crucified on barbed wire
Others blasted to nothing
For King and Country

War is political poetry
Calligraphy of bullet holes
Scribed on adolescent chests
Turning young hope
To obscene art
Pornography of progress

In the holy cavern
Footfall echoes
Candles flicker
Shadows dance
Sorrow hides in cracks and corners
Tears stain floors
Of the regimental church



Mikel Vause is the author of numerous articles and short stories that have appeared in various books, magazines, and journals. He is also the author of five collections of poems: *I Knew It Would Come to This*; *At the Edge of Things*; *Looking for the Old Crown*, a poetic guidebook to interesting and out-of-the-way places in Great Britain; and *The Scent of Juniper: Poems of the Himalayas.* His newest collection, *A Mountain Touched by Fire* (Kelsey Books/Aldrich Press), is available at Amazon.com.

Phyllis Barber

Adababa—*an excerpt*


James Grabill

Osawatomie, Kansas, March 1856 — Geoffrey Scott

The apron she wore that day was colored green and tied with a grosgrain ribbon. Drying one hand on her apron as the horsemen thundered into the yard past the corral, she must have lifted the other hand to tell them to wait. "Please," he heard her shout as loud as he'd ever heard her shout, him bending to peer out the window, and check the commotion. The next word seemed timed to come out of her mouth as the bullet sank into her chest. Synchronicity.

Geoffrey Scott. Seventeen. Rushing from the back of the house, running to the window to see his mother fall, catching sight of the horseman sheathing his rifle, turning his horse. The boy had frozen, stunned by the scene in front of his eyes. He hadn't run to protect her on the front porch in her green apron. It was too late to stop her mouth. Her likely words must have been, "Stop. Right where you are. In your tracks. Stop thinking any man is subhuman, that misdirected, evil way of thinking that no God would ever sanction—no God no matter whose he is." For sure, she must have said those things, though Geoffrey was too late to hear the prelude to her death. He only saw his mother crumple and the blossom of red on the front porch, the flower cradling his mother's head, the tossing of sticks covered at one end in cloth, soaked in oil, and lit with fire. The sound of horse's hooves fading away.

His father had been in town that morning. Not at home. Came back right after the three men rode away, soon enough to see his wife lying there, his son kneeling over her, the roof of the house burning. Dismounted in a flurry and ran for the porch. "Why didn't you shoot 'em? Where were you?" The three words were arrows.

"In the back. Did not see them coming."

"You blind? Deaf, too? You couldn't hear the sound of horses? Whole world of silence out here and you couldn't hear that?"

"Not soon enough. They came fast."

"Why weren't you there, son? What did I tell you this morning?"

"I . . . ."

"You what?"

"I was . . . . You know."

"You were what?" His father put his head in one hand and the other hand on his thigh, too refined to ask him why he was doing anything other than standing at the ready with his rifle. Too restrained to swipe at his son with the back of his hand, to punish him with the force of his unwelcome grief.

"Get up, son. The roof's on fire. We'll take care of her as soon as we save the house."

Geoffrey's legs had no strength in them. That strength had left when he knelt by the side of his still mother. So quiet. So unresponsive.

"Help me," his father shouted, running for the water trough.

Geoffrey Scott had been turned out. Nowhere to go. No one to answer to. His father refusing to leave the burned-out Kansas homestead his son had farmed at his side.

On the third day after the shooting, his father tossed off reckless words, angry at anything that moved and some things that didn't. "Find your own life. No need for you here in Kansas. Nothing good here. Nothing."

But Geoffrey didn't go far. At first. He stayed close to home with a friend in town, not inclined to take his father's words at face value, thinking his foul mood would pass. But two days later, when he rode his horse back to the farm that was mostly ash and ruins, his father appeared in the blackened and still-standing door frame with a rifle cradled in his arms. "Git. I told you once, and this is the last time. Kansas is poison. I don't want no son of mine anywhere near here. AND DON'T THINK for one minute I'll change my mind."

Sure that his father was only caught in the snare of grief, Geoffrey stayed on for a few days more and occupied himself in the evenings by talking with townspeople and passers through. Everyone, it seemed, was mired in the topic of whether it was right to own a man or not. But another subject was taking hold. Besides the talk of slavery, there was an itching in everyone's feet and bold words in their mouths about heading out West. "Riches. Land left blank and wide-open since the Mexican-American War. Miles for the taking with a mere snap of the fingers."

But since his mother had been shot, Geoffrey was more than a little uneasy with talk of war and victor's spoils. The Mexicans may have been cheated by a land-grabbing Administration or incompetent military personnel for all he knew. He'd seen what happened when men were blinded by a cause—men on both sides of the border of Kansas and Missouri: Jayhawkers. Border Ruffians. Raiders in both directions. Retaliation. Eye for an eye. Women and children. No matter who was in the way. His mother catching a bullet in the chest. He'd seen the shot. Taken by a soused pro-slavery man. Only because she didn't believe in keeping anyone in chains and had spoken out about it. Nothing more than that. Now his father had gone off his head, inconsolable, and too stubborn to leave something he thought he still owned, even though that something was charcoal and ash, mostly burned to the ground.

"I'll do it again. My land, by God," Elias Scott swore loudly on both days that Geoffrey rode away from the farm, the words feeling as though they had been hurled against Geoffrey's backside, words that caused water to shine in his eyes, something he'd never let his father see.

"Go on now, boy. Git yourself out of here."

Thus, Geoffrey, who mistrusted answers found at the end of a rifle, had no choice but to leave.

Doncaster, England, Autumn 1856 — Sophia Poultney

Sophia leaned against the wooden headboard, her legs tucked beneath the familiar quilt. The flame of the candle on her bed stand cast playful shadows across the quilt, now soft with age, and across the pages spread open on her lap. Had she been six or seven years old when her mother taught her to take the tiniest of stitches into the top layer of this counterpane, through the feather filling to the bottom, and back up again with a barely discernible flick of the needle?

Tick, tick. The clock in the hall. The sounds of floorboards creaking. Mother, brother, sisters, which of them could be walking past her door at this late hour? Or was it the strong wind blowing upriver from the sea? Or the house itself complaining of its arthritic pains, its lengthy life, or maybe of its having to support these inhabitants who required constant comfort from its halls, stairs, bannisters, and doors?

Trying to concentrate on one particular poem, her eyelids drooped without her permission, blocking the light, dim as it was. Blackness behind the lids. The invitation of Nepenthe. She urged herself to open them again. To stay awake. She had just skimmed over some important lines in the book her father had wrapped and tied into a packet for her twelfth birthday. Just before he departed for other worlds. Heaven, to be sure. Five years ago. How he loved words, schoolmaster he had been. Wordsworth's in particular.

Drowsy and trying not to be, she imagined that the lines of the poem were calling her name. "Sophia. Wake up. Read with care." She forced her eyes artificially wide—a doll with open and shut eyes—and read the words her father had once recited to her, her lips moving silently:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

"A presence." Those two words wakened her. What was this presence that interfused the sublime with the natural world? "Interfused." She paused at this word she rarely heard—to blend, to mix together, to braid or intertwine, most likely. What was it that compelled her to squint in the candle light and re-read the poet's words written when he had been sitting, perhaps on a rock, a few miles above Tintern Abbey on the banks of the River Wye when he was about her age? Maybe it was the illusion of her father's low baritone voice reading those words—a lullaby she had not heard in far too long. Maybe it was the hope that something would open her mind until there were no boundaries between her and what she could not see on the other side of her ceiling.

Who am I? she wondered. A young woman named Sophia Jane Poultney? A daughter? A milliner's apprentice? A shop girl? An artist or a poetess in embryo? And who is it that keeps asking these questions? Was it this thing called presence?

Enough wondering, she told herself, the seventeen-year old girl who loved asking questions more than answering them. "A box of questions," her father had once said of her.

Her seventeenth birthday. A few months ago in May. Her situation was good enough, she mused, her eyelids growing heavy again. She did have a gift with a needle and thread and possessed an inherent sense of style and beauty. She was a dutiful daughter, contributing to the welfare of her family. But the same shop day after day? Toiling with a needle for hours upon hours? Waiting on those grand people with their carriages, drivers, and footmen? No one taking notice of her genuinely ivory complexion, her dark eyes with their abundant lashes, her inquisitive mind—except to ask her about this type of feather or that color of satin. As if she were invisible. No one to invite her from her humble home, the narrow row house, tall and thin, a place where rooms were squeezed between thin walls and hips brushed against other hips when passing in the hall.

Is that what it is all about—waiting for a gallant man to recognize her beauty and intellect radiating from beneath the bonnets and hats she made so artistically? Not just a man, but one with enough substance to escort her to a better life? But most of those only knew how to look across their own dull horizons, unable to consider anything that existed above or below that plane of vision. Silly men in their top hats. Silly world of people and their

places in the order of things that they themselves had authored. Ceilings above which those below could not rise. What about a "motion and spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought?"

If she could only take a few days for herself. She would take the train to see the ruins of Tintern Abbey in Wales, the remnants left behind by the Cistercians who wished to lead a simple, austere, ascetic life to correct the abuses heaped on the monasteries by those who sought luxury and power. And she would climb the hills above the ruins to see what Wordsworth saw. To look on nature and hear the "still, sad music of humanity . . . of ample power to chasten and subdue," free from all thoughts of who belongs where and who is best or better than another.

The candle dripped to a dangerously low height, the base of the candle holder soon to overflow its pool of hot wax. It was time for her to stop her internal chatting. She was due at the shop by eight in the morning and needed the clearest of vision for assembling the hat that awaited her, the one needing to be ready by late afternoon for the Countess of Wheatley Hall. Cupping her hand behind the candle, she blew out the flame. She nestled into her covers, into sleep—the night hours watching over her until she awoke to a new day.

Doncaster, England, April 1857 — Sophia's announcement

Her mother looked up from her dinner plate, confused when Sophia made her announcement over the suspended spoonful of mulligatawny soup. Julia, Malcolm, and Elizabeth stopped eating as well. The comfortable dinner table chatter stopped, and the air filled with the echo of the words Sophia had spoken, their shock and surprise. As if her announcement had caused a sudden draft, the candlestick flames leaned to the left at the same time. A horizontal flame, almost connecting.

"How can you consider such a thing?" her mother said, resting her spoon in the soup remaining in her own bowl. "You are only eighteen. Not quite that. You are a young woman. A delicate one. And what about your family? Your sister, Elizabeth, not to mention myself?"

Again, the diners at the table fell silent. Their hands went from their laps to the table and back. The clock ticked. The portraiture on the wall stared. Malcolm, Sophia's only brother, loosened his cravat, smoothed his hair on one side, leaned onto the table, pinched his cheeks together, then slowly stroked them with the fingers of one hand.

"My dearest sister," he said. "You can say all you want about finding truth and light and how you must follow your heart and mind. But, please. Be truthful with yourself. I suspect that you only want to escape a boring life."

His dark eyes felt as though they were piercing Sophia's, his look unflinching. For a moment, Sophia paused and recoiled inwardly. Malcolm's words always seemed as if they were law, delivered with punctiliousness, his bearing and his words magisterial. He had an ability to puncture the air from any fluffed or excessive thought. "I know you better than you know yourself, Sophia. Please."

The air thickened. Felt closer, heavier. The room seemed darker, the candles less able to light it well. Julia shifted in her chair. Elizabeth sat tall, as she was wont to do on all occasions. Malcolm sat back in his chair and rested his hands on the wooden arms. Sophia's mother took the napkin from her lap, folded it haphazardously, then dropped it next to her plate.

"If only your father were still here to address his youngest daughter's rashness," she said, looking across the table at Sophia, putting the famous pout into play. She was given to pouting, and there it was again—a pout exaggerated almost to grotesquery in the flickering candlelight.

Sophia had expected the pout, and gratefully, it brought her back to her senses. With the opposition gathering around her, Malcolm's words caused her to question herself. The pout was a useful aid to reconnect her to her original declaration. She took slow and steady sips of soup from her spoon, then tipped her bowl toward the back of the plate to capture the last of her dinner. She alone knew how she had been moved by the spirit that 'impelled all thinking things.' Her family had no idea of the power of her conversion, of its beauty.

"You've always been stubborn," Malcolm said, reaching for the salt cellar, pinching the salt with his thumb and forefinger, adding it to his soup.

"That is the truth," her middle sister, Julia, added, encouraged by Malcolm's authority. "What can you see in those itinerant Mormons and their outrageous promises? The American West is uncharted. You're going to nothing plus nothing."

Only Elizabeth remained silent in the flurry of opinions. With her narrow eyes, she seemed to be looking at Sophia more curiously than she had ever looked before. Of all the members of her family, Sophia's love was greatest for this ungainly sister, the one who grew bashful in the company of anyone outside of the household, the one who was content to stay within the walls of their home, hiding herself from view.

"You'll be back, begging at our doorstep," Malcolm said, smiling his famously dismissive smile, then finishing the last of his soup. "My reckless sister."

"I can't believe you would even entertain the idea," her mother said, wiping the corners of her mouth with the cloth napkin she recovered from the table. Pouting once again. "It shocks me. My own daughter with such ideas." Once again the candlelight deepened the angles in her face and emphasized her mask of displeasure.

The room was silent again except for the insistent ticking of the grandfather clock, something that had belonged to Sophia's father's father, a man who had been a clockmaker. Candlelight glared off the glass that protected the Roman numerals on the clock's face. The candle flames stood erect now, flickering only slightly.

"I think we should reserve judgment." Elizabeth finally spoke. She wore her hair in an old-fashioned way—parted from front to back until it reached a middle part drawn from ear to ear, the rest of her hair fastened into a bun at the back of her head. Her mouth was a stern, unappealing line. No softness had been built into Elizabeth's angular face except for the look in

her eyes. "I am, as you know, bound to this house, my body insufficient to the demands of a normal day. But, as you also know, I am here for Mother and her needs. Julia and Malcolm have work, enough to feed all of us, to keep coal in the bin. I can take care of the necessities of this household. Why shouldn't Sophia go? She is the youngest. She has her convictions."

"But Elizabeth," Julia said. "To America? That untamed place? And, from what I have heard, the West is even more unknown and reckless than the rest of the country. It's not safe for a young girl like Sophia."

"Bored. You're only bored," Malcolm concluded, rising from his place at the table and carrying his dishes to the enameled dishpan where Elizabeth would wash them.

"Sophia is a poet," Elizabeth said. "Maybe a dreamer. But why should one not be able to follow dreams? I suggest we leave her be."

"You are much too indulgent, Elizabeth," Julia said. "Indulgent and unwise. How could any daughter leave her home and her family? It speaks only of disloyalty."

Everyone looked toward Sophia, who had not responded. They wondered if she was ready to defend herself against their insuperable reasoning.

Finally Sophia spoke, her face and eyes looking quite soft in the candlelight. "I thank you for your opinions, my dear family. I thank you for your concern, even you, Malcolm, who can think nothing more of me than that I am bored. But I am bound to follow a higher purpose. You must believe that is my errand. And you must believe that you matter to me. Always."

With that, Sophia placed her hands on the table and pushed to a standing position. She gathered her spoon and fork and bowl. She bowed her head slightly to acknowledge her family, deposited her dishes next to Malcolm's in the dishpan, and retired to her bedroom. No one would see any doubt or indecision on her face, in the way she stood, in the way she sat or moved. No one would know that maybe she wondered whether or not Malcolm was right. His words had sunk deeper than he could know.

Late Summer 1866, St. Thomas, Arizona Territory — The Muddy Mission, Sophia and Geoffrey Scott

"So, do tell, what are you really doing in this part of the world?" Sophia asks after the Indian and the crowd of gawkers, commenters, and disparagers has disappeared. The sight of such a massive Indian has sent most of the bystanders away and back to business-as-usual, as they do not want to see what happens next. Yet she does not realize she has started to breathe again and that her accent is mesmerizing the stranger.

"Say that again, Ma'am. I love how you talk, especially how you say 'really.' Tight and high. Pinched. Never heard that before."

"Your speech is strange to me, as well. Your words are slow-spoken. Flat on the ends." She sits on the step next to Geoffrey Scott, trying to order her world and remember what she is supposed to do today, but who is this man?

"I do not wish to be rude or over inquisitive, Mr. Scott . . ."

"You can call me Geoffrey, Ma'am. I like to be called Geoffrey Scott. The whole name."

"All right. But, propriety aside, not many people find their way through these hills and valleys of fire. And you come alone. Well, not exactly alone. I'm not sure how you and that Indian are connected. How. . . ."

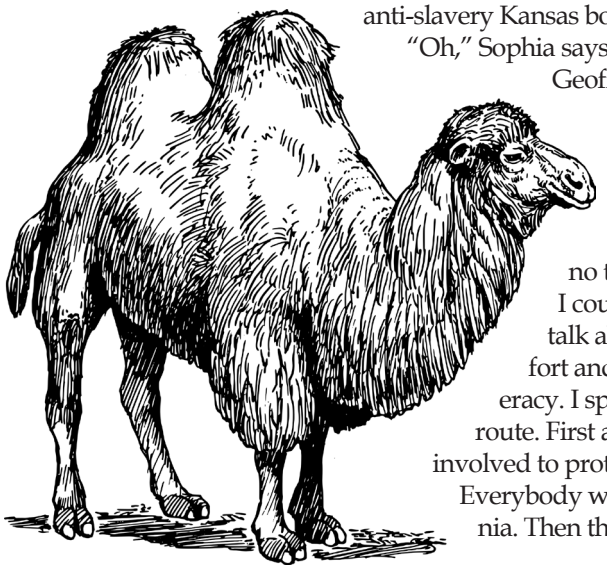
Sophia looks again at the camel sitting about twenty feet from her back step. A bizarre moment in time that she may be inventing with her wish to be somewhere other than this barren, sometimes tortuous land where the water is brackish and alkaline and silt sometimes staying in her teeth even when she boils water for a pot of tea. She feels sick half of the time—her stomach a bundle of contradictions: sometimes a minor battlefield of cramps, pains, and fevered chills.

Never enough good water. No refrigeration for their food. Where is a cool spring of water in this poisonous land? And then her baby, a Hallow's Eve baby, born eight months after they arrived at the Muddy Mission. Her Sarah. Her girl who had bleated like a lamb before she sank away into the ether. Dysentery. Nothing left to nourish her. Returning to air and sky and silence, before Sophia could kiss her or hold her enough. Three months old. Lived until January. This child of her body. Then she remembers she had asked Geoffrey Scott a question and is not listening to the answer.

"Civil War happened. Says it all." She must have missed something he says. "I couldn't even hang around the military anymore. Too many Union sympathizers taking on the Johnny Rebs. Too many Johnny Rebs taking umbrage, fighting back with their fists, getting all worked up, saying stuff that got to me, bottom line. I never said much, didn't talk about the Border Ruffians crossing the line from Missouri, burning out anyone who had any sympathy for slavery, those rowdies putting a bullet in the middle of my mother's chest in one of their drunken raids. Truth is, I'm an anti-slavery Kansas boy, clean through to the bone."

"Oh," Sophia says, as if startled out of her thoughts. Geoffrey Scott knows death, too.

"I never joined up, to tell you the truth, but spent a good amount of time hanging out with the boys in the military, the ones who built forts while the rest of us built roads. I had no truck with any of them except for what I couldn't avoid. Mostly, the non-stop talk about slavery before the Rebs quit the fort and went back to fight for the Confederacy. I spent time building a road. The middle route. First a supply route. Then the military got involved to protect immigrants from Indian raids. Everybody wanting to get the gold out of California. Then the Mormons acting up, threatening



Papapishu

the rest of the country by claiming so much territory for themselves, getting all military like everybody else. But I guess this is a Mormon settlement, so I should keep my words to myself."

"So you should," Sophia says, though still wanting to keep this conversation going. "The people of the faith just wanted to be left alone," she says, the mid-day sun reaching its zenith, reminding her that she needs to get back to her chores, especially with the talk of "Mormons acting up," a statement with which she wholeheartedly disagrees. Charles will be home soon. She has prepared nothing for lunch. Worse than that, he will be suspicious, she knows he will. He can show a mean temper when things do not go as he assumes they should. He is a jealous man, especially when it comes to her.

"Left alone?" Scott says. "I'd say they claimed a pretty big territory for themselves, then told everybody else to stay clear. Threatened travelers. Riled up the Indians."

"That is your opinion, Geoffrey Scott. I do not agree that they would respond in that way," Sophia speaks in her finest English accent. "They have made efforts to help travelers and keep peace with the Indians by feeding them. All the Mormons want is to worship in their way and not be persecuted for it."

"Are you one of those plural wives?" he says as if the situation has become much more clear than it had ever been before when he'd merely heard tales of the Mormons.

"I would be," Sophia says, suddenly painfully aware of how difficult it is for her to give an answer when she would have preferred to chat on with no erosion to a perfectly enjoyable conversation. "Excuse me, sir. I have work to do. I need to run to the neighbor's. You can wait here. My husband should be home soon, and you can ask him the questions you might need answered. He knows the territory and the mines."



Phyllis Barber is the author of eight books, including a trilogy of memoirs and a novel about the building of Hoover Dam, and is working on the ninth—a novel currently entitled *Adababa*. This novel is set in the years 1856 to 1870 in the Kansas, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona territories. She has received many major recognitions, most recently the 2016 Award for Outstanding Contribution to Mormon Letters by the Smith-Pettit Foundation.

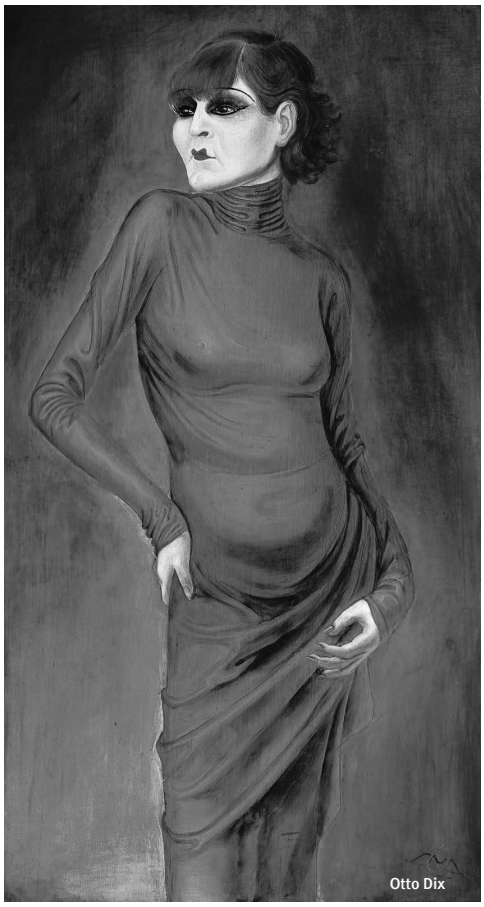
Lance Olsen

My Red Heaven : an excerpt

May you be born in a house on fire.
— Attila József, "The Seventh"

loss library : shrapnel

Otto Dix runs a palm over Anita Berber's hair and is startled by its dry stiffness. He is sitting cross-legged before her in his studio, shoes off, sleeves of the surgical gown he purchased from a medical supply company rolled up, studying her face, marking time until the heroin monochromes her into unconsciousness.


Otto Dix

At the end of the block a streetcar clanks by.

Upstairs Otto's neighbor, an upright ferret who croups his way through the early morning hours, clumps through his flat, out the front door, down to the water closet on the half-landing for a small-hours visit.

Hinges squeak open.

Hinges squeak shut.

And Otto feels himself entering those hours that are no longer about words. They are about silences, in-betweennesses, perceptual caesurae. It comes to him that, not so long ago, Anita was frothily reckless with her immaculate skin and dark eyes and black hair and black lips and acerbic curiosity. She arrived in Berlin ready to eat life, show up anywhere, meet everyone, sample every powder or fluid anybody would offer her because she believed frantically that one of them would reveal some honest-to-god magic.

Now she is this loss library, this violet stain behind chalky makeup.

She was already looking sharp-cornered when Otto painted her two years ago, sickly thin, decades older than she was. Twenty-four, and her face had already become a hag's mask, her heart a rain of tiny dead yellow flowers.

Before that—Otto stands and rubs the back of his neck, lingering over the glossy knot where the shrapnel startled him, satisfied she has left herself for a while, he has helped her depart her sense of having to remain Anita—before that she was this stunning sixteen-year-old raised by her grandmother in Dresden after her broken parents had lost interest in her, the economy had lost interest in them, collapsed around their ears, and now she is this—this, what, a different kind of beauty, tremendously more convincing and significant and lasting and touching than the kind she was when Otto first met her.

It is as if over the last decade her interior has slowly secreted itself onto the surface of her skin until it has become her exterior, as if contemplating her you can actually see the X-ray vapor of the person the world has overwhelmed.

Anita Berber is the saddest person he has ever met and he loves her for that, loves her hardest where she is most ruined. Her revelry, inexhaustible excess, self-possession that is all about doubt became in the minds of her audience (and everyone is her audience) an antidote for wartime defeat, all those worthless zeros stringing out behind the German Mark.

Otto takes his place behind his easel and lifts the fine-pointed paintbrush, pecks at the glob of lacquer-red tempera on his palette, considering the small wood panel he will cover with Anita and falters. At the outset of every piece it is the same for him: he feels less like a particular human being than a confusion of occasions. Everything becomes everything. Every stroke arrives both as an opportunity and a misstep. Otto can orchestrate that blank surface before him any way he likes and the emphatic openness of this prospect frightens him, makes him hectically queasy.

He puts down his brush and marks time, seeing Anita stepping off the train from Dresden into the madhouse of the main station early one morning, secondhand suitcase by her side. The great vaulted roof. The flood of white light from the great vaulted windows. The scent of onions, perfume, sauerkraut, coal, fresh pretzels, fresh bratwurst, bitter sweat, wet steel. He sees the young brash Otto Dix squatting in that trench. Realizes those two instants—Anita pausing to register the first information arriving from Berlin, Otto beginning to rise—must have occurred within the span of a few weeks.

The fog had settled so thickly across the wintry earth pocked with mortar craters, braided with barbed wire, littered with body parts, abandoned helmets, rifles, had condensed so heavily around him that Otto couldn't make out the soldier squatting directly to his right or left. He recalls how sleep had failed him again, left him jittery and out of focus. Recalls standing gradually, carefully, to situate himself in time and space and then he was waking up in the hospital tent, bite of chlorine disinfectant in his lungs, unable to turn his head, swallow, struggling against two nurses' arms and imperatives.

When he began getting to his feet that day, boots sloshing in icy mud and liver-brown water, Otto believed enthusiastically in the German enterprise. He had left his father in an iron foundry and his seamstress mother (who wrote good-hearted poems about love and spring and patriotism when she was Otto's age) in the kitchen, and enlisted in the army to help make his country's destiny happen, fought in a field artillery regiment down south, a machine-gun unit on the Western front, another on the Eastern.

Yet as his bones liquefied and his body crumpled out from under him Otto came to understand you either leave a trench like that believing in some invisible sky daddy with a bushy white blessedness, or you leave it believing in exactly nothing at all. Otto woke in that hospital tent, struggling against those two nurses, convinced the only significant objective he possessed from there on out was to function as a reminder that to be awake is to be beaten, broken, demolished, and to be beaten, broken, demolished is to embody the purest form of beauty because that is the world and what else could the world be except beautiful?

The rest was fairytales and reckless faith and so he picks up his fine-pointed brush again and commences applying the tempera underpainting. He will follow this with a thin glaze in the manner of the old masters. The coolness of Holbein. The dispassion of Dürer. Because this is the new holiness. The stony fact. The turbulence of the young men's screaming around him in that hospital tent, armless, faceless, pointless. Because his reminders are so close to the truth the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne chose to hide one behind a curtain like a piece in some peepshow. Step through, and you bumped your nose into a blasted landscape with a blackened corpse in shredded uniform hanging from a burnt tree's limb. The mayor forced the museum's director to resign for curating such an outrage.

Because Anita isn't Anita. Like that corpse, she is Germany, what has become of the dreadfulness. She is the beautiful world splayed upside down, legs spread, knees raised, draping off the narrow bed, arms hanging limp by her limply hanging head, prop knife still jutting out from between her legs, blood soaking the groin of her nightshift, her mutilated stomach, pooling out from her stiff dry hair.

Behind her and to the right: a window through which will appear in the finished piece not Otto's street but another, shrilly empty, sans trees, this row of orderly four-story buildings receding into tedium, their very Teutonic orderliness undone by the holy mess inside his rendered room on the heels of the bloodshed.

The orientation and freshness of the scene make the viewer into the killer.

(The viewer is always the killer.)

Little by little time disperses and soon the only thing Otto perceives is what used to be Anita Berber, this place, that setting, these colors, and when he looks up again to consult his model he is dismayed to find early-morning sunlight already beginning to frost everything around him with an all-wrong light.

Otto wants to say he is in Berlin, but he can't be sure. He wants to say it is just past 4:30 a.m., another day in June, a year called 1927, but that's just a guess. How did these hours, this unmarked day, happen so quickly? He doesn't recollect lifting Anita into bed. Doesn't recollect tucking her beneath the quilt and plumping her pillow. Still, there she is on her back, snoring unexceptionally. She will snore unexceptionally for another thirty, forty minutes before waking confused and afraid. Otto will sit on the edge of the bed and try to reassure her. Except he knows Anita won't need reassurance. What she will need is another hit. She will demand one, half little-girl whine, half dominatrix edict, only he doesn't have it, couldn't afford it, and, even if he could, he knows too much heroin isn't good for her. Anita needs to leave herself for a while every day, but she also needs to return and get on with her life.

Another thirty, forty minutes and Otto will help her dress, prepare her for what comes next, give her whatever spare cash he has lying around, usher her out the front door, down the stairwell, and into the frisky sunshine. Then he will try to catch a couple hours of sleep himself. The most he can manage lately is three or four. After that the bombed-out houses whirl in, the cadavers susurrating.

When he wakes up he will wash, dress in the same clothes he wears now, take the long stroll over to Potsdamer Platz's star-shaped intersection. Spend an hour sketching on Café Josty's leafy veranda, caught up in the engine noise, the people noise, the caffeine, bowler hats, shrinking dresses, traffic light tower, the way a capital occurs. Sketching across from the Grand Hotel Esplanade allows him to concentrate even when he can't concentrate, notice for a while instead of letting his brain hamster on its wheel. Sketching, he can sense his heart decelerate, nerves muffle.

Once he observed Charlie Chaplin coming out the hotel's entrance. There was no mistaking him. Yet no one noticed the celebrity because he wasn't trying to be noticed. He understood how to look like anyone else, simply give himself over to the crowd flowing around him and be carried along the pavement.

The Tramp was there.

The Tramp wasn't there.

It felt to Otto as if he were witnessing an apparition's brief fluttery appearance at a séance.

Tonight Georg Grosz will host a modest dinner party with a few friends, including Max Herrmann-Neisse, that beaky bald hunchbacked poet and cabaret critic always looking a little like the plush chair he is sitting in is trying to devour him, after which Otto will stroll home to reenter his work. First, though, he wants to envision the window that will occupy his painting's upper right-hand corner. He moves to the real one, studies the daylight starting to flister through the linden trees, unaware that within another dozen years they will be virtually the only subject matter he will be allowed to paint: the

inoffensive landscape, the odd countryside village, the mildly reverent rainbow, and, yes, as many trees as he likes. Unaware how much can be taken away from one person—even his own nightmares.

But now he watches the day come into being.

All across the city whores are melting away into millinery shops, cafés, tenements, other kinds of commerce stirring. Otto unlatches the window, swings it open to let in a chilly dank gust, hears a horse-drawn delivery van jangling up the street, takes in a man and woman walking their dog, a lean Doberman with cropped ears and docked tail.

Somewhere produce trucks are rolling into market squares, offloading barges along the canals.

At the Tempelhof airfield people are queuing groggily for flights to Paris, Zürich, Moscow.

This will be his city another few inhalations, then it will gradually go to others.

Letting the idea pass through him, Otto watches a couple below pause near a linden and share a cigarette while the Doberman squats daintily on the brown-sugar sand at the side of the path and pees imperiously.

zionism : blue ghosts flocking

The white face hovering in the window four meters above Otto Dix's belongs to Dora, daughter of a small factory owner and esteemed rabbi in the Hasidic dynasty called Góra Kalwaria just southeast of Warsaw.

Dora is the last lover of a writer whose lungs scarred into white clouds pocked with charcoal holes.

That's who she is thinking about while absentmindedly twisting between her thumb and middle finger a strand of thick espresso hair that barely reaches her jawline.

That's who she has been thinking about all night.

In daylight, memory is another thing.

Those glistery brown eyes she plunged into at a holiday camp on the Baltic coast four years ago, those cheeks and chin jagged as an expressionist woodcut, that tall nattily dressed lankiness which had a decade and a half on her quarter century—all that bleaches out in dawn glow, shrinks into a hurt the size of a jewelry box she can fit in her palm.

Fetusing beneath the covers at ten or eleven at night, though, drained by all the not-remembering she has had to exert, the dead writer spreads out across the back of her closed eyelids like a continuous detonation.

She is staring at the youngish couple walking their dog below, yet her head is lit with him. What she sees is the two of them sitting on a

park bench in the Tiergarten not far from their flat on Grunewaldstrasse. They are eating ham sandwiches (their little joke) and talking about Yiddish literature and Zionism.

He hated newspapers. All their thin wings flapping accomplished was to remind him how unemployment had crested to a quarter million, how street fighting between extremists on the right and extremists on the left was breaking out in the city center every few days. He preferred the foliaged calm of the park, the strolls through their neighborhood to the bakery, vegetable stand, butcher's shop, where Franz's most important choice involved selecting the right loaf of bread for dinner.

He preferred sitting in the café overlooking Wilmersdorf Lake, describing the restaurant he wanted to open with Dora someday in Tel Aviv. It would be a modest affair, cozy, perhaps just a few tables inside, a few on the sidewalk beneath a dark red awning, tidy, well-managed, and on another planet from the one he used to occupy grimly day in and day out at the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia (although, he was always quick to add with a grin, he had been responsible for developing the first civilian hard hat while employed there).

And maybe most of all he preferred making fun of their fathers. His, Franz said, was like the Un-god Himself in a perpetually bad mood, a big brute school bully who used to beat you up, not because he didn't like you, but because you just happened to be in his way. Such creatures were invented to prevent you from becoming who you were. And Franz's biggest regret was that it had taken him so long—nearly forty years—to land in the emotional and intellectual country he should have been living in all along.

Dora nicknamed hers The Great Obtuseness, The Hebrew Ha-Ha: all cartoonish long beard, earlocks, black kaftan, fur hat, closed mind—the bleak, righteous household dispenser of daily guilt and humiliation. He wanted Dora to marry an upstanding man in the dynasty and teach in the local Orthodox religious school, so she ran away. She made it as far as the German border before he caught up with her and forced her back into the flavorlessness. And so she ran away again, this time to Berlin, where you could think about what you wanted and sleep with who you wanted and eat ham sandwiches while discussing Zionism and Yiddish literature on a bench in the Tiergarten.

That is where they were when a little blond girl stepped out in front of them. She was crying. Franz straightaway slipped off the bench and kneeled before her, took her by her shoulders, and asked gently what the matter was. The girl told him she had lost her doll. Without missing a beat, Franz told her not to worry. In fact, he just happened to have heard from the doll herself. She wasn't lost at all. Rather, she was enjoying a lovely holiday on a sunny island off the coast of Greece.

Everyone needs a holiday once in a while, he said. Work can be a very difficult affair. Don't you agree?

She shook her head *yes yes yes*.

The girl's doll had even sent him a letter saying how much fun she was having, Franz went on. Suspicious, the little girl asked to see it. Franz told her he didn't happen to have the letter with him, but he would bring it the very next day.

The instant Dora and he walked through the door of their flat he disappeared into the bedroom. When he returned half an hour later, he was holding a note written in that odd longhand of his with all those plump white spaces between stubby words, huge R's, W's, thickly crossed T's and F's.

He delivered it to her the following day, just like he said he would, and another every day for the next two weeks.

Soon, however, Franz began worrying about just how he could provide the little blond girl with a conclusion to her story that wouldn't make her unhappier than she'd been when he met her.

Finally he hit upon the solution: the doll's next letter would tell about the handsome prince she had met on Santorini. It would tell a story about love at first sight and shocking sunlight and how the prince and the doll were quickly engaged, already engrossed in wedding preparations, and in no time at all drawing up plans for their new home together in America, where the Statue of Liberty would welcome them with her tremendous raised steel sword as they sailed between her legs on their way to Ellis Island.

Once married the doll would naturally be unable to visit her former mistress.

Is that all right? Franz asked her. Can you see it in your heart to understand such a thing?

The little girl pursed her lips, pondering, then looked right into his glistery brown eyes and said solemnly she understood completely.

Dora blinks to make Franz and the little girl go away.

She hears him talking instead, commenting how in every story people live happily ever after until they don't.

And then there he is again (it always comes to this), not even a year into their relationship, consumption having closed his throat so he can no longer swallow, wasting away amid a mob of coughs, fevers, night sweats, and bloody handkerchiefs. He has come to resemble a doll himself, one with all the stuffing torn out, skeletal, fragile, crushingly depleted, propped among pillows in bed at Herr Professor Doktor Hoffmann's sanatorium in Kierling near Vienna—and nonetheless editing his parable about that artist, unnoticed and unappreciated, who himself wasted away like a doll with all the stuffing torn out in a pile of dirty straw in a rusting cage in a town square.

Even when it reached the stage where Franz couldn't eat, couldn't tolerate any sort of noise whatsoever (Dora had started speaking to him in whispers during those terminal days), could hardly tolerate her brief touch, he could always daydream a page of bright, orderly, almost juridical prose into being.

Everyone thought stories were about things happening out there, in the world, one after the other after the other. That's what they had always been about and always would. But Franz knew better. He told Dora every age got the literature it deserved. This one deserved stories in which everything important would happen in here (he pointed to his head)—inside the storm.

If the nineteenth century had been a photograph of hillsides and factories and bad marriages, the twentieth would be an X-ray of blue ghosts flocking.

Dora was a twenty-six-year-old kindergarten teacher and seamstress in an orphanage when they met. She had just changed the spelling of her name from Dymant to Diamant in order to shed Góra Kalwaria. On their first dates Franz recounted how he suffocated a little every day at his job until two in the afternoon, then suffocated a few hours more helping his father at his fancy goods and clothing shop. After dinner he would slip out to the brothels, trying to un-recall the last twelve or fifteen hours, fail, and return home, where he would write through most of the night. Then he began coughing up blood—not a lot, just small pink stains into his handkerchief, but somehow marvelous. When healthy, he still on occasion visited his prostitutes, finding those in Berlin energetically more imaginative than the ones in Prague. Dora favored the intellectuals she chanced upon in cafés. There was all that love, all that being present, to go around, and she adored Franz for his part in their mutual goodwilled tolerance about such matters.

She didn't know who she was and then she did and now she is an actress in Düsseldorf, staying in a fellow actor's flat (he is working in Paris for the month), taking on the role of the sister in a short run of Jacob Gordin's *The Savage One*—the very play Franz stumbled across more than a decade ago concerning an idiot boy hiding in his room for fear of his tyrannical father, wrote about extensively in his diaries, and gradually amplified into his own tale concerning a giant insect-son named Gregor.

Standing there at the window, Dora is charged at by the recollection of a wintry night. It had been a bad morning, a bad afternoon. Franz could no longer speak. He had to write down everything he wanted to say on little slips of paper.

He handed her one with two words scribbled across it: *Burn everything.*

Dora read it twice. She looked down at him wrapped in his bewilderment of quilts and smiled.

She left and reappeared with a matchbook, a dustbin, and the box of his writings.

Far into the small hours she helped him find strange comfort by igniting page after page of his letters, his stories, his notes, their ashes fluttering from her fingers into the dustbin.

She read the note twice, looked down at him, and smiled because of course she wouldn't burn everything. Not everything. That would be like setting Franz himself alight.

Dora lay a hand upon his hot cheek, loving him, letting him inhabit some momentary peace believing what he needed to believe. She burned the rest, yet held back her favorite blue octavo notebooks, the ones he had been working on those last months and, needless to say, held back those thirty-six letters he wrote her because they were no longer his, but Dora's.

Someday she will see these things published. She promises herself. Not now, though. Now she has too many things to live. But when she is older she will travel to Munich, Frankfurt, Dresden, anywhere that will have her, and give lectures, share him with others, help Franz into the—

A black shadow scrambles across the lindens below and flickers out of existence.

Dora thinks *cloud.*

She reflexively raises her head to spot the sun mirroring off a small metal airplane descending toward Tempelhof through the bluing day.

For an instant she supposes that's what hope will look like.

Then she doesn't.

this memory: the space between notes


Otto Dix

The concert. One with Schnabel. Clouding over now. Artur. What were we. Mozart. Sonata in. Yes. Music the color of this hefeweizen. Sun flashes. Shade flashes. In B-flat. Remember? Artur struggling to be patient with me, bless his heart. But socks are cotton jails and my Lina wouldn't listen to me that night. Ocean of faces waiting for paradise in the hall. Because the problem with socks is they. Furrows gathering across Artur's brow. Afternoon will find me here. If all goes well. Beneath this oak. Lina letting me down. Day making its progress. Those two sweet old men taking their seats at the next table. If not Mozart, Bach. The only reason for time is so everything doesn't happen at once. But it happens at once anyway. The furrows gathering. Mouth dry. Look at their Bratwürste. At this time of the. Problem with socks is they get holes in them. That simple. Feet are so much more cheerful without. And then Artur stopped mid-phrase, glaring up at me from his piano, and snapped: Can't you *count,* Einstein? *What a funny. The idea being. Audience hushed to see what would mishappen next. I looked at Artur. Artur looked at me. And I replied across*

the stage: Whatever is worth doing is worth doing badly. *That laughter. This table. This memory. What more to be happy? Because combing hair takes time. Pulling on socks takes time. Living takes time. The idea being if not Bach, Schumann. Electromagnetic radiation. Steal it. Steal it. The pure contentment of joining the Christmas carolers outside your door in the. Lina helping them sing. In the after-dinner snow. Neighborhood a different dimension. Sounds softened. Damped down. The pale silver light. Mother, father, child, too. Have they had a good day on Pfaueninsel? I hope – . The boy looks remote. Like me when other people are with me. Never lonely by myself. Because a photon starting at the center of the sun and changing direction every time it encounters a charged particle takes between ten thousand and one-hundred-seventy-thousand years to reach my face and music helps your thoughts find themselves. When I sit I want to walk. When I walk I want to be home. When I'm having fun I want to do research. When I do research I can't concentrate. When I go to sleep I feel like the day has been junked. No. Not junked. Something else. The idea being to locate spaces to let your ideas loaf.* Can't you *count,* Einstein? *The man on the right is blind, isn't he. Black spectacles. Same with us when we try to spot particles.* I know only two kinds of audiences, *Artur told me afterward:* one coughing, and one not coughing. *Worst thing you can do when thinking is think about thinking. Shit-brained jingoists. Cramming my mailbox with letters. Silvery light. That's. Horse-jawed. Slack-eyed. No pill for idiocy. How can Heisenberg possibly. Silvery. Pick a spot in the sky and. How can Heisenberg possibly believe himself? Close your eyes: you can feel your life becoming history. Open: pick a spot in the sky and stare. Without music it's inconceivable. Chilly birdsong. Thick fragrances. They smell like – . They smell like purple. Albert has become invisible. Mother, father, boy. Gray-haired teacher nursing her morning beer in loose solitude after a long week. That couple over there. Teenagers. They don't know the rest of. Their expressions. Their memory of. What more to be. Because step out your apartment door, your office at Humbolt, and those assholes are waiting.* Jewish science! *they shout at you.* Jewish science! *The point being how can Werner believe in the Uncertainty Principle? It's mistakes all the way down. Like socks, only with ideas. God of harmony. That's Spinoza.* If a triangle could speak, it would say God is eminently triangular. A circle would say the divine is eminently circular. *Every piece of debris assumes itself to be like.* Artur, *I said,* Artur: What's the secret? *and he answered:* There's no secret, Einstein. I handle the notes no better than most pianists. But art resides in the pauses between them. *Because everything has an end except my argument with Werner. Because Mozart bathed in Hellenic beauty. The purity of musical line. The roguish playfulness. Horse-jawed, slack-eyed, they filed into my lecture hall shouting:* I'm going to cut your throat, you dirty Jew! *And I replied, laughing:* With what, your incalculable imbecility? *Otherwise it's. Werner has it upside down. You can't found a theory on what you observe. Theory dictates what you observe. Close your eyes. Feel space-time bend around you. LECTURES AGAINST THE EINSTEIN, the Working Committee of German Natural Philosophers billed it. What could I possibly do except attend? Clapped and giggled my way through.* Bravo!

Bravo! *Afterward a journalist asked me to comment.* The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits*, I told him. That's when darling Elsa arranged for the bodyguard without telling me. Easy enough to pick out though. Man in the mackintosh. Even on sunny days. There: smoking, pretending we don't know the dance steps. What must he be. Silvery. Because I can't make up my mind and so I read ten pages each from seven books every night. Darling cousin Elsa nakeding at the foot of our bed to end it all.* Expel me or fuck me*, she demanded. With a pistol in her hand.* Carry this gun*, she said.* But I don't know how to use it*, I said.* Learn*, she said.* I'm sure even you can learn, Albert. *Not to fire but to grow up, she meant. Be a man. But I'm the opposite of.* Virility is the measles of the human race, *I told her.* Good *god*! *she cried, looking up at the ceiling.* I give up! *Silvery light edging toward bluewhite. Be brave, she meant. And how old was. Seven. Yes. Standing in the doctor's shadowy office with my sore throat.* Time for those tonsils to come out*, he said to my parents over my head. As if I was waiting in the next room. My parents politely withdrew. Their stooped shoulders. Door closing. I heard the silence where the word* anesthetic *should have been. The doctor stared down at me. A tower of dreadful. Sizing me up. I thought maybe* he *was god. My stomach ached. I had to pee. After much too long he said:* Are you a brave German boy or a coward who cries because of a little pain? *I looked up at him, weighing my options. I had to pee. My stomach hurt.* A brave German boy*, I said. Naturally. And so he lifted me up and clumped me down on a hard wooden chair.* Sit still*, he told me. He told me:* Open your mouth and sit still*. And with that his long shears appeared and he reached in and snipped out my tonsils. Like that. And I didn't cry. I surprised myself. I willed myself not to and I didn't, thinking: this is just like school, only* inside *my body now.*



Lance Olsen is author of more than 20 books of and about innovative writing, including, most recently, the novel based on Robert Smithson's earthwork the Spiral Jetty, *Theories of Forgetting*. *Dreamlives of Debris*, his next, an untelling of the Minotaur myth, will appear in April 2017. He teaches experimental narrative theory and practice at the University of Utah.

Ryan Ridge

Four Stories

A Novel Idea

The boy wanted to write flash fiction. It was his calling. And so he told his dad as much one December afternoon in the den upon returning home from boarding school for the break. "Flash fiction?" his dad said, lowering the newest *New Yorker* from his face as his monocle dropped in disgust. The fireplace hissed. "Isn't that what those degenerates on the internet write? No, no that won't do. No son of mine is going to produce small works destined for obscurity. Novels: that's the idea. It's a novel idea. Novels longer than your hair, son. Something to make the publishers swoon. Now go into your room and don't come out until you've written a blockbuster."

The boy went into his room and he didn't come out.

For many years he didn't come out.

Once emerged, the boy was no longer a boy and still not quite a man. He had hair to his knees but none on his chest. He was twenty-seven. The world had changed. The boarding school had been boarded up. Dad was dead and gone. And the novel? It was not bad. It was not good. But it was not bad. It was like a lot of novels. They loved it in New York.



Karen Watson

Cold Case

"Where did you lose your virginity?" asked the detective.

"I can't remember," said Clapboard McGuffin. "It's been so long. . . I'm thinking it was in the parking lot of a dog track in Pensacola."

The detective scrawled the word *Pensacola* in his miniature notebook, "Florida?"

"Uh-huh. Yes."

"Okay," the detective said. "You said 'it's been so long.' How long are we talking here? Months? Years? What?"

"It must've been forty-five years ago."

The detective wrote the number *45* in his notebook, "Wow, forty-five years, okay."

"Give or take," said Clapboard. "So I don't want to waste any more of our time. Do you think you can find it or what?"

"Well, I've got to be real honest with you here, Mr. McGuffin. This is what we in the business refer to as a 'cold case.' I don't think so."

"Too bad," Clapboard said.

"My condolences," the detective said.

The two men shook hands and were about to part ways when the detective paused, "One more thing. Say I was able to track it and bring it back to you, what were you planning to do with it?"

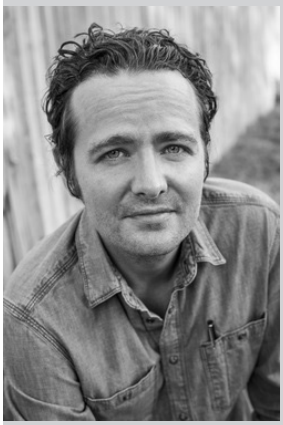
"I was hoping to lose it again."

Koan

After the ventriloquist returned from the colonoscopy, his dummy said to him: "The circle is now complete." Then it got up and walked away.

Deadhorse

Outside, the snow falls like commercial fishermen falling from boats. It's almost April here in Alaska, and although the local marijuana industry is booming, our head shop is about to bust. Today, you say, is an excellent name for a dog, and you're allergic to dogs. Earlier I mistook a beer for the mirror and now I'm wondering about California: what is the state of California? When we left there was almost nothing left. Now we're half past hungry in the Land of the Midnight Sun, but instead of setting the table, you set the teenage psychic's business card on the table and I set both the business card and the table on fire. Because, when you live in a place called Deadhorse, every possibility is already exhausted. And so am I.



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

Gail Yngve

To Arrive Somewhere—

A Conversation with Kay Ryan



Martin Klimek

PRELUDE

Desert landscapes are known for their stark and spare beauty. Growing up near the Mojave Desert appears to have influenced the poetry of Kay Ryan. Her poetry is also known for its stark and spare beauty. Her economy of words echoes the economy of movement that is often characteristic of desert creatures. Nothing is wasted. Every word matters. Every metaphor "arrives someplace."

Kay Ryan's work is an oasis in the contemporary American poetry scene. With so much assaulting the senses of twenty-first century readers, her poetry gently forces us to slow down and meditate on what is being said – on the surface and below. The same can be said of Ryan, herself. On the surface, she has a quiet, albeit friendly, demeanor. When Kay and I sat down to start this interview, I couldn't help but notice her purple-and-black striped socks peeking out from beneath her pant legs. We had a quick laugh about her colorful socks, and she readily admitted that she loved them so much, it was her second day of wearing them. (Sorry to divulge your secret, Kay.) This insight set the tone for easy banter, much more of a conversation than an interview. However, it is immediately apparent that below the surface, Kay has substantial depth and gravitas; she is alternately unassuming and charming. Her humility is unexpected given the extent of her awards and accomplishments.

The sixteenth United States Poet Laureate, Pulitzer Prize winner, MacArthur Fellow, recipient of the National Humanities Medal, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and author of eight volumes of poetry (the list of accolades continues), Ryan is one of the most interviewed American poets of our time. Finding questions that she had not already answered numerous times was a challenge, but it made for a different, if not unique, list that some will no doubt find surprising. What is most evident is her love of words and wordplay, her disarming modesty about her accomplishments, and her honesty. I was so immersed in our conversation that I had to keep reminding myself about the interview, but I managed to stay on task, and the results produced some wonderful nuggets of insight into Ryan's creative process.

The following interview took place March 31, 2016, at Weber State University.

CONVERSATION

It's a pleasure to meet you, Kay. Welcome to Weber State University, and thanks for agreeing to this interview. I'm thrilled to be speaking with a poet of your stature.

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

Earlier, you mentioned something about the cover of Say Uncle *– you were going to tell me about it?*

I was. So, this was my second book with Grove Press and I was pretty thrilled because they were actually consulting me about the cover, and I said that I thought I would like a cover, like the cover on Penguin books, those classics that just have a label, and then it's a pattern, sort of like the pattern on your pants [a black-and-white block print]. Well, I was trying to describe the Penguin covers, and I said, "You know, like a medicine bottle label."

[laughter] That's hilarious.

I said, just simple, like that. So the funny thing was, I got the bottle instead of just the label. I got the bottle. And it makes no sense in terms of the book, and yet I really like it, you know.

I'm sure the poetry police had their say about it.

No. As far as I know, nobody's ever said a word about it. I don't know.

I edited one of H.L. Hix's books, and you may have heard about him from Dana [Gioia].

I know him.

Anyway, the typography was . . . . Well, the book was titled Perfect Hell*, and it was perfectly hellacious typography.*

Really?

Yeah. It was the graphic designer I was assigned to work with, who had insisted on making it thematic. I tried to explain to him, no, that's not what we do, but then I started thinking, "why not?" and I thought, "let's just flout the conventions here." Boy, I heard about it later.

What did he think about it? It sounds horrible.

Harvey liked it. He kinda liked it.

Oh man. That would drive me insane.

You're part of the poetry police? [laughter]

Well, no, I don't think I'm part of the poetry police. I just don't like the thematic organization of poetry.

I hope you know I'm joking about the poetry police. In truth, I see now that it makes sense not to flout conventions, mostly because Hix's wonderful book deserved to be taken seriously, and I'm afraid it was dismissed by some because of the typography. Live and learn . . . On a whole other topic: you are often compared to Marianne Moore, Robert Frost, and Emily Dickinson. Would you consider them your primary influences?

Would I consider them my primary influences? No. No, I don't think the writers that others associate with my work necessarily are . . . there may be commonalities, but that doesn't mean that one thing comes from the other. In other words, my work may share some interests with Marianne Moore's or Emily Dickinson's or Frost's, but that doesn't mean that they are the source of those interests for me or even influenced my interests in those things.

I mean, I like defining things. I've defined a number of things in poems. Lord, Emily Dickinson's done a ton of that, but I don't think I was aware of that until long after I had already done it. In other words, we can always look back and see connections, but that doesn't mean that they were there in the other direction.

I know in some of your previous interviews that you've mentioned Frost and Dickinson were some of your favorite poets, and then you have an homage to Brodsky.

Brodsky is a deep favorite of mine as a thinker and as an essayist. I really can't say that I understand his poetry because I'm only able to read it in translation. And it doesn't seem to me that it translates very well. I've heard the most wonderful things about it in Russian. But I don't know. It's his mind that thrills me in his essays.

He's brilliant, for sure. If you were asked to be the U.S. Poet Laureate again, would you?

No. I wouldn't have said yes, even once. But I did. [laughter] I'm not sorry that I did it.

Is there a backstory?

Oh, there's a great backstory. Well, it's a terrible backstory. When I was invited to be the Poet Laureate by Dr. Billington at the Library

of Congress, I wasn't home. There was just a message on my answering machine saying that he'd called, and asking me to call him at home. I didn't know him, and I knew what it had to be. Even though it was unlikely, that's what it had to be. It had to be an invitation to be Poet Laureate. I had just come home with my partner, Carol, from the last vacation we would ever take because she was dying of cancer. And I sat down on the bed with her and said, "I just got a call. I know what it's going to be." And I explained it to her. She said, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "I don't want to do it. It's not right for me. It just doesn't fit with my nature at all. It would be such an embarrassment to me to have a position of that sort." And I recounted all the reasons why I didn't want to do it. She listened very sympathetically and then she paused and she said, "All right. So do it for me."

Boy, how can you turn that down?

I couldn't. I absolutely couldn't turn it down. I just couldn't. She asked me to do it for her.

Did she go to Washington with you?

No, she didn't. She was too sick. But she was incredibly proud that I got the position. It was a giant triumph for her.

Well, it truly is an honor. I heard, I don't know if it's true, but I heard that Ginsberg was constantly thinking that he should be [Poet Laureate] and he was sort of asking and trying to get people to think of him in terms of the Poet Laureate and was even a little offended when he didn't get it.

Well, there's no justice to it. And the ones who get it aren't necessarily the ones who are best at it, and the ones who don't get it maybe would have been marvelous. It's as random as any other prize.

It is, and you certainly are entitled and deserve the honor. I'm glad you went forward with it. Were there any highlights of being Poet Laureate?

I think one of the things that I enjoyed most was, I taught for many years, over thirty years, at a community college in Marin County, and as Poet Laureate I went around to a lot of community colleges. I advocated for community colleges as Poet Laureate. I didn't really want to do anything particularly in terms of poetry; I just wanted to say, "Hey, let's respect community colleges and recognize the incredible job they're doing in the education system and the social system. They deserve so much more attention and credit and funding than they get." It was terribly satisfying to go around to community colleges and feel the satisfaction and pride among the instructors and the students. They were just really proud to be represented, and they knew that I really was their champion.

I advocated for community colleges as Poet Laureate. I didn't really want to do anything particularly in terms of poetry; I just wanted to say, "Hey, let's respect community colleges and recognize the incredible job they're doing in the education system and the social system. They deserve so much more attention and credit and funding than they get." It was terribly satisfying to go around to community colleges and feel the satisfaction and pride among the instructors and the students.

Community colleges deserve a champion. I've taught in a few of them. So, which of your poetry collections do you love the most and why? [laughs] Is that like asking a mother which child she loves most?

It really is impossible for me to say. I do know that my feelings about the books shift and continue to shift, so that whatever I said at one point might not be the case later. For a long time I sort of disdained *Elephant Rocks*, which was the first book that I had with Grove Press. I was really thrilled to get a book with them, a New York publisher, but I thought it was inferior to the one that had preceded it, which was *Flamingo Watching,* because that book was the cream of many years of writing. It was, what I considered at that time, the very best things that I had written for maybe fifteen years. So it was really concentrated in that sense. And I had been asked almost immediately after that by Grove for a manuscript, so I was putting together, in my mind, the leftover scraps from *Flamingo Watching*. Therefore, for a long time I thought that it was inferior to *Flamingo Watching*. It took me years to realize that the poems were just as good.

I find the same thing with my own writing.

It's interesting, isn't it? And it's strange how it shifts. It's not fixed.

I write something – an essay or story – and the next time I read it, I wonder, what did I see in this piece?

And later you come back and read it and think, "Oh, I was right. That really is a lovely thing." [laughter]

You once said you enjoy teaching in San Quentin prison because it changes people's lives. I once taught for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections, and I always hoped that something I said or did would penetrate the inmates' armor and get through to them somehow. Is that what you meant by changing peoples' lives?

Well, you know I said that about San Quentin, but it doesn't make a bit of difference; I could have been speaking about the College of Marin where I did the great bulk of my teaching—very basic skills. It's just a wonderful thing to maybe be the key to some shift that we'll never know about. The thing that's remembered. I do have students come up to me, still to this day, and remind me of something or tell me that their lives were changed by a class or a phrase, and they'll tell me something that I'd said. And there would be no way that I could have thought of it as something important, but it triggered something, set something loose in them. So it's a great privilege to be the agent of those kinds of shifts. We can't force them. But we can sort of try to maybe loosen things up so that they happen for people.



Michael Wutz

You also once said of teaching community college that "you got it out of your system." What did you mean by "it"?

Oh, I think I was just teasing; I meant, I had already done enough teaching. I didn't need any more teaching in my system.

Your poetry invites introspection. As I read it, I hear it being whispered to me in my head, which requires me to focus more on your words and meaning. I believe it is because your poetry reads like a series of meditations. Is this your intention?

Well, I'm very complimented that you feel that way. I think it is a meditation. The reader that I'm interested in, or the voice that I'm interested in hearing read my poem, is the mental voice. I'm interested in the words coming alive in somebody's mind. I like to read my poems aloud, and I like to hear them read aloud, but I'm really interested in that brain voice. So yes, I hope they talk to your brain.

They certainly do. In one of your interviews with Dana Gioia, you said you tried not to choose poetry. Why?

Well, and I told Dana this, too, I never liked having to say I was a poet. I don't like the kind of pose that people sometimes assume. The poet pose. I don't like the grandeur. I don't like the drama. I come from modest people, and it would be considered putting on airs. I've always been terrified of pretensions. Also, I always like to say that I'm a writer. You know, when you're on an airplane. "What do you do?" "I'm a writer." But it doesn't help, really, because then they say, "What do you write?," you have to say that you write poems. This happened to me last night at the hotel here in Ogden. I was sitting at the bar with a couple of people, enjoying dinner, and this person asked, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a writer." She asked if I had written books, and I said, "Yes, I've written books." She said, "Are they story books?" I said, "Well, they're poetry."

I never liked having to say I was a poet. I don't like the kind of pose that people sometimes assume. The poet pose. I don't like the grandeur. I don't like the drama. I come from modest people, and it would be considered putting on airs. I've always been terrified of pretensions. Also, horrified by them. I always like to say that I'm a writer.

She said, "Oh, I don't really know any books of poetry." Happily, it was a complete conversation ender.

You also told Dana, "Pleasure is my motivation in poetry." Do you mean pleasure for your readers or for yourself?

Oh, that's a good question! Certainly pleasure is inseparable from the other things that one wants in a poem. But it would be pleasure for both parties. Whatever the substance of the poem, maybe it's death, maybe it's loss, maybe it's loneliness, who knows what it is. Maybe it's frustration. The thinking about it and the writing about it and the finding the language for it is a pleasure. Whatever the subject matter, seeking that language and finding that metaphor that will enliven it is a pleasure unto itself. And I do think that there has got to be pleasure in reading a poem, not just work or duty or trying hard. It's got to give pleasure. It has got to. And too often that is forgotten.

Well, I'm a word lover. And I also love symbolism, so you combine the two and there you go. In a new direction: I was fortunate enough to meet the writer

Raymond Carver a few times before his tragic passing. He told a group of us at AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs) that he disliked being called a minimalist because it "smacked of a certain smallness of intention." You have been referred to as a miniaturist. And that your poems are compact, compressed, and condensed. What is your reaction to these descriptions of your poetry?

That's a good question because I do struggle with these terms for the same reason that Raymond Carver did. I just don't believe that small is small. I think apparent size is so completely superficial that it doesn't matter. Something that appears big is not significantly big; something that appears small may not in any way be small. It's just a little outside dressing. As to the matter of compression or condensation, I do think it's the job or the nature of poetry to have a great deal within in. But it can't feel oppressively condensed or compacted. If it is compacted, it has to be compacted the way a clown car is in the circus, where it doesn't seem like all those clowns could jump out of that car, but they do jump out of it. Or the clown suitcase—endless stuff is pulled out of this suitcase. So it has to have that sense of play. It has to have that sense of surprising quantities and possibilities. But it has to feel not compacted. And if it does, that's a problem. And sometimes things do. They feel too compressed, too refined.

The thinking about it and the writing about it and the finding the language for it is a pleasure. Whatever the subject matter, seeking that language and finding that metaphor that will enliven it is a pleasure unto itself. And I do think that there has got to be pleasure in reading a poem, not just work or duty or trying hard. It's got to give pleasure. It has got to. And too often that is forgotten.

They drag the reader down almost. I love that metaphor of the clown car. You also said about your own poetry that, like oysters, your poems take shape around an aggravation. Does that apply to all of them?

No. Of course not. That's the problem with talking about poetry or talking about what one does, is that you generalize. We're asked to generalize, and we do generalize. And then we suffer for it. No, some of my poems are celebrations. You know when you get in bed and you have to make room for your feet? You have to push the covers up with your feet and toes and wiggle around and make room. Well, a lot of my poems are making room for me. They're making room for the way my mind works. There are things that are attempts to make more room, at least for me, and I'm always surprised to find that they seem to make room for other people. It's often so shocking because it seemed personal to me, and then somebody else will respond well to it.

Isn't that the hallmark of a great piece of writing? You're writing something that's meaningful to you, and then other people relate to it as well?

The mystery of it, and it is a mystery, is that you really do have to not think about them. You really do just have to try to get as close as you can to that thing that is nagging at you or fascinating you.

I guess you could become too concerned about your audience. – Are there any contemporary poets whom you read and find noteworthy?

I'm not much of a reader of contemporary poets.

Mostly classic?

Yes.

Stephen Burt said in the San Francisco Chronicle *that your poems are founded in wisdom, not in song. Do you agree?*

[laughs] Well, I don't know that we have to separate wisdom and song, nor do I know that they are founded in wisdom. I don't know. I guess I can say I can't really answer that question. I don't think I would plump for either side of that argument. I would say that there is a fantastic amount of sound that is operating in my poems. Whether it's musical or not, sound is terrifically important.

I think hip-hop is doing poetry a lot of good. Rhyme is so much more appreciated now than it was thirty years ago. It's really pretty wonderful. It's going to be very interesting to see. I mean, have you listened to hip-hop? It's hilarious! It's so witty. It's also gross and everything else. Overlooking all the parts that we abominate, there is the terrific joy in using language very, very playfully and elastically in all sorts of exaggerated ways that are quite freeing.

Your wordplay, wit, puns, and so forth are the hallmarks of your poetry. Are they a means of sugarcoating something darker or even sinister? And the poems that come to mind when I ask that are "The Fourth Wiseman," "Great Thoughts," "The Best of It," and "Dutch."

Or almost anything I've ever written. [laughs] Well, I would never ever think about sugarcoating. I would say that our knowledge and our experience and our understanding are compounded of everything dark and everything light at the same time. And those elements are inseparable, and the play is not a form of sugarcoating attempts to get close to something that might be dark, but part of how the mind works and part of how language operates.

Hmmm, that's insightful. Once you said that you wrote about twelve "keepers" every year. Is that still the case? And how has your poetry changed or evolved over the years?

I can answer the first. Probably twelve keepers would be great. I feel like I'm having quite a bumper crop this year, but what usually happens is I look back later and realize, "Oh, that was illusory confidence. Actually, they're no good. Well, I could keep these two." So probably if I get twelve that would be thrilling.

So do you think your poetry has changed or evolved over the years?

Well, I regret to say it seems to be getting briefer. But I would really leave those kinds of things for readers to decide.

Too personal, huh?

I think there are some things that are better not to name.

Do you think the role of poetry changed in the twenty-first century?

I think hip-hop is doing it a lot of good. Rhyme is so much more appreciated now than it was thirty years ago. It's really pretty wonderful. It's going to be very interesting to see. I mean, have you listened to hip-hop? It's hilarious! It's so witty. It's also gross and everything else. Overlooking all the parts that we abominate, there is the terrific joy in using language very, very playfully and elastically in all sorts of exaggerated ways that are quite freeing. Of course it's always evolving and the technological age will have big impacts on it.

[laughs] You're quoted saying, "As for reality, I don't even have any interest in that word."

I have an intermittent interest in that word. "Intermittent." I think I was probably attempting to suggest that I don't know where reality lies. I don't know if it's a meaningful word.

You're known for your slant rhymes, enjambment, and third-person speakers. Do you see your style changing at all in the future? Is there any experimentation in the works?

You know, I don't know what I'm going to do till I do it. But I would imagine that my work would continue to employ the third person or to avoid the first person. And every poem's a new undertaking. I just don't know till I get there. And really they're one at a time. I'm not one of these people who can think about projects. You know, have a theme and have an idea for the book and fill the book up with it. I just write individual poems, and when I have a sufficiently thick stack of them I see if they can be a book. And they have nothing in common except that I wrote them.

Dana Gioia said, "The key thing about Kay's work is that she takes you through a kind of a linguistic game that leads you to a sudden insight about the nature of human existence." Is this description an accurate portrayal of your poetry?

I can say this: In writing a poem, I am trying to figure something out myself. It's something I don't know. What I'm writing about is new to me and I am feeling my way along and hope that I knock things over that become useful to me and show me things. It's dark in there, and I have to make do with what shows up. So it is an exploration, and I do have a strong sense of wanting anything I write to arrive someplace. I like the sense of it getting somewhere, of it having a conclusion. So that it is, I hope, an exploration of some ground using whatever tools I can find to get someplace that is at least new to me. And I can't speak for anybody else.

In writing a poem, I am trying to figure something out myself. It's something I don't know. What I'm writing about is new to me and I am feeling my way along and hope that I knock things over that become useful to me and show me things. It's dark in there, and I have to make do with what shows up. So it is an exploration, and I do have a strong sense of wanting anything I write to arrive someplace. I like the sense of it getting somewhere, of it having a conclusion.

Back to the question I asked before about contemporary poets that you found noteworthy. What about classic poets?

Well, I don't know who you would consider classic. Do you mean just generations preceding ours?

Poets of enduring quality.

Okay, sure. Well, I have the same old list: Gerard Manley Hopkins, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Philip Larkin, Catullus, C.P. Cavafy, and Fernando Pessoa is also very interesting, though I really think I prefer his prose.

Do you find yourself going to any one of those poets particularly?

I should add in Elizabeth Bishop. I would say, Emily Dickinson is who I go to most reliably. I think she's our greatest poet. She's an astonishing poet.

I read her in junior high, and she was really my savior in a lot of ways. I was a bullied kid, and I would drag home volumes of poetry, but I always went back to Emily Dickinson.

I didn't even discover poetry until I was in college. It didn't mean a thing to me. Nearly nothing. I liked comic books as a kid, and I liked to read, but I didn't like poetry.

Fascinating. I've noticed so many comic book readers have gone on to become writers. I know you're not a memorizer, but that was my thing. I would memorize these poems. In fact, there were two of us who were bullied and we had a code. It was Dickinson's poem, "I'm Nobody."

Wonderful.

We would repeat that to each other, which is kind of nerdy and very weird now that I think about it.

And yet, you had your own freedom and your own code and your own language inside of that, and your own company in Emily Dickinson. So it wasn't all bad.

Yes. Lawrence Ferlinghetti was another one I read quite frequently because he was the "in" poet then. I later on ended up editing one of his books: a long poem of his with many photographs. It was one of the highlights of my editorial experience, as was this interview. I hope we "arrived some place." Thank you again, Kay, for your thoughtful and honest responses.

My pleasure.



Composition professor and former book editor Gail Yngve is now in her twenty-first year of teaching at Weber State University. She has also taught composition and literature at Howard University, Prince George's Community College, and Salt Lake Community College. Yngve's writing has appeared in *The New Virginia Review*, *The Dominion Review*, *The George Mason Alumni Magazine*, *Weber,* and in the book *Arts and Crafts Ideals: Wisdom from the Arts and Crafts Movement*. She also has won first place in the Dan Rudy Fiction Contest and the Irene Leache Memorial Contest. Yngve hikes Utah's spectacular mountains every opportunity she gets.

Sarah Vause

Slavery and Racial Justice Reconsidered—

A Conversation with Douglas A. Blackmon



PRELUDE

Several years ago I came across a book in my local grocery store. I first noticed the cover: pretty nondescript, red, white, and black, with a noticeable stamp in gold announcing "Winner of the Pulitzer Prize." While that commanded some attention, what really got to me was the title, Slavery by Another Name. *In this book-length exposé, journalist and author Douglas A. Blackmon meticulously documents through narratives, court records, and government documents how African Americans were – through a blatantly racist judiciary and a system of discriminatory economics – in fact re-enslaved from the end of the Civil War all the way through World War II. I was sickened and horrified, dumbfounded and disgusted. As I read how injustice and corruption in local and national governments allowed African Americans to be abused, exploited, and killed by the tens of thousands, I became heartbroken and appalled. Young black men throughout the South were arrested on spurious charges and pressed into involuntary servitude before disappearing altogether. After reading this book, I decided to try to reach out. I found an email address online and contacted Mr. Blackmon about an aspect of research I was interested in pursuing. To my shock and amazement Mr. Blackmon – former Atlanta bureau chief of* The Wall Street Journal *and host of* American Forum*, a public affairs program produced at the University of Virginia's Miller Center – responded enthusiastically, and thus began a correspondence that led to an invitation to be a featured speaker at the 2016 National Undergraduate Literature Conference and to this interview.*

CONVERSATION

You grew up in an area that was predominantly black, and your background provided the opportunity and insight to begin to feel that something "big" was happening. Along with your background, what caused you to investigate and dedicate years to expose, and tell the story of, neo-slavery in the United States?

The book itself began with a long article in *The Wall Street Journal*. It was part of a series of stories, beginning in the late 1990s. I started writing things which looked at what the Civil Rights Movement was about. The movement was about compelling state governments, county governments, and the federal government to stop doing active injuries to black people and to stop preventing them from exercising their civil rights: being able to vote, not having discriminatory schools, not having laws that prevented people from living where they wanted to live—it was really all about the relationship with the government. The Civil Rights Movement never really got into or discussed the role of commerce. In reality, it was banks that refused to loan money to black families if they were buying a piece of property in a white neighborhood. It's the refusal of millions of businesses to hire black people into positions of any significance or at all, and you just run down the list. Real estate agents who wouldn't show certain houses to black families. In so many ways it was really—as it is with so many things—commerce and people in business who are the primary enforcers of all sorts of social customs. Businesses are the primary tax collector for the government, so I was interested in this idea that we never have really looked at the way that business was so deeply complicit, and assessed that.

At the same time, in Germany, lawsuits were being brought by Holocaust survivors against German corporations or companies that had connections to companies that used slave labor during WW2. There were Swiss banks that had appropriated the fortunes of Jewish families that had turned their money over to Swiss banks and then had all been killed, and these banks just grabbed that money. So there was this litigation going on in Europe about a similar thing—businesses involved in really terrible social crimes—and I was intrigued that in the United States everybody really applauded these lawsuits. The Clinton administration was very supportive of it. Congress passed a law that would make it easier for some of those cases to be brought into U.S. courts, even. There was a lot of support for all of that, which struck me as interesting, because the peace treaties at the end of WW2 made provisions for reparations that were paid to Israel and to others and the treaties foreclosed all future claims. Those lawsuits had no legal chance. They would never have won, but there were morally powerful people behind and inherently supportive of them, and were willing to re-write the laws to make it possible for them to move forward. Finally, in a settlement German corporations agreed to contribute to a five billion dollar fund to be paid to the survivors of the Holocaust.

I thought to myself, what would happen if we looked at American commerce through the same completely unforgiving lens, not giving anybody a break and not accepting that just because all of the people that did the bad things are dead, then it doesn't matter anymore, because a company can live forever? When we die, our liabilities die with us, our debts die with us, and for sure whatever moral favors we had die with us, but a company can live forever. A company that was involved in some terrible thing that it never really accounted for, 100 years later, does it still matter? The company is still alive. The people are not, but the company is. Companies constantly remind us, "We've been your bank since 1874." So, the positive dimensions of the longevity of a company are emphasized all the time, but what about the negative ones? That's what launched me on this series of articles I wrote: I wrote about the way a Wall Street bank had been involved in the financing of white supremacist groups that were opposed to the Civil Rights Movement of 1964. I wrote about the involvement of national business leaders who were close to Franklin D. Roosevelt's implications in white supremacist thinking. In the course of all of that, I ended up stumbling across a reference somewhere to this place in Alabama where there was this coal mine, owned by an obscure sounding company—Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad—where it appeared that the people who were working there were actually forced laborers, not people who had committed crimes. I wondered if that company existed in a fashion today, and I typed the name into a database of SCC (State Corporation Commission) filings, and immediately it popped up that it was a unit of U.S. Steel Corporation, the most iconic company there is. It even says "United States" in its very name. So if you want to do a story about a United States business, what would be a more appropriate vehicle for examining that? So that was the beginning of looking into that. But obviously my whole life background, the circumstances that I grew up in, for whatever reason, motivated me to try to understand this race stuff. I spent about a year working on that original story and there was a lot of reaction to that. I thought my book would take a year or two to write, but it took seven. And then there was the film four years after that. It just took over my life.

In the introduction to Slavery by Another Name*, you state that, unlike the victims of the Jewish Holocaust, who were on the whole literate, comparatively wealthy, and positioned to record (if only secretly)*

the horrors that enveloped them, Green Cottenham and his peers had virtually no capacity to preserve their memories or document their destruction. How did you decide that you would tell their story and preserve and document their destruction?

It really was a case of following my nose. There wasn't a point where I decided, "I'm now going to go document the lives of these people." It was a much more osmotic thing. I started off interested in this question of business and civil rights abuses, the terrible racial record of American history, and then I began to look at these business questions and that took me to this one place in Alabama, where clearly this bad thing happened. Green Cottenham happened to be a name in the midst of that, although in the original story he was very briefly mentioned in one or two references only. Later when I decided to pursue the story further, he was one of the people I began with primarily because of the uniqueness of his name. I thought, "Let me see what I can figure out about his life." As I began to do that, and for a very long time, I could find almost nothing about him. But in the course of looking for Green Cottenham, I found thousands of others. It began to be clear to me that I was actually working with something that was really very, very big and very misunderstood.

A newspaper reporter is trained to pick up a phone and call somebody who knows something, whereas historians are generally not trained to do that. Historians, in an academic sense, are trying to read all of the papers and articles written, to go through the whole historiography of something and to draw from that. They might or might not ever actually have a conversation with the author of some paper that they are relying on. But as a newspaper reporter, you pick up the phone and you call somebody. So I quickly was in conversation with the relatively small number of historians who'd ever done any significant amount of work around any of this, and it was clear to me that there was no definitive history on forced labor practices in the modern United States. There were a lot of views about what had happened, a lot of minimization of how bad things were, partly because there was a belief that there was no way to get to the bottom of it. There was this idea that there were all of these people who were arrested for misdemeanor offenses. There were references to people, but those types of records don't end up in the state archives of all these different states. Historians truthfully, generally, only ever go to research libraries. They almost never go anywhere else. So there were all these question marks. I instinctively had the sense that it wasn't possible that no one could get to a better answer than that. I thought, gosh, if this was something that happened in every county in eleven or twelve states, for decades and decades, and touched tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands or

A newspaper reporter is trained to pick up a phone and call somebody who knows something, whereas historians are generally not trained to do that. Historians, in an academic sense, are trying to read all of the papers and articles written, to go through the whole historiography of something and to draw from that. They might or might not ever actually have a conversation with the author of some paper that they are relying on. But as a newspaper reporter, you pick up the phone and you call somebody.

That's when it began to dawn on me that there was something really substantial there. I began to understand that anybody who has experienced the disparity between black and white life in the rural South can't help but ask, "Why is it that black folks are still so poor 150 years after the end of slavery?" My family was really poor 100 years ago. However, my family improved their status pretty dramatically. Why haven't these families improved their status?

even millions of people, there's just no way that there's not a storage room somewhere that's got some papers left on that. So, it was a really gradual thing. I went looking for that, and at the first courthouse I pulled out a big leather-bound ledger for the records of some particular jail and began realizing that, holy cow, there were thousands of people being arrested for next to nothing and then immediately being sold into these terrible places where Green Cottenham ended up.

That's when it began to dawn on me that there was something really substantial there. I began to understand that anybody who has experienced the disparity between black and white life in the rural South can't help but ask, "Why is it that black folks are still so poor 150 years after the end of slavery?" My family was really poor 100 years ago. However, my family improved their status pretty dramatically. Why haven't these families improved their status? There are only two answers to that: You believe there is some structural thing happening that was keeping that from occurring; there was some reason why poor white families started doing better, but something was keeping that same thing from happening for black families. You either accepted that or you're a white supremacist. You just think, well, black folks on average are not as smart and capable as white people. It's got to be one or the other.

When I began to see this, it made a lot of sense to me that there was something much more sinister than being called a bad word and not getting a vote, and this seemed to explain it. It wasn't just the people who were in the coal mines, but the much larger groups of people whose lives were affected by that and who never broke the social codes. They didn't want that to happen to them because they knew their families would be destroyed, just the way that a kind of persistent terror inflicted on a population of people over a long period of time can have this incredibly powerful impact. That's when I began to realize that I was going to be making a very big claim. I was saying, wow, this is like slavery has been brought back, so I'm going to end up arguing somehow that Abraham Lincoln did not successfully end slavery. I better really be ready. I better present this in a way that can take a lot of challenges. The enormity of what I was trying to do set in, and so it took a long, long time.

The system you describe is obviously unjust, but as you detail in your book, the injustice takes on a whole new level with the development of forced labor and neo-slavery. In cases like Green Cottenham, arrests are arbitrary and unjust, but to then get lost in this horrific system and basically disappear seems to only add insult to injury. To just be gone – disappeared forever and then there is nothing left.

Just to be erased. Green Cottenham, interestingly enough—I don't really ever say this, in part because I just made an assumption, I

don't have any foundation for it—he died and there is no record of whether he was buried in this burial field. I eventually did establish that the place he would have been buried, if he was buried, was in another place from the initial one that I discovered, from the place I was describing. Eventually, I came to know all kinds of these places, these sites were all over the place in the South. Many of them were known and can be documented. But eventually I learned the general vicinity of where Green's body almost certainly would have been buried, but I could never pin it down. But it's also entirely possible that his body was one that had been thrown into a furnace, which would go along with the fact that there are only five references to his existence at all anywhere on paper. It could well be—whether his body was burned or put in an unmarked grave—in a place where the bones wouldn't exist anymore because of the nature of the soil there. None of these bones would have anything left of them today. It really is a case of where, if you have been reduced to a state in which you don't even merit a marker on your grave, then, yes, someone like Green Cottenham was very nearly erased. His very existence was nearly erased. That gets back to the question that you asked before—the necessity of trying to reestablish the humanity of this enormous number of people, whose lives were lost and whose histories were lost and who were not in a position to write letters or memoirs. There is no Anne Frank of a sharecropper farm who leaves behind this gripping account of her destruction and her family's destruction, that then for generations people can go back to and realize, "Oh my God, how can so terrible of a thing have happened?" Those voices are all snuffed out or never existed. So, the closest thing we have are the Carrie Kinsey Letter and things like that. That became a compulsion of mine, this idea that once I began to do this work—at one point, I abandoned Green—I concluded that there's just not enough here on this guy, I've got to focus on somebody else. Later, I circled back and realized, no, that makes me part of the conspiracy to erase him, if I abandon him. He is the ultimate illustration of just how diabolical all of this was.

There is no Anne Frank of a sharecropper farm who leaves behind this gripping account of her destruction and her family's destruction, that then for generations people can go back to and realize, "Oh my God, how can so terrible of a thing have happened?" Those voices are all snuffed out or never existed.

For readers who haven't yet read Slavery by Another Name*, will you describe what you mean when you discuss the idea of a slave trafficking network that functioned in the United States for over eighty years?*

Basically, the heart of it was a perversion of the criminal justice system. When I first started working on this, that was an odd sounding thing to say. Today, because of all of the debate about mass incarceration, we're all a lot more comfortable, and we know there is a big debate going on about whether the justice system today treats people equitably across races. Fifteen years ago, when I was first digging into this, there really was not any conversation happening. So even that was a bit more of a radical proposition. The general assumption was that the justice system was the least discriminatory. In ***To Kill a Mockingbird***, Atticus Finch standing up for a black man—we had this whole

The criminal justice system had been turned on its head to become a mechanism for arresting large numbers of black men, overwhelmingly young black men who would be good physical workers, on charges that were either made up or for having committed crimes that were invented. The state legislatures of the South passed laws that essentially criminalized black life.

mythology that, even with its flaws, the justice system was the place that had done the best in the bad days, but that's not the case at all. The criminal justice system had been turned on its head to become a mechanism for arresting large numbers of black men, overwhelmingly young black men who would be good physical workers, on charges that were either made up or for having committed crimes that were invented. The state legislatures of the South passed laws that essentially criminalized black life. Just as Nazi Germany passed laws in the 1930s that made it a crime to do anything that was customary of the typical life of a Jew in Germany and elsewhere in central Europe, all of the southern states were passing laws that made it impossible to live a normal black laborer's life and not be breaking the law. For example, the way almost all poor people in the South got from one town to the next was by walking alongside a railroad line. The roads were terrible and most people didn't have transportation other than their feet, so the easiest way to get to town was to walk along the railroad line. Well, that became a crime. It was a crime to walk beside a railroad line, a crime that would only ever be enforced if it was broken by a black person. None of these laws stated, "This applies only to black people." That would have been unconstitutional. But all of these laws were enforced, typically, only against black people or against white people who were problematic. You had this whole legal system that was put in place to make black men, in particular, vulnerable at all times. Once a society has set in place a set of laws that make your life illegal, it's not a question of if you're breaking the law. You can't help but break the law at all times because of it. Once that's been established, it's not a question of whether you're breaking the law. It's a question of whether you're going to be charged with it because they can arrest you at any time and attach one of these things to you. That's the definition of a police state—where the police are in the position to seize anyone they want at any time for whatever reason and be able to come up with some other justification for it.

Our criminal justice system had been perverted into this instrument of control over black people for two reasons: (a) It was an economy that was still desperately hungry for slavery. It had worked best and most effectively for the South and for the whole country when it was based on the enslavement of millions of black people. So there was a desperate economic appetite to restore anything as close to that as possible. The threat of the worst version of this was another way of coercing people into less terrible things, but things that were still really bad—like share cropping—that were very much like slavery. (b) The other reason was just a way of terrorizing people away from their rights. A black man who started talking about, "Well, why don't we get to vote?" was going to very quickly find himself arrested and working in the coal mines. That happened over and over again, particularly in the early years. It became very clear that anybody who stepped out of line was going to have this draconian event of actions taken by the justice sys-

tem. It was a perversion of the system using the law to compel large numbers of black people back into a kind of forced slavery.

The even more sinister thing that happened was—and this is just the nature of economics—once you have set a system up, where if a person is arrested, there's a structure in place whereby somebody who needs that kind of labor can acquire that person through the courts by paying their fines, you've established what, in the terms of Wall Street, is called a market. You've established that the value of a really strong, twenty-two-year-old black man—if that person can be acquired for a year, for forty dollars from the courts—is, well, forty dollars. So a landowner or a mill or a coal mine or a timber camp comes along and says, "Well, you're paying the sheriff forty dollars a year for those men. What if I brought you a black man that you could have for thirty-five dollars?" Next thing you know, the old systems of pre-Civil War slavery begin to resurrect themselves. In many cases, the very same people who were in the business of dealing in slaves in the 1850s were back and in the business of enslaving people in the 1860s and 1870s and 1880s. Many of the very same people who were most important in the industry of slavery in the 1850s were the ones designing all of this in the 1870s.

No, it's not criminal to be black in America today. But is there a much greater jeopardy to be black in America? Of course. Are laws enforced against African Americans in a disproportionately harsh way? Absolutely. Is the reality of any encounter with the legal system different for you if you're black compared to white? Absolutely. In those respects, it's still the case that black Americans and white Americans face very different realities when it comes to the law and the legal system.

It's not the same system of slavery that existed. The two biggest differences were that in this system, if you were an enslaved person in the 1880s or in the 1920s, your children born to you in that time were not necessarily going to be enslaved in the same way. So it is not shadow slavery in that sense. That's a difference and that's an important difference, a positive difference. But a diabolically negative difference was that in the old form of slavery, before the Civil War, an enslaved person was extraordinarily valuable. It required a gigantic amount of money to acquire an enslaved person. A farmer who used slaves would typically have spent a considerable amount more on buying people than buying land. You would not then go out of your way to kill. In the old system of slavery, as cruel as it was, you wanted your workers to survive and you wanted them to have a mate. You wanted them to have children because you made money off the children. You got more labor off of all of this. So it was a system that was based on the idea that these human beings would live an entire life. In the new kind of slavery that came afterward, each individual was worth so little and was so easily replaced that there was none of that. From an economic standpoint, you only have men, just tiny numbers of women, because it's only about the kind of labor that they can do best. They were worked to the very limits of human endurance—frequently worked to death, or punished to the point of death, if need be, to keep them working. So in the end, it became a much more physically vicious system than what had been before.

In an interview with NPR, you said that in the South, during this period you call neo-slavery, it was criminal to be black. Is it still criminal to be black in the United States today?

That's an interestingly framed question. No, it's not, because when I said it was criminal to be black in that period of time, I really meant, explicitly, that. To be black was to be criminal in the sense that you couldn't go to the city park; as a black person, you were specifically proscribed from certain things that white people were not proscribed from. There were legal consequences if you violated those laws. That's not the case today—there may be illegal consequences for violating people's preferences and expectations, but it is now criminal to be the person who attacks a black person for breaking the racial code. So, in that sense, no, it's not criminal to be black in America today. But is there a much greater jeopardy to be black in America? Of course. Are laws enforced against African Americans in a disproportionately harsh way? Absolutely. Is the reality of any encounter with the legal system different for you if you're black compared to white? Absolutely. So in those respects, it's still the case that black Americans and white Americans face very different realities when it comes to the law and the legal system. But it's by no means the same in the sense that I meant that to be black was to be criminal.

You've answered this in a number of ways already, but I want to conclude our interview with your thoughts about what the future will bring in terms of racial issues.

I'm actually optimistic that, ten years from now, twenty years from now, fifty years from now, things will be substantially different and better than they are today—I'm pretty optimistic about that. I think, on the whole it's impossible to imagine that we're not headed toward a progressively better situation, in part because it is a dimension of humanity that we are compelled to think about what's wrong with things around us and wish that things were better. We get it wrong a lot of the time, we get totally mixed up about what "better" would be. I think twenty-five years from now, we are going to look back over the previous twenty-five years and say, wow, we made a lot of progress. There will still be things that we're unhappy with, but we will appear to have made a whole lot of progress. And the things we are unhappy about will increasingly appear less aligned with race.



Sarah Vause is an instructor of English at Weber State University and holds a Bachelor's Degree in English from WSU, a Master's Degree in American Studies from Utah State University, and is currently working to complete a PhD at Idaho State University. She is the co-director of the National Undergraduate Literature Conference held yearly at WSU. She has worked as an editorial fellow for both *Western American Literature* and for the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C.

Douglas A. Blackmon

Caney Creek Bottom



Go burn that trash, Ned," his mother squawked, "but you watch them sparks—'hits dry you know."

Rarely was a chore such an unqualified joy—particularly when it involved a heap of rotting food and garbage. Ned loved the feel of matches in his hand, and as the flames first sputtered from the stick between his fingers and spread into the mass of paper and bottles in the black garbage pit, Ned almost glowed as well. There was something powerful and romantic about the consuming and unstoppable growth of fire.

On weekdays, the colored women from down the road burned the trash after he and his mother got through in the garden. But on weekends it was Ned's job, and this Saturday's trash was the best to burn he'd had in a month. It was mostly paper plates and throw-away napkins from yesterday's fourth-Friday singing. The garbage was stuffed into three big cardboard boxes from the furniture store alley they had used as garbage bins when everybody from the church came over to sing and eat barbecue. Ned set the boxes on his tow sled that morning and dragged it behind the barn. Driving the tractor was almost as exciting as the fire, but not quite.

The garbage pit was on the other side of the little pond right behind the house. Ned and his momma and daddy penned pigs on one side of it so that at the height of summer, the heat, the pigs, the green pond mud, and the pit could muster a serious deterrent to the excitement of Ned's favorite chore, but it was May now, and this would be a grand bonfire.

Ned liked to dump all the trash so it would make a big, tall mound he could light on all sides. The orange and red flickers would creep up the pyramid into a huge, brief flame that sent big gusts of black paper-smoke up with crisp little bits of newspapers and paper plates floating until they burned out and drifted back down again.

Just as his fire completely engulfed the heap and Ned stood back absorbed in the mesmerizing flow of the flames, a voice cut through the crackling: "What are you doing with that far'? I told you to watch them sparks! You wanna' burn the whole place down? You beat that far' down, Ned, fore I beat your hide."

Ned felt the compelling sense of urgency in the voice that wafted from behind the kitchen's screen door, and he quickly shouted back, "Yes, 'um. Yes, 'um," between short strokes of his rake as he tried to quell his enormous fire. "I got it down now. I got it down." After a moment's tentative hesitation he heard the door slam shut, and the crisis had passed.

A few minutes later, the fire had settled into just a reddish glow here and there on the black heap, and Ned was headed back to the house.

"Momma, I got that trash all burnt," he uttered matter-of-factly, as if she had never known he was doing so, "you ain't got nuthin' else for me to do, do you?"

She did not—apparently much to her dismay. Floral Foshee had always believed it was safer to keep her boys doing anything other than what they were naturally inclined to do. This seemed particularly true in the case of Ned. Only two things attracted him: guns and fire. But Ned was only thirteen and had earned the privilege of burning garbage only the summer before.

Floral was still far from convinced he was ready to handle guns.

"I'm gon'go down to Caney Creek for a while, Momma, ok?"

"You plannin' on takin' your .22 along?" Floral replied.

It was as if her question took the shape of a dog collar and suddenly wrapped around his neck.

"No'mam," he lied without turning to look at her.

"That's good," she said while noting the implicating crack in his voice, "cause you know better than to ever go out with your gun alone, dontcha?"

"Won't nuthin' happen, Momma," he begged while turning to let his mother see a well-rehearsed, twisted face of agony.

"Won't nuthin' happen but you shoot yourself and lie there bleedin' to death all alone. Now get on outa' here and you leave that pea shooter at home." She dropped her words in one long swift line like the swing of a two-by-four into the side of his head. He turned on a heel, knees slightly bent, the pain of injustice watering his eyes, and trudged out the back door.

"Damn," he muttered—still relishing the new excitement of such words even under adverse circumstances—and sat on the back steps to brood over the unending cruelty of familial superiors.

As soon as it became clear no amount of pouting would move his mother to open the screen door and send him on his way, rifle in hand, Ned decided to give up on the gun and head on out for the Caney Creek Bottom.

What he called "Caney Creek Bottom" was the last tract of untouched timber from the family's original 1845 homestead. Set deep in the hilly recesses of Northwest Louisiana, it had slowly dwindled as five generations of the first Foshee's descendants gnawed at its boundaries in the endless struggle to squeeze a little more from the expiring fields they worked. This last vestige of the wilderness had finally been reduced to a thick winding clump of trees and bushes on either side of the little creek that crossed the width of the family holdings. In most places it was so narrow that the pastures were hardly separated at all, but on the farthest corner of the farm, the treeline began to widen until it was almost two miles across. The creek dissipated into a thick, moist marsh at the heart of the woods, and the trees changed from the towering pines and leafy hardwoods to a hodgpodge of ferns, Devil's Walkingstick, and scraggly sweetgums. Only an occasional cypress reached above the stunted groundcover, starving out the ferns and leaving a bed of brown needles broken only by its mysterious knees at the surface.

The marsh stretched on in miles and miles of useless land. The Foshees built a fence across it one year to mark the boundary line, but the water and weeds were enough to stop their cattle long before any reached the barbs. The three-strand fence barely stood at all now—fallen trees crossed the wires every few yards and the game habitating nearby no longer recognized it as the work of humans. Beyond that one mark of man in its midst, Caney Creek Bottom continued for miles out of Foshee land. It grew larger until the marsh and accompanying forest land covered several thousand acres, but on all sides, farms, houses, roads, and pasture formed a wall of modernity, a clear dividing line between the wild and tame.

Farmers left the remaining woods alone only because the land was too wet and the trees too big to allow for clearing and farming ever to be profitable. And, in earlier days, as the pasture land expanded at the expense of forest, what survived of the game that had once abounded moved deep into the bottom. It was the only land remaining still worth an early rise on Sunday to search for squirrel or deer, and it was this allure that tugged at Ned as he crossed behind the barn and headed into the pasture toward the creek bottom and the woods beyond.

Ned scaled the wooden fence around the stock yard and was following a narrow cattle path across the South Range. He never had understood why cows always walked in the exact same place. It made a rut in the ground only about six inches wide, but not even a sprig of green was anywhere inside it. Some winters, the trails got so deep that the rain started digging them into gulleys, and he and his father had to put rocks and logs on the trail to force the cattle off and keep the fields from washing away. Thinking about the path and last winter's salvage effort helped push Ned's thoughts away from his mother's unbending will, and as he contemplated looking for crawfish in the creek's sandbanks, she was altogether forgotten. It was still two hours until lunch, so the crawfish might be sunning in the shallow water before it got too hot. But just as he passed the Post Oak that provided the field's only shade, he suddenly froze. Something, he wasn't sure what, caught his eye. Turning slowly, Ned gazed up into the tree's limbs. Autumn leaves had already fallen,

leaving the branches bare, and his gaze moved slowly over each extremity of the old tree. Finally, without knowing what he was looking for, Ned saw the squirrel. Right there in broad daylight in the middle of the pasture was a big, grey fox squirrel squeaking at a blue jay a few feet away. The two animals started squawking and screaming and running around the tree in some territorial dispute, but Ned didn't notice any of that. He stood still, imagining his father's black Ford truck rolling up the driveway after work; he could see in his mind the strange look of his father when Ned motioned him to the back porch, and then the elder Foshee's broad smile when his son raised by the tail this squirrel taken with a single shot in the tree no game ever climbed.

By the time Ned had seen all this, he realized he was running at breakneck speed back to the house. Momma's leather strap or not, he had to have his .22. By now she might be in the garden, anyway, and he could grab his rifle, go shoot the squirrel, and have it in the cooler by the time she was back. When Ned turned the corner of the barn, he slowed his run to a brisk walk—just in case she was still nearby. He jumped on the porch not bothering to make the extra paces to the steps and peered through the screen door into the kitchen.

Mother was gone.

As soon as he was sure he was alone, Ned rushed into the house and into the hallway where his father's gunrack was. He pulled the footstool from his parents' bedroom and reached for his rifle. He paused for an instant to touch his father's army marksman's pin and savored the thought of this squirrel somehow being his own medal. It was the moment he had dreamed of ever since he unwrapped the rifle and his paper targets the Christmas before.

Realizing every second he wasted was precious time lost, Ned grabbed the rifle and two fistfuls of shells from the yellow box on the shelf. Running wildly, barely able to keep the .22 from flying out of his hand, he leaped off the porch and dashed around the barn. Crossing the fence, his feet slipped and Ned, the gun, and the shells ended up splayed on the dirty bare pasture. Undaunted and not even noticing the trickle of blood on his knee, he gathered up the bullets, snatched the rifle, and broke for the tree and his date with destiny.

He stopped thirty feet short of the Post Oak. Moving as slowly as he could with his trembling arms, Ned put five cartridges in the reserve barrel and the rest in his pocket. Then he pulled back the bolt and eased a shell into the chamber. He pushed the safety catch off, and, just like his father had taught him, stood motionless—waiting for the squirrel to move.

For five minutes, Ned stood stock still. Then he raised the rifle to his shoulder and followed the branches' outline with the sights. Still no squirrel. He lowered the gun, scanned the ground, looked into the sun, and back to the tree. He walked to the other side of the oak—a tricky squirrel can hide from its hunter. Still, no squirrel. He circled again. And again. He raised his rifle, saw a knot on a limb and fired. It was only a knot. The squirrel was gone.

"Damn," he muttered, meaning it this time, as tears welled up in his eyes again.

"Why didn't she let me take the .22 before?" he shouted. It just wasn't fair to have such an opportunity disappear like that, he thought. It just wasn't fair.

Dejected, the little hunter sat down in the same spot with his legs crossed and the rifle across his knees. After several minutes, the tears subsided, and Ned began to more clearly realize his predicament. Not only had he failed to bag the squirrel, but he had also fired a shot his mother almost certainly heard. Now he was faced with going home to an angry mother with leather strap in hand and no trophy to dissuade her intentions. He was about to head back when a sudden surge of angry determination overtook him. Now that he was here with a loaded rifle, he might as well go on to the creek bottom. One squirrel had gotten away, he thought, but he'd find another one, and that one he'd blow away.

Off he headed across the pasture and into the woods. Running from the house before, he hadn't been able to appreciate the feel of the rifle's stock in his grip, but now its power was like an extension of himself. He was after something different now as well. He had a score to settle with that squirrel, and the rifle would give Ned the odds. He carried it with pride like a soldier or a real hunter. This would be his moment. He wasn't after some squirrel that happened across his path in the middle of a cow pasture. He was hunting, this was for real game in the real forest. Even the woods of Caney Creek Bottom seemed to rise up in a different and more powerful way when he topped the hill in the center of the range. Before, Ned had always come here to play, but now, he thought, he pursued a man's game.

At the edge of the pasture, just before the entrance to the forest, the grass and briars were thick and high. When Ned and his father baled hay, the cutter never went too close to the trees, and no cattle had grazed in that field since the summer. Ned had to struggle with the weeds and thorns, but it made him feel strong to push through. If he had only been playing, he would have found an easier place, but this time, Ned was headed for the real woods.He had no intention of wasting his time at the creek or with the crawfish. The squirrels were to be found downstream in the marsh where his father hunted. That was where he was headed, and here was as good as any place to cross the scrub brush.

After pushing through the high grass, Ned stepped under the high canopy of the bottomland walnut and post oak. The grass was still thick since the cattle had been fenced out for the season, but the going was easier now. All of that was unimportant to Ned, though, as he crunched through the tangled foilage with his eyes ablaze—scanning the trees and limbs ahead. Watching intently for any movement on the branches above, he continued forward, tripping over the blackberry vines and terraced ground, but never breaking his careful scan of the trees.

After walking for several minutes and, by his reckoning, a half mile or more into the forest, he had seen no life in the trees. His rapid-fire .22 still

hung loosely at his side—gripped casually—dangling just above his knee-line. There had been a few birds far overhead, but they were much too high to even consider shooting. Ned was looking for a good spot to sit and wait out the game, but the creek was beginning to widen, and on either side, springs fed trickles of water that made the ground soft but never seemed to deepen the water. Off to the right there was a young sweetgum with its bark stripped bare from the ground up to its first limbs. The ground around it was torn and pitted with deep, two-pronged tracks, and Ned stopped to touch the smooth, exposed wood. The tree would shrivel and die soon. He had been told how in the spring, bucks grind their new racks against the trees, tear off the tender bark, and eat it. Deer were hard to find even around Caney Creek now. They had been hunted for the trophies until the only bucks left stayed deep in the bottom where most hunters never went. Every few years a deer would wander in and be seen close to the houses, but not often. One time Ned had looked across the pasture from the loft of the hay barn and seen standing at the top of a hill one of the big strong animals, the fastest and fleetest game left, and even then he had paused to stare a moment before scrambling to the ground and telling his father to get the rifle. Ned knew that once he passed around the next curve, he would be farther into the Caney Creek Bottom than he had ever gone. Long ago, his mother had forbidden him to go out of earshot of the bell that stood in the backyard, and everyone knew the ridge he was about to cross was the dividing line between where the children could play and the men went to hunt. A few more steps, and he was over the hill, and the marshland spread out before him. Ned could no longer see the pasture through the woods beside or behind him, but none of that mattered anymore. He was finally in the men's hunting ground. Despite his angry determination to use the .22 on live game, he couldn't completely quell the nervousness thrumming in his chest. He was hesitant to go farther since the creek soon disappeared completely, and he was unsure of the way back without it, so Ned found a mossy spot on the south side of a big black walnut tree with a clear view into the marsh and of the last line of hardwoods along its edge. He settled in for a patient wait, sitting on his heels to keep from getting wet, and gripped the rifle with both hands, finger on the trigger, eyes ablaze.

He planned to wait calmly just as his father described a good still hunter doing. Not one motion would betray his presence to any unsuspecting squirrels, and he would wait them out and bag his game.

It took only a few minutes of sitting on his heels to make Ned decide he could go ahead and get his backside wet. He stretched his legs out slowly and quietly, still tenaciously holding the .22 and scanning the forest for movement. After a little more time, it was getting difficult to keep the mosquitoes from swirling in his ears. Even at noon, they filled the shaded spots around the marsh with a flying army of whining, biting nuisances.

Finally, perseverance waning, he started slapping at the creatures when they alighted on his face, and the rifle ended up lying across his thighs untouched. Even half an hour of sitting patiently was difficult for an energetic

thirteen-year-old, but Ned accomplished it before growing more and more irritated with the total stillness of the forest. Only the insects moved and then only to bite at the back of his neck and ankles. He never remembered that the midday heat making him steam in the thick humidity kept the game nested, and that little or nothing would move until late in the day, when cooler winds swept through Caney Creek Bottom. After forty-five minutes of waiting, Ned once again resorted to watching the trees through the sights of his gun. It made sense to be completely ready to fire when the first squirrel moved, and he also felt a little less bored when he began moving the barrel. Slowly moving the rifle along the outline of the sweetgum he could see most clearly, Ned stopped when his eye rested on a dark hump atop one high branch. Deep down he knew full well that what he saw was merely a knot on a limb, but he was tired and restless and anxious to feel the power of the rifle surge through his arms. Besides, he couldn't be absolutely sure it wasn't a squirrel, and if it were, this might be his only chance, so he eased back the hammer, took a big breath, and as he let it slowly pass through his lips squeezed the trigger. Almost unexpectedly the shell discharged, and Ned felt its heat rise from the barrel as the boom filled the forest for an instant. When the smell of sulphur faded, there was a deeper calm to the trees, and Ned began to feel an uneasy fear even before he looked and saw that the knot was still there and, again, only a knot.

Suddenly, though, he felt vaguely unsettled and frightened, but the rifle reassured him, and he remembered the pocket of bullets he still carried. Since there was no chance of a squirrel now that he had fired, Ned decided to target practice. He sighted in on a distant cone under the only pine he could see and fired again. He missed, then fired again. The cone spun off into the leaves behind it.

"Not bad," he thought to himself. Ned had only gotten to use his rifle for target practice once before, and shooting pine cones and saplings in the wild was infinitely more exciting than the package of paper targets he had gone through behind the barn. Since he could only shoot when his father was with him, he had never gotten to fire rapidly, but if he pulled the trigger quickly and repeatedly, the rifle would discharge again and again. Holding it waist high, Ned sprayed a nearby oak with a line of bullets. The bark flew in all directions as he raised the line of fire up the trunk, as if it were a machine gun in the movies until the rifle clicked empty.

He quickly grabbed another handful of shells from his pocket, leaned against the tree, and began slipping them into the barrel one at a time. He was so excited by the firing that he almost didn't notice the male cardinal that swooped in and alighted in a tree a few feet away. After filling the reserve to its twenty-shell capacity, he glanced up and saw the bird.

Finally, something alive had come into his range. It wasn't a squirrel, but it was wild, and Ned's need to spill blood was raging. His chest heaving with excitement, he brought the .22 up and sighted in on the bright red bundle of feathers fifty feet away. Again, he eased the hammer back, took his breath, exhaled, and slowly began pressing the trigger when suddenly,



before his rifle fired, the thick curtain of brush in the marsh separated beside him and the massive rack of an ancient buck bounded toward him.

Spinning backwards in terror, he felt the .22 fly out of his hand and fire when it hit the ground. The buck, huge, brown, and tangled in vines and briars, bore down on him. For an instant Ned looked into its deep eyes, and he felt the ground sink beside him as a hoof pounded into the soft soil. The animal dipped its snout at the boy, close enough for Ned to smell the wild scent exhaled from its nostrils and see the wood ticks clustered behind its ear. And then, as suddenly as it had come, the buck was gone again and the forest was filled with silence.

When Floral Foshee burst out the screen door and saw her youngest child tearing across the backyard, screaming and crying, mired in mud, bleeding at the knees, and tangled in briars, she thought he must have been beat up by one of the nigra-boys. He could not recount his story, though. Hours later, as a thunderstorm pelted the tin roof reassuringly, Ned's crying slowly ceased.

Deep in Caney Creek Bottom, where the rain fell just as hard, the rifle disappeared into the mud of the marsh, and the old buck, hunting cover and warmth, nestled under a fallen log and slept.

This is a previously unpublished piece of fiction written when Blackmon was a college student, circa 1985.

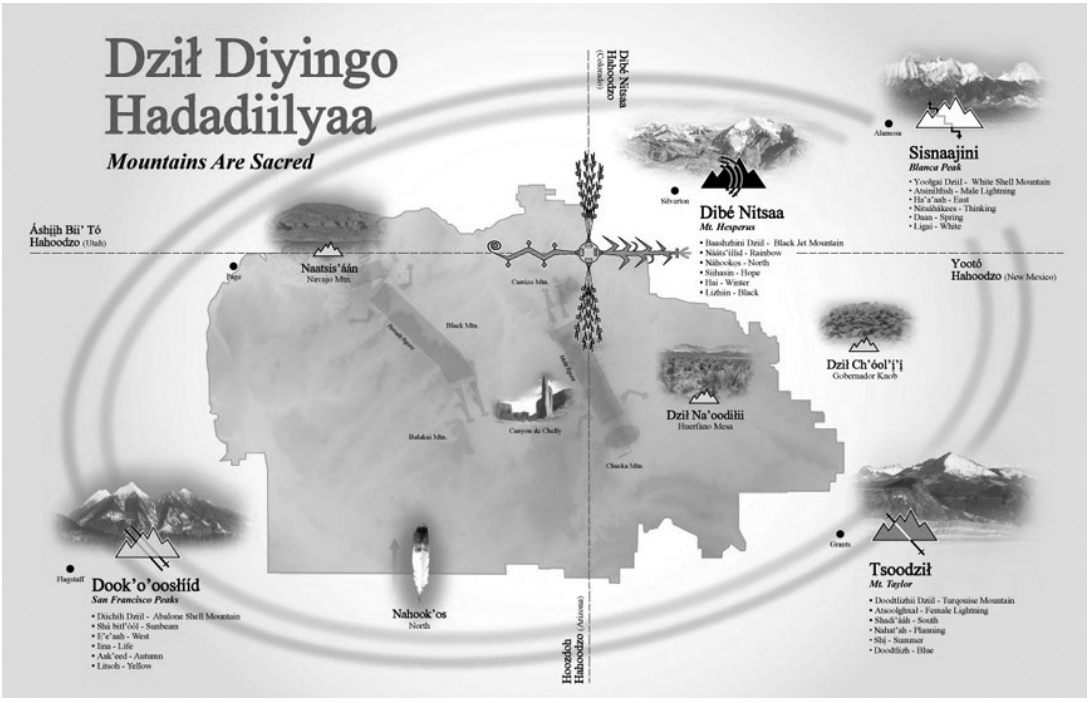
READING THE WEST

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.

NAVAJO SACRED MOUNTAINS

Although Athabaskan people moved from Canada into the Southwest, the Dine *or Navajo claim that their homelands are bound by four sacred mountains at the cardinal directions: Blanca Peak (*Sisnaasini*) near Alamosa, Colorado; Mount Taylor (*Tsoodzil*) north of Laguna, New Mexico; the San Francisco Peaks (*Doko'ooslid*) near Flagstaff, Arizona; and Mount Hesperus (*Dibe Nitsaa*) in the La Plata Mountains of Colorado. Two other mountains, Huerfano Mountain (*Dzilna'oodilii*) and Gobernador Knob (*Ch'ool'I'i*), are at the center of the homeland in New Mexico.*

As explained by geographer Kevin S. Blake at Kansas State University, the mountains are not only repositories of spiritual power, they are elemental in Navajo prayers, chants, and ceremonies. They create a pattern of protection and well-being throughout Dine Bikeyah*, the land of the Navajo. To harm sacred land is to cause the loss of healing power and the ability of a mountain to restore harmony in the lives of the people.*



Source: http://www.chinleusd.k12.az.us/office-of-federal-programs/curriculum-center/

As a consequence of the cultural importance of these mountains, the Navajo Nation filed a petition in 2015 with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against the United States government for allowing a Flagstaff ski resort to make snow out of reclaimed water. As reported by Laurel Morales for Fronteras*:*

Arizona Snowbowl has been pumping treated effluent up the San Francisco Peaks for the past two winters. In 2012, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals allowed the ski resort to make snow out of reclaimed waste water.

With no legal remedies left in the United States, the Navajo Nation filed a petition March 2 with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. It has heard more than 12,000 cases and published dozens of reports on human rights abuses in the western hemisphere.

"It's very important across the world in today's events that the world community has become more advanced in respecting, protecting and remedying where necessary indigenous human rights," said Leonard Gorman, the executive director of the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

The Navajo people, along with 13 other indigenous nations, believe the San Francisco Peaks to be sacred. Navajo medicine men say making snow out of reclaimed wastewater "threatens, desecrates and exploits" their religious freedom.

Sources: Kevin S. Blake, "Contested Landscape of Navajo Sacred Mountains," *North American Geographer*, 3.1, 2001, 29-62; https://www.k-state.edu/geography/kblake/papers/ Contested%20Landscapes%20of%20Navajo%20Sacred%20Mountains.pdf; Laurel Morales, "Navajo Nation Files Petition Against U.S. Over Sacred Mountain," *Fronteras*, 3 March 2015; http://www.fronterasdesk.org/content/9964/navajo-nation-files-petition-against-us-over-sacred-mountain.)

BEARS EARS

In July 2015, leaders from the Navajo Nation and four other tribes (Hopi, Ute Mountain Ute, Pueblo of Zuni, and Ute) founded the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition in an effort to protect the cultural landscape around Bears Ears Mountain. With support from twenty other tribes in the Southwest and the National Congress of American Indians, they proposed to President Obama that he order the creation of the Bears Ears National Monument (1.9 million acres), the most truly "Native" of all federal public lands. The petitioners explained:

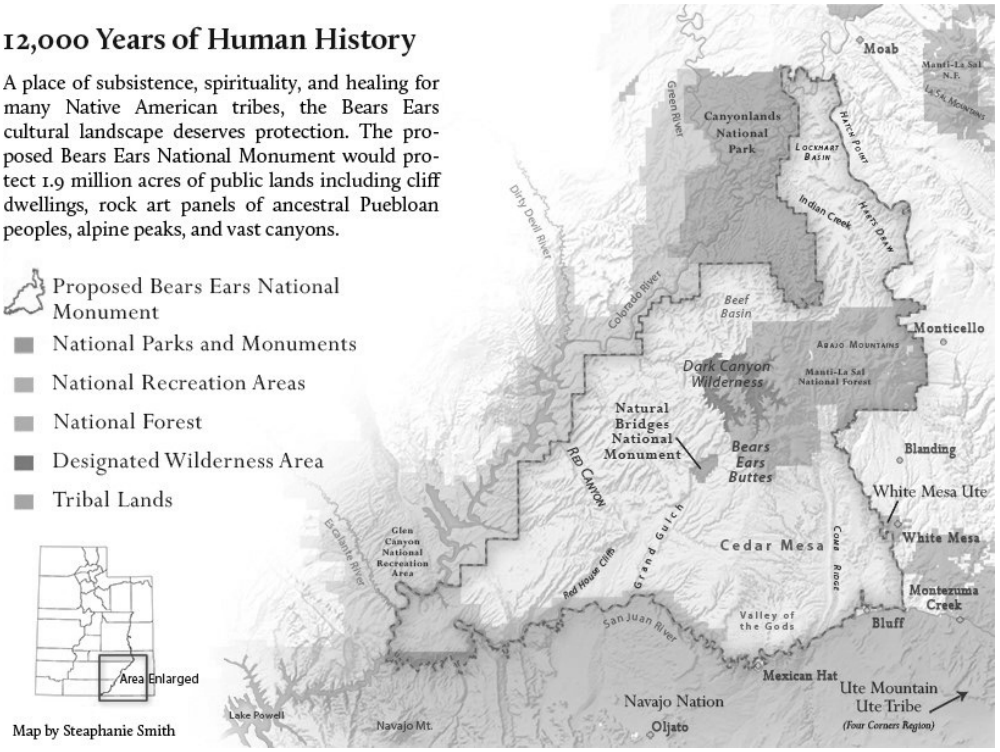
Ever since time immemorial, the Bears Ears area has been important to Native American people as a homeland. In the mid-1800s, Native Americans were forcefully and violently removed from the area and marched to reservations. But the Native bond to Bears Ears is strong and today is a place that embodies that history. Modern Native American people continue to use the Bears Ears area as a place for healing, ceremonies, and the gathering of firewood, plants, and medicinal herbs. When they return to Bears Ears today, Native American people feel the presence of their ancestors everywhere. This landscape records their ancestors' migration routes, ancient roads, great houses, villages, granaries, hogans, wikiups, sweat lodges, corrals, petroglyphs and pictographs, tipi rings, shade houses, and burial grounds.

Our people are surrounded by the spirits of the ancestors, and embraced by the ongoing evolution of their culture and traditions. For Native American people, Bears Ears is a place for healing. It is also a place for teaching children—Native American children and the world's children— about meaningful and lasting connections with sacred and storied lands.

All of this is threatened—by destructive land uses, such as mining and irresponsible off-road vehicle use and by the rampant looting and destruction of the villages, structures, rock markings, and gravesites within the Bears Ears landscape. The Bears Ears National Monument proposal is a bold and inspired plan to stem the tide of this erosion—and protect Bears Ears for the benefit of all.

12,000 Years of Human History

A place of subsistence, spirituality, and healing for many Native American tribes, the Bears Ears cultural landscape deserves protection. The proposed Bears Ears National Monument would protect 1.9 million acres of public lands including cliff dwellings, rock art panels of ancestral Puebloan peoples, alpine peaks, and vast canyons.



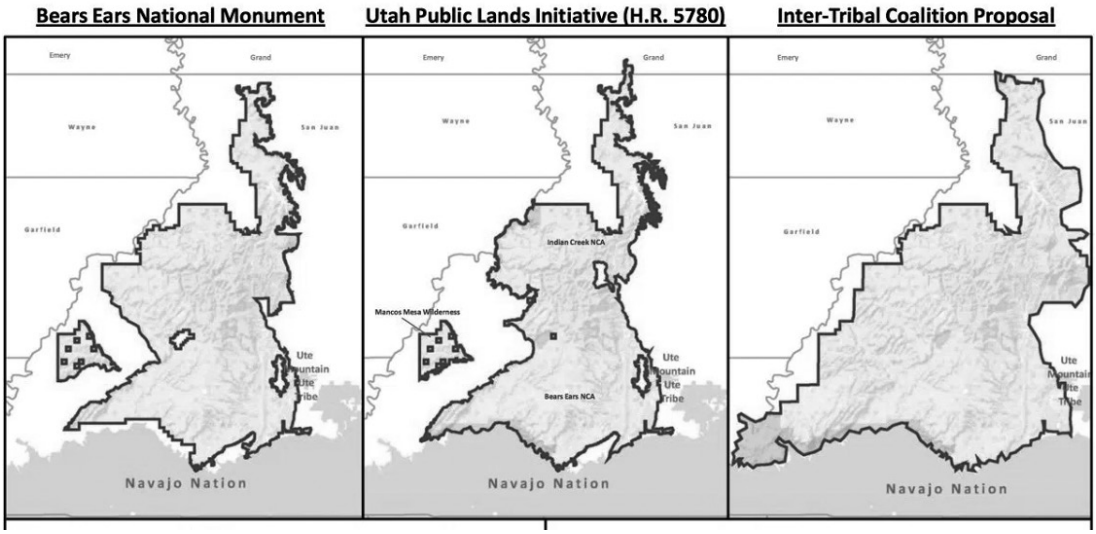
Sources: http://www.bearsearscoalition.org/about-the-coalition/; Grand Canyon Trust: http://www.grandcanyontrust.org/advocatemag/fall-winter-2015/tribes-unite-to-protect-bears-ears

PRESIDENT DECLARES BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Protection of the Bears Ears area will preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources, ensuring that the prehistoric, historic, and scientific values of this area remain for the benefit of all Americans. The Bears Ears area has been proposed for protection by members of Congress, Secretaries of the Interior, State and tribal leaders, and local conservationists for at least 80 years.

The area contains numerous objects of historic and of scientific interest, and it provides world class outdoor recreation opportunities, including rock climbing, hunting, hiking, backpacking, canyoneering, whitewater rafting, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Because visitors travel from near and far, these lands support a growing travel and tourism sector that is a source of economic opportunity for the region.

Source: The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 28 December 2016; https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/28/proclamation-establishment-bears-ears-national-monument.)



A comparison map by the U.S. Dept. of Interior showing the Bears Ears National Monument boundaries, the one proposed by Rep. Rob Bishop (H.R. 5780), and the one outlined by tribal coalitions.

Source: US Department of the Interior

MOUNT GRAHAM

*Another "contested landscape" is Mount Graham (*Dzil nchaa si'an*). Considered sacred by the Apache, it became the site of efforts by the University of Arizona (UA) to build telescopes. The Mount Graham International Observatory is now home to three telescopes: the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope, the Heinrich Hertz Submillimeter Telescope, and the Large Binocular Telescope (LBT). Building the LBT, which particularly obscured the sacred peaks, incurred 40 lawsuits, eight of which ended up before a federal appeals court. Ultimately an act of the U.S. Congress allowed it to move forward. The university's involvement remains controversial:*

By the mid 1990s, UA became the first university to lobby against the listing of an endangered species. It became the first university to fight in court against the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, to arrest an American Indian for praying, and to demand permits be obtained by Apaches to pray on their sacred mountain. UA is also the first university to seek exemption from all U.S. environmental laws, which it chose to do twice to circumvent regulatory processes and court orders that blocked the construction of telescopes on Mount Graham.

Source: Mountain Graham Coalition; http://www.mountgraham.org/content/star-struck-astronomical-abuse-indigenous-sacred-sites

KITT PEAK

Another sacred mountain appropriated by astronomers against Native wishes is Kitt Peak. The Baboquivari Mountains delineate the eastern boundary of the Tohono O'odham reservation outside of Tucson, Arizona.

The Kitt Peak Observatory, established in 1958, now holds 21 telescopes that were once cutting edge. Recently, however, the National Solar Observatory moved its headquarters to Boulder, Colorado. As well, the organization will abandon its solar telescopes at Kitt Peak and in New Mexico for a larger instrument in Hawaii. The McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope, which has held the designation as the world's largest collection of solar telescopes since it was dedicated in 1962, will be replaced by the Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope on the Hawaiian island of Maui in 2019. However, late last year, the Hawaii Supreme Court rescinded the construction permit for the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). Shannon Hall explained the situation in the Scientific American*:*

The court's decision is the most recent battle wound in a years-long contest between astronomers and native Hawaiians as well as environmentalists who oppose the construction because of the sanctity of the mountain. The controversy is nothing new: Mauna Kea is the latest in a long line of mountaintops that have become combat zones between scientists and activists.

… In the 2000s the Kitt Peak National Observatory, built on the tribal reservation of the Tohono O'odham Nation, became the site of another clash when the National Science Foundation (NSF) wanted to build a new $13-million telescope complex called VERITAS (Very Energetic Radiation Imaging Telescope Array System). In 2005 the tribe successfully put a stop to the project, spurring the NSF to decide to build it elsewhere.

… These controversies share many features in common, says Leandra Swanner, a science sociologist and historian at Arizona State University in Tempe. The first source of similarity dates back to before these projects were even conceived. Astronomers first leased properties on Kitt Peak and Mauna Kea in 1958 and 1968, respectively, during a time when native groups and environmentalists had less power to oppose them.

… And for both the TMT and the LBT debates, colonialism hangs heavily over the controversy. The use of sacred American Indian land for the LBT seemed like one more encroachment on native land rights after centuries of infringements by European settlers going back to the 16th century. Hawaii, too, has a long history of Westerners wresting control of land from native Hawaiians and pursuing development projects to the detriment of the environment. Against this backdrop, the TMT in the view of indigenous people is the latest episode of Western oppression on the islands.

Source: Shannon Hall, "Hawaii's Telescope Controversy is the latest in a Long History of Land-Ownership Battles," *Scientific American*, 11 December 2015; https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/hawaii-s-telescope-controversy-is-the-latest-in-a-long-history-of-land-ownership-battles/.)

EDITORIAL MATTER

ISSN 0891-8899 – Weber *is an international, peer-reviewed journal published biannually by The College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah 84408-1405. Full text of this issue and historical archives are available in electronic edition at https://www.weber.edu/weberjournal*

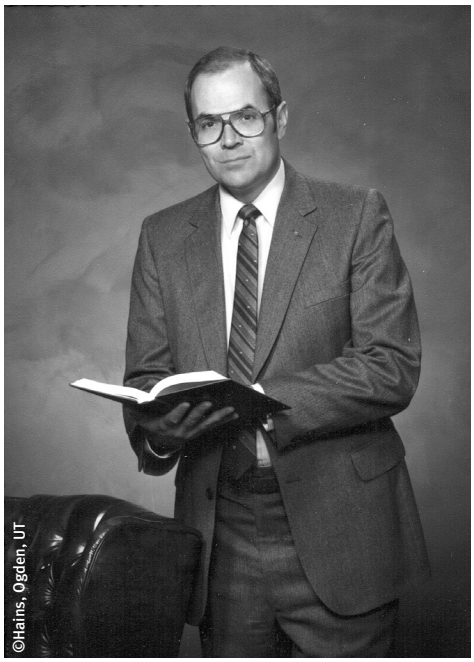
Indexed in: Abstracts of English Studies, Humanities International Complete, Index of American Periodical Verse, MLA International Bibliography, and Sociological Abstracts. Member, Council of Learned Journals.

Subscription Costs: Individuals $20 (outside U.S., $30), institutions $30 (outside U.S., $40). Back issues $10 subject to availability. Multi-year and group subscriptions also available.

Submissions and Correspondence: Editor, WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST *| Weber State University*
1395 Edvalson Street Dept. 1405, Ogden, UT 84408-1405.
801-626-6473 | weberjournal@weber.edu

Copyright © 2017 by Weber State University. All rights reserved. Copyright reverts to authors and artists after publication. Statements of fact or opinion are those of contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the sponsoring institution.

ANNOUNCING
the 2017
Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Poetry Award



to

Kaiser Haq

for

"Inheritance," and other poems

in the Spring 2016 issue

The Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Award of $500 is presented annually to the author of the best poetry published in *Weber* during the previous year.

Funding for this award is generously provided by the Howard family.

Dr. Sherwin W. Howard (1936-2001) was former President of Deep Springs College, Dean of the College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, editor of **Weber Studies,** and an accomplished playwright and poet.

WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST
Weber State University
1395 Edvalson Street, Dept. 1405
Ogden, UT 84408-1405
www.weber.edu/weberjournal

Return Service Requested

Nonprofit Org
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 151
OGDEN, UTAH

An international, peer-reviewed journal spotlighting personal narrative, commentary, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that speaks to the environment and culture of the American West and beyond.

SPRING/SUMMER 2017—VOL. 33, NO2—U.S. $10

CONVERSATIONS

Douglas A. Blackmon, Bethany Schultz Hurst, Margaret Rostkowski, Kay Ryan, Colm Toíbín, Simon Winchester

ESSAYS

Judy Elsley, Kathryn Hummel, Eric Swedin

POETRY

Katharine Coles, David Lee, Brad L. Roghaar, Laura Stott, Nancy Takacs, Mikel Vause

FICTION

Phyllis Barber, Lance Olsen, Ryan Ridge

ART

Pam Bowman

https://www.facebook.com/weberjournal

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY
Lindquist College of Arts & Humanities
http://www.weber.edu/CAH