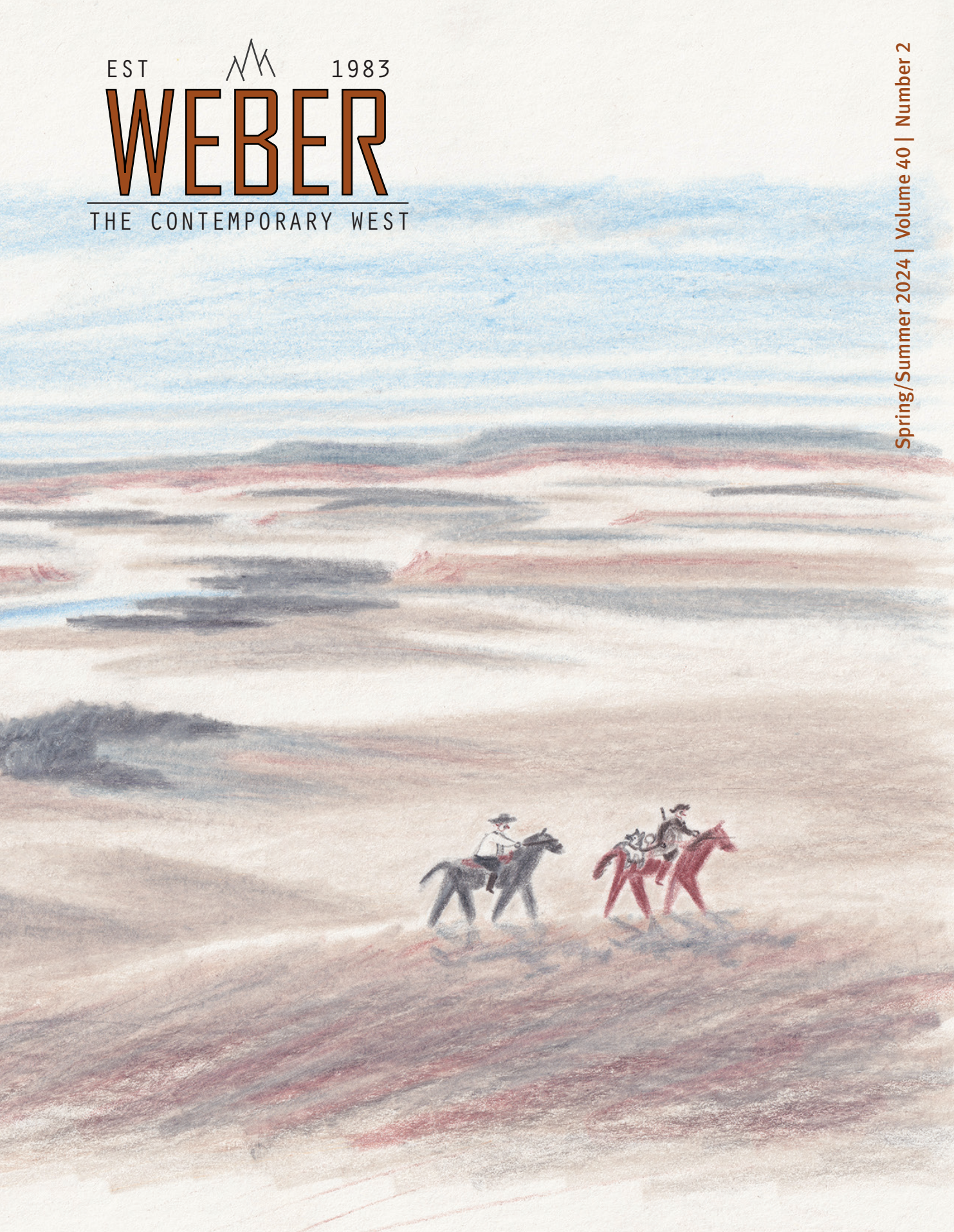
EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Spring/Summer 2024 | Volume 40 | Number 2



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.

INSPIRATION

from the editor's desk

Despite having the oldest water rights in the Colorado River Basin, tribes face disproportionately low access to safe water sources. Native households are 19 times more likely than white households to lack indoor plumbing. In the Navajo Nation — the largest tribe in the United States, with 170,000 members spanning New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. . . — about one-third of households are without access to running water.

—***Walton Family Foundation,***
Ted Kowalski & Heather Tanana,
31 March 2022

Unlike other European immigrants colonizing the west, the Mormons were not looking for gold or other material riches. They were on a mission to establish their holy land, a place called Zion. By 1865, approximately 65,000 Mormons had settled in Utah. And they had built some 1,000 miles of canals to irrigate nearly 150,000 acres of semi-arid farmland. It was a triumph of Manifest Destiny unlike anything else in the American west.

—Annette McGivney,
***The Guardian,* 25 Sept 2022**

Water, water, water. . . . There is no shortage of water in the desert but exactly the right amount, a perfect ratio of water to rock, water to sand, insuring that wide free open, generous spacing among plants and animals, homes and towns and cities, which makes the arid West so different from any other part of the nation. There is no lack of water here unless you try to establish a city where no city should be.

—Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (1968)

In the West, it is said, water flows uphill toward money. And it literally does, as it leaps three thousand feet across the Tehachapi Mountains in gigantic siphons to slake the thirst of Los Angeles, as it is shoved a thousand feet out of Colorado River canyons to water Phoenix and Palm Springs and the irrigated lands around them.

— Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert* (1986)

Cover art: William Grill, artwork from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



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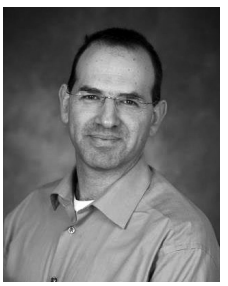
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"PUT IT TO YOUR EAR, AND YOU HEAR THE SEA"

CHARLIE VASQUEZ
LAURA STOTT &
SUNNI BROWN WILKINSON


Gasper Tringale

A Conversation with LOUISE GLÜCK

The beauty of Louise Glück's work is startling and brave. Reading her poems feels as if someone has finally unlocked an ancient voice buried deep inside each of us. One of the most revered writers of our time, Glück is known for her candid and often autobiographical examination of the world. During her writing career, which spans over seven decades, she has drawn from mythology, personal grief, and the natural world in order to examine loss of innocence, trauma, mortality, and transformation. Glück's collections are known to be compact and intense and her poems offer what critic Helen Vendler calls "an alternative to first-person 'confession,' while remaining indisputably personal."

Born in New York City in 1943, Glück began writing at an early age. Her debut poetry collection, Firstborn, *was published in 1968 and notable works that followed include* The Triumph of Achilles *(1985),* Ararat *(1990),* The Wild Iris *(1992), which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry,* Vita Nova *(1999),* The Seven Ages *(2001), and most recently* Winter Recipes from the Collective *(2021). Glück is the author of thirteen collections of poetry, two poetry chapbooks, two essay collections on poetry, and a book of fiction titled* Marigold and Rose: A Fiction (2022) *about the first year of life of twin sisters. In all of Glück's writings there abides a deep sense of awe at being alive, a sharp and penetrating dissection of pain and wonder, and language that is both unsettling and incandescent.*

As a Nobel and Pulitzer prize winner, a former U.S. Poet Laureate, and winner of numerous fellowships, awards, and honors, Glück continues to influence generations not only as a writer but as a teacher passionate about mentoring future writers.

The following is a compilation of two interviews that took place at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference at Weber State University in Spring 2023. They have been braided together for ease of reading. Ms. Glück's participation at NULC was the last public event she attended as a visiting writer before her death in October 2023.

(Wilkinson) Louise, we are so fortunate to have you here. I think I speak for everyone when I say that we are thrilled that you've traveled here – especially in difficult weather – and that we can gather with you here today to learn more about you, your writing, and your work. I want to start off on a slightly personal note. We met about nineteen years ago when you came and did a reading in Salt Lake City. It was a phenomenal reading, and to this day, it is probably my favorite reading ever. As you read your work, it seemed to me that it was less about crafting a poem and then performing it than it was about each line revealing itself to you as you were reading it. You read each poem very slowly. You read each line with care. It was as if it were coming to you, for the first time, in that moment. I stood at the back of that room, completely enthralled. These poems, that I had read so many times before, you read as if they were just coming to you, and we were experiencing them together. It made me think that maybe these truths that come to you in your writing, and then come and present themselves to you again in your readings, that there is something sacred in those. It felt, to me, that language itself *is a spiritual practice for you. So, I want to start by asking you, what role does spirituality play in your life and in your writing?*

That's impossible really to answer. First of all, I should say that I really must have been exceptional. I don't like reading my poems aloud. I feel like a salesman. I feel remote from work that comes from the center of my life, and to feel that degree of estrangement about something so important to you is extremely painful. I don't feel, when I listen to myself, as I read, that the words are coming out and that I'm just thinking them. It's a miracle that that was your experience. But those of you who will be listening tonight, I wouldn't make any bets along those lines.

Spirituality is a word I don't like. There are a great many MFA programs now, and they encourage a notion that suggests that diligence and application are the way to excellence. They discourage the kind of patience that I think is essential to any writing life. There will be periods in which inspiration does not visit you. To continue your industrious journey of poetry, like a silkworm, seems to me a mistake. It doesn't allow that abyss to be experienced, out of which something new will emerge. So, I try to teach my students to understand that you're not always moved to write. And yeah, if you're in such a program, it's good to keep the juices flowing. I discovered teaching after years of thinking that the way to write great art was to do nothing else. Once I realized, after two years of silence, that I might not be a poet, I thought, well, I better find some better work than secretarial work. I took a one-semester teaching job. The minute I started teaching, the minute I got back into the world, I started writing again. And the other thing that was interesting to me was that I feared that, as a teacher, if I was in a period of not writing, as I certainly was when I began, I would so resent the appearance of power in the work that I was reading, that I had not written. I would sabotage it, out of envy. And I think this is why I started writing again. I felt the same exhilaration and excitement in looking at student poems—poems that had moments of real force, and life, and originality—as I would have toward my own work, helping those poems to become the most memorable poems that they could be. Teaching is important, but, in answer to

To continue your industrious journey of poetry, like a silkworm, seems to me a mistake. It doesn't allow that abyss to be experienced, out of which something new will emerge.

your question, everything that I do comes from some deep imperative. That imperative translates into something that could be called play. If you're not having an adventure when you're writing, if you're not having a good time—which doesn't have to mean you're writing merry poems; it means that you're going somewhere you haven't been before, and something is unfolding in front of you that you had not anticipated—if you don't have that feeling, then something is going to be missing from the finished work, or at least in my life. So, I would call that "spirit."

(Wilkinson) In The Seven Ages*, my favorite poem is "The Sensual World." There's a line in the poem that says, "I loved nothing more: deep privacy of the sensual life." So, as a follow-up question, what in the sensual world has been exciting to you in your life? What has helped you in your writing to engage in life?*

I think to engage in life, the first thing you have to do is to get rid of the piece of the part of the question that says, "What has helped you in your writing?" It seems to me you live your life and, if you're lucky, writing comes of it. You should live your life following the enthusiasms that present themselves to you, which will be particular to you and not to some generic notion that you have of poets or writers. I live through my senses, always—smell, taste, sight, sound, food, music, love, pain—all of these things register profoundly. I don't think this is particular to me; I think it's commonplace. And the other thing to say is that every poem makes its own world. So, within that poem, that statement could be made. But if you try to make that a kind of policy, or rubric, that informs everything I write, it won't work. But there, that's a poem about the sensual life, and also the degree to which it can't save you.

(Wilkinson) You have said before that some of your poetry collections were written in a very short period of time, even feverishly. I think you've said that, particularly, about The Wild Iris*. These are collections that are typically very focused, very central, to a certain kind of theme. So, I'm wondering – moving on to your work* Winter Recipes from the Collective *– will you tell us what the circumstances were as you wrote the collection, about the time and place in particular?*

If you're not having an adventure when you're writing, if you're not having a good time – which doesn't have to mean you're writing merry poems; it means that you're going somewhere you haven't been before, and something is unfolding in front of you that you had not anticipated – if you don't have that feeling, then something is going to be missing from the finished work, or at least in my life.

It was not written quickly. ***The Wild Iris*** was. ***Vita Nova*** was even faster; ***Vita Nova*** was six weeks. ***The Wild Iris*** I'm a little sick of, but ***Vita Nova*** I'm still proud of. My newest book, which is prose, was written in three weeks, three ecstatic weeks in which I felt inhabited by these two wonderful voices that came from nowhere and then left. They went away, and I was all alone again. ***Winter Recipes from the Collective*** was slow. When I finished the book before that, ***Faithful and Virtuous Night***, I felt a degree of pride-in-book that lasted an unusually long time, and it suggested to me that I was, perhaps, at the end of what I was going to be able to say during my human life. More typically, before that, I would come to hate a book pretty quickly. The repudiation of what had come before makes room for something

to come after. But I seemed to be unable to repudiate *Faithful and Virtuous Night*. So, I thought, well, that's it. And then, the poems that began after that sounded to me different. I mean, for one thing, they ended very differently; they ended abruptly. And I had had different kinds of endings in my writing life—sometimes the kinds of poems that end by drifting away, melting away, sometimes the sort that end definitively, like a judge's gavel. This was different; these poems just stopped. I thought it was interesting, because several life-changing things happened during that period. Most crucially, my sister became ill and died after several long cancers had piled on top of each other. That was one of the closest relationships of my life. There was just the two of us, and she was the person I had known at every stage. She had been my companion, my rival, my comrade, my enemy, my beloved. I mean, there were practically no roles we did not play in each other's lives. So, that happened, and then COVID happened.

The repudiation of what had come before makes room for something to come after. But I seemed to be unable to repudiate Faithful and Virtuous Night. *So, I thought, well, that's it. And then, the poems that began after that sounded to me different. I mean, for one thing, they ended very differently; they ended abruptly. And I had had different kinds of endings in my writing life – sometimes the kinds of poems that end by drifting away, melting away, sometimes the sort that end definitively, like a judge's gavel. This was different; these poems just stopped.*

Obviously, the initial stages of COVID were terrifying. And I, by that time, lived alone. When the first lockdown happened, I left California, where I'd been teaching, and I flew back to Cambridge, where I live. I'd been away for months, and when I got back, there was this feeling of estrangement and discontinuity. I regularly looked at my apartment and had the conviction that the furniture had been moved, even though no one had been in the apartment. The bed could not have been moved, but nothing looked right. I could not convince myself that this was the place where I lived. What fixed the feeling for me was seeing friends. So, I get home, and right away I see all my close friends, and by the end of a week I felt like I was home again. But this particular year, I flew home on March 15th, which was the day we couldn't go out anymore. And so, I get to this place that isn't my home anymore, and I can't see any of my friends, and I had no food in the house. This was harrowing. But as COVID evolved, and this sense of "pulling-in" evolved—even given my sense that my poems came out of my worldly, busy social life—something really remarkable started to happen. I would describe it as a kind of "shedding away" of what was unnecessary, and a clarification of what was necessary. At the same time, I began to have a longing to go back to Vermont, where I have lived for about twenty-five or thirty years. And because of COVID, I badly wanted to be in this place that seemed to me pure and clean. Ultimately, I bought a house there, because you could buy houses there for much less than almost anywhere in the world.

Anyway, the book was finished during COVID. I think some of the strongest poems are the poems that came out of COVID, like the last one in the book. I wrote those poems as I was taking my daily exercise—no more gym, no more classes—just a walk, which, in Cambridge, was a sort of prisoner's walk. I did the same walk every day, so that I would

know how long the walk was, and I wrote a lot of poems in my head. Not a lot, because it's a small book, but I wrote some of those poems in my head. The whole thing took probably six years, and then a few years of silence beforehand, so longer than most books.

(Wilkinson) I really appreciate your candor. Sometimes you are a lightning rod, right? Sometimes things come, and then sometimes you have those long periods where they don't, but we shouldn't panic during those periods, right?

Well, you do panic. (Laughter) You're not okay with periods of silence. It's the abyss. It's crucifixion. It's terrible. (Laughter)

(Stott) But we shouldn't force it, just wait. If it's silent, wait – rather than be belaboring the page. Is that correct?

It's true for me. I mean, there may be people who are made so nervous by that sort of capitulation that they do better to keep up the drill of writing daily. But for me, that was simply productive of increased panic, because the things that I was writing in those periods were so utterly dreadful, and there was very little eked out, you know, drips. I would write a noun, usually with a definite article, "the tree," and I couldn't get a verb. "Stands"—that was a day's work, you know. So, it was better for me just to re-enter life fully and hope. But the sense of despair that these periods produce, that's vivid.

(Stott) There is also that time of life where, for instance, for me, now, with a full-time job and small kids, being able to carve out those spaces to get to the page is sometimes difficult. But, I still do it. Do you have advice on this? I sometimes worry about this with my students as well, if they don't have a class giving them assignments. . . making that space, that time, in your life for writing when things get intense or busy, or, like you said, when there are those abysses that are very difficult to get out of. What do you do to get out of that?

I don't have any quick hints for getting out. I just believe in patience, and I also think that the students who leave class and don't write more poems are probably not supposed to be writing poems in their lives. If they were, they would. As for how to make space, it seems to me that an equal danger is the ceremonious ***making*** of space, which puts too much emphasis on an art that has to be, has to ***feel***, like, furtive, clandestine, private-time stolen from the life. The minute that it becomes the bright-lit purpose of the life, even though I know it to be that, it's suicidal. I don't write that way. I've seen it also in my students. There's a big prize at Yale for the best undergraduate writer. I have nothing to do with choosing who wins, which is good, because I'm the teacher of everybody, so I wouldn't want to choose among them. But, the people who win this very big prize then feel compelled to spend a year doing nothing but writing. And when this happens to them, they've usually just finished work on a thesis. Often, the thesis manuscripts are extraordinary, and many of them go on to be parts of books. But they're tapped; they're emptied out; they've used everything that they have accumulated to that point. They've had this year of ceremonious writing, and, for them, it's terrifying. They do nothing, or they write. I have a former student, who is now in law school at Berkeley, and she showed me her poems from the Clap-year, The Clap Prize, and they are one after another ***terrible***, just terrible. But, she's capable of great work. And you can say to her, "Tiana, this is, you know. . . put it away, you save that one." For her, it was restorative. It reminded her of the fact that you can write bad poems and still be a poet. That better be true.

(Wilkinson) I think it's so helpful for young writers to see that things will come. I wanted to lean in a little bit further into Winter Recipes from the Collective*, which I*

I just believe in patience, and I also think that the students who leave class and don't write more poems are probably not supposed to be writing poems in their lives. If they were, they would. As for how to make space, it seems to me that an equal danger is the ceremonious making *of space, which puts too much emphasis on an art that has to be, has to* feel*, like, furtive, clandestine, private-time stolen from the life. The minute that it becomes the bright-lit purpose of the life, even though I know it to be that, but if I live like that, it's suicidal. I don't write that way.*

found to be a remarkable collection. As you say, it is fairly slight, but there's so much in there. Several of your collections have leaned into fable, scripture, mythology, narratives of the ancient or natural worlds, to examine the human experience. This particular collection seems to lean into many references to Eastern sensibilities, practices, and philosophy; poems about bonsai tree caretaking, and references to Chinese characters. A few particular lines that I love read, "Perhaps you will attain that enviable emptiness into which all things flow, like the empty cup in the Daodejing," and, in a later poem, "The Chinese were right, she said, to revere the old." So, I am curious what drew you to this theme that seems to surface a lot in Winter Recipes*?*

I have no idea. (Laughter) Something of that came to me in a dream. It was so out of left field that I was immediately drawn and began improvising worlds around a bonsai tree. I don't know why I would have had a dream about a bonsai tree. I don't know all that much about Asia. I hate travel. I haven't ever been there. I do have Asian students, but it's not as though they gave me tutorials in Asian studies. I think if a totem appears to you in a dream, and something in your waking life adheres to it, it's a prompt, so you start riffing around it, that's how all this happened. I started reading up a little, just in the most cursory way. I wasn't trying to make myself a scholar in these fields. I began with nothing, but you pick up facts. Sometimes you pick up inaccurate facts, but that doesn't mean they can't be used; in fact, they can be used interestingly. What was very strange about those poems is that, shortly after this book was finished, my son had, at the age of 47, twin daughters, and they're half-Chinese. When I was writing these poems, he didn't even have a Chinese girlfriend, she appeared later. What I feel about that material is that it was clairvoyant, but it wasn't. Please don't quote that. (Laughter) It pleases me to think so, but do I really think it, no.

(Stott) Along these same lines, I'd like to talk about an experience I had with one of your early collections, The House on Marshland*. It wasn't the first book that I owned of yours, but nearly one of the first. Right from the beginning, the first poem, "All Hallows," the experience I had when I read that poem, I was a graduate student, and I felt all of this electricity coming off of the page. It did something that I feel a lot of your poetry does, which is that it has this sense of being grounded in this world, but there is something else happening – you're reaching into some other world. There is a dream-like element to your work, even today. It's one of the qualities that attracts me to your poetry. Will you talk about that a little bit, how poetry can do that? It can be very much here, but then not here, at the same time.*

I can try. It's a complicated question. First of all, what I was talking about with *Winter Recipes* is different *quality*. That first poem in that book *did* come from an actual dream, but the dream-like quality that certain poems invoke, that isn't translated or decanted from actual dreams. I certainly know the quality you mean, but how to account for it is difficult. All I can say is that as a writer, you know when it's *not* there. I mean, you know if the words that you're setting down are clear, literal, true, maybe even suggestive. But the poem isn't straddling realms. I like poems that seem to mean several things at once. I don't always write them, but when I do, I'm happier. But, how to describe it, or account for it, that would take a great deal of time and thought. I don't know how to account for it, but I could probably describe it, given time to think it through.

(Vasquez) One line in Winter Recipes from the Collective *reads, "the book contains only recipes for winter, when life is hard. In spring, anyone can make a fine meal." What, to you, defines a good meal in this poetic and metaphorical sense?*

Well, what those lines say is that when an abundance of ingredients present themselves, inexhaustibly, it's easy to just put them on the table—you put the fresh peaches on the table, and the new lettuces with a little olive oil—you can't go wrong. But when what you have is snow, ice, and preserved meat—it's harder. So, what's being talked about is old age and the kind of thrill that comes from making something memorable at a point when you don't have a lot of raw materials, but you're up for the challenge. I have a number of good things to say about old age. I don't mean on the page, I mean in life; it's surprising to me. I think what that is saying is the people in this strange commune and/or collective, doing these dream-like, surreal things like gathering moss—men going into the woods to gather moss—all of this came out of a dream. It was actually a couple I know, gathering the moss, in the dream. They are very sanctimonious people— literally sanctimonious, not religious. The dream had them making sandwiches out of preserved moss. And all of this seemed to be just incredibly funny. The poem that emerged had about it a kind of valor and pathos that I found interesting. I think it was the first poem written for this book. And I had the sense that I would be drawing on it. But it was a slow draw.

(Stott) Yesterday, you talked about how there was a possible clairvoyant moment in a poem. There is an interesting history within Hebrew literature where poet and prophet can mean the same thing. I'd also like to talk about the adventurous quality of following a poem and seeing what it's going to reveal to you. Will you talk about poetry's role in revealing things to us, whether that is us, *the* writer *of the poem, or for readers, as they come to poetry?*

Well, I think the experience that the writer has should predict the experience that the reader has. If I'm writing, and I feel a sense of being taken some place I've never been, then I know that the poem is dead. It's conceivable that a dead poem can be brought to life, unlike other dead things, but it's crucial to recognize when the thing on the page is inert. The feeling of the unexpected, of the poem taking turns that you don't anticipate, this seems to be crucial. It's the opposite of having an advance of writing, an idea, for what you want the poem to be. That idea precludes the sort of adventuring that I'm talking about. It seems to me that if it isn't happening to the writer, it's not going to happen for the reader either. Ideally, the writer is breaking trail for the reader, and the experiences will be parallel.

One of the ways that you can encourage such things to happen, I think, is that if a poem seems to you to be leaden, inert, change a declarative sentence to a question; change a negative to a positive. When I was

writing a poem that has since become very well known, "Mock Orange," at the beginning of *The Triumph of Achilles*, the first two lines say, "It is not the moon, I tell you / It is these flowers / lighting the yard. / I hate them. / I hate them, as I hate sex." The poem goes on to talk about that hatred of sex, as compared to the hatred of flowers. What's hated is the inebriating quality; the sense of possession; the sense of transformation, in the case of sex, being when the act ends, or the romance ends. Those lines, originally, were, "I love them. / I love them as I love sex." And I thought, "Oh, God, no!" Then, I tried saying, "I hate them," and I thought, "Now that's interesting; there is something I can do with this." So, my point is, don't be invested in your original ideas, because they may be unproductive; they may curtail imagination too strictly. If there is a tactic that will put you on the path of going somewhere new, it is: change what you say.

(Stott) I like that, thank you. I'm now thinking of a few poems that I need to do that with.

Well, just go back in with the opposite, and see what happens.

(Vasquez) Speaking of the feeling of the unexpected, in talking about the bird in the poem, "An Endless Story," you say, "once it is kissed / it becomes a human being. So it cannot fly." And later, when talking about love, you write, "we search for it all our lives, / even after we find it," Why the departure from the usual "love sets you free," and why do we search for it all our lives?

Well, we do. I think it's the great animating force. But, what the line says is, "the usual myth is you find love at the end." And fairytales operate that way, the stories end with lovers coming together. The frog becomes a prince; the story that the old woman tells follows along with that model. But, she has a perspective that makes her the spinner of such a tale. We're, all of us, at every moment of our lives, waiting to be transformed. Transformed means you get to keep everything you have, but you add. So, you don't lose anything that you value, but you become "other." That sense of being entrapped in a single-self disappears—transformation. The obvious place that people look for transformation is love, because it actually does provide that sense of transformation. In its initial stages, falling in love is transforming; the world looks different. What the lines say, which I think is true, is that there's a love story. You look for love, you find a mate, you live with a mate, and in many cases, you do find durable but mutable happiness, or you flourish within the relationship. That wish for transformation, I think, continues beyond the falling in love. And so, what the line says is, there is no stopping point. As long as you're alive, you're looking to be transformed, searching for love, in order to catalyze that transformation. And even after you find it, you're still looking for it. I actually believed this, but I didn't ***know*** I believed it, until I wrote these lines. And I may not believe it at some point, but the point is that it's an insight specific to the world that's created in that poem.

(Wilkinson) I love your explanations; there are *worlds in each of your poems. But then there are these startling truths that bubble up to the surface that, I feel, have withstood time. Each time I go back to those poems, each time I re-enter those worlds, there are certain truths that still startle me, that still feed me. So, I appreciate that.*

I was struck by the theme of time, which of course we write about, and think about, and carry around with us as mortals. But, it seems to play a very large role in Winter Recipes *as well. There are many references to clocks and watches; there is this sense of being in time, but being out of time at the same time. I found interesting the fact that the title contains "winter," and then that lines up beautifully with the line that*

you just read, "the way we loved when we were young, as though there were no time at all." I'm wondering if there is something in this collection about the process of aging and facing life. You said briefly a moment ago that you have a lot to say about aging. So, what can you impart to us?

One of the things about age, for a writer, is that any condition that affords you new information is a gold mine. Because out of that new information can come new perspectives and new material. So, no matter how inconvenient the new information may be, at some level, it's a godsend; it will keep you alive as a writer trying to find what there is in that shift, or change, that you can transform and use. There are different stages of aging. And there's a long, long period that is a period of diminishment. I've been writing about the fear of death since I was three years old. So, the new for me, at this point of my life, is not the fear of death. When I was young, and healthy, there was still the possibility of dying tragically young, which no longer exists. So that's actually quite thrilling. But what I hadn't realized was the great challenge of diminishment. The diminishment of faculties, the sense that your body is beginning to make unwise aesthetic decisions, all of these things. (Laughter) But then, when you're finally quite old, certifiably old—people offer you wheelchairs at airports—what you realize is that, you've come to a still point. It's not that movement has stopped, that time has stopped, but you've accustomed yourself to the fact that many things have changed. And I experienced—after the age of mid-70s somewhere—this strange, euphoric acceptance. And the other thing that happened was that when I bought my house in Vermont, I went back to a place that was astonishingly unchanged in the thirty years I'd been away. I mean, I visited, but the point is, this particular piece of Vermont hadn't changed. The streets in Montpelier are exactly what they were when I went there at twenty-seven

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years old. My oldest friends are still there. We were girls and boys together, and now we're ready for assisted living—not quite, but you know, we're moving toward it. And that sense of wholeness, and the sense that you have a perch from which you can see the whole of a human life, that is extraordinary. The feelings about time change—I had this sense, as I was living through all those years, that it was taking forever, sometimes moving fast, but oftentimes moving slowly. If you'd told me then how many years I've been alive, I'd have said, impossible. But what it now seems to me is I feel as though I have had the lifespan of a mosquito—you just suddenly feel all time collapse. But it isn't harrowing, it's deeply strange. And it puts you in realms that are unfamiliar. You couldn't have had these experiences earlier, because you couldn't have had that much to look back on. So, all of that I find very interesting. And I think that's what is in the book. If you had told me, when I finished that book, that two years later I'd write, in three weeks, a book of fable, I'd have said, I couldn't possibly. But it is that feeling of depletion that then creates the new, and makes that new seem miraculous, because

you would have sworn you were utterly empty. So, when that happens, it is a great gift.

(Wilkinson) There's a sense of looking backwards and forwards in life, and looking inward as well. Toward the end of the book, the speaker of the poem says that "the fire is still there." There is still something there that continues to surprise. So, it was a book that was strange, and it was also very hopeful.

I think so. I mean, people have described it as bleak. Well, the things that people have said about my books dazzle me sometimes. You can't be sure that you're the one who's right about what the books are, there's no way to know. I certainly thought the book was filled with hope and kindness, and it's weirdly expansive even though it was a tiny, little thing.

(Stott) In your Nobel lecture, you talk about your early experiences reading Blake and Dickinson, and the intimate experience you felt with them when reading those poems. Oftentimes, when I read your poetry, I feel like I'm being spoken to directly. I wonder if you could talk about that. Is that a conscious experience that you're attempting to create with your readers? And how much are you thinking about that, either while you're writing or revising the poems?

It's what I prize in the art. It's what spoke to me when I was a child, that sense of the voice in the seashell. You hold it; it's a shell; it is inert; it's not speaking. You put it to your ear, and you hear the sea. I want poems that are like that, or like notes in bottles that you rescue from the waves—private information disclosed to a single reader, that feeling of an intimate bond with a listener—as opposed to, say, stadium poetry or rhetorical poetry that's meant for a large audience; or even a certain kind of meditative poetry that is the self, talking to the self. Wallace Stevens's poems have a kind of grandeur and privacy; they're gorgeous. He's a magnificent artist, but for me too self-involved to be useful to me as a writer, because I'm excluded. It's a kind of private audience he's having with himself. To many writers he's the great stimulator, but to me, he silences me. Of course, there would be people who would say, that's a good thing.

(Stott) This might be a selfish question, but I really like to garden, and I've noticed from your poems is it safe to say that you also like to garden?

It's safe.

(Stott) What is the relationship between your writing process and gardening? Is there anything there?

No. I mean, gardening, like cooking, which I also love. . . . You do hover over and worry over a new plant or seed. But, there's a deep sense that things will probably go well for the seed. It will sprout, and from the sprout will come whatever it is programmed to be.

I don't have that feeling as a writer at all. Things come to nothing, or there are no seeds, there's nothing to plant. I find ritual activities that take me out of my head to be enormously consoling, and therefore useful. Anything that consoles, that diminishes anxiety, is useful to a writer, I think.

(Wilkinson) Do you have a favorite collection, poetry collection in particular, that is close to your heart?

No. It changes.

(Stott) Last night, you mentioned how sometimes you come under the spell of a book, or a single poem, that you love, something that you just continually read. You talked about Mark Strand's book. Will you share another book that is like that for you, or a poem?

Right now, I am basically reading one poem, a poem by Tomas Tranströmer. I don't speak Swedish, but I read it in the English transla-

tion. It's called "Vermeer," and I can't get enough of it. It's clear to me that this poem is trying to teach me something, and the fact that I can't get enough of it means I haven't been taught yet. Everything else, no matter how masterful or brilliant, or thrilling, seems, at this moment, to me, besides the point. The point is this poem. There's usually something like that. There was Mark Strand's book, ***Almost Invisible***, when I was working on ***Faithful and Virtuous Night***. Other books have enthralled me in that way, and writers whose effects I have thought I have to figure out.

(Wilkinson) Is there an element to writing that uses obsession? Whether we like it or not, we're sort of consumed by something that doesn't release us for some time. Because your collection seems so carefully centered on certain things, has obsession played some role?

Absolutely. But the role that it plays is not that an idea presents itself and you doggedly turn it into something that passes for obsession. What obsession means is that the thing won't relinquish you—an idea, a kind of language, oftentimes it's a tone. And if it does relinquish you, then you can prop it up. You've gotten what you can from it. If you keep brooding about it, thinking about it, playing with it, toying with it, then it is doing the work for you. All you're doing is succumbing. And when I say succumbing, you succumb with a certain kind of savvy as you write for many years. You will know when you have a fish on the line, but every fish is finite, the obsessions end. Whatever vein you were mining, you get what you can from it. You can't go back.

(Stott) Do you see any underlying currents or themes that have developed over the course of your writing career? You've written for a very long time.

Yes, seven decades. In a way, it would be more for a reader to say such things. I think, from the beginning of my writing career, when I really was a little tot, I was preoccupied with the idea of mortality. It seemed to me so agonizing even when I was very young, to think that the magnificence of the world was offered to us, and there was a "use by" date attached—not to the world, though now it seems to be—to our ability to participate in it.

I think the subject of mortality has been preoccupying from the beginning of time for me. And disappearance. I can recite the first poem of mine that I remember, written when I was probably about six years old. My father used to write doggerel poems. So, here's my childish poem, and you can see that it's of a piece with later work: "If Kittycats liked roast beef bones, and doggies sipped up milk, and elephants walked 'round the town, all dressed in purest silk, if robins went out coasting, then slid down, crying 'Wee,' if all this happened to be true, then where would people be?" I mean, I am still, sort of, writing that poem.

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(Stott) That's amazing. Thank you for sharing that. I remember writing poems when I was that young, but I don't remember any of them. I had a conversation with my students about what they would be interested in hearing, and one person said they would really love to hear you speak about your organization process and about putting together a collection. Is there anything you do, logistically, to help that process? Is there an order you put things in?

Every book is completely different, and learning to put one book together isn't going to help you with the next book at all. But, I do have rough models. I put books together as though a reader would start on the first page and end on the last—as someone would with a novel. I realize that a lot of people don't read books of poetry this way, but I shape them this way. It's essential to me, because it's a way of enlarging the scope of an individual collection of lyric poems. You make a larger shape, an arc. I like to work from both ends toward the middle, and I like to work in clusters. An analogy would be to a batting order, though you don't always want your big hitter third. Sometimes, it depends on the material; it depends on the book. But, I usually have a sense, as I'm working on a manuscript. I get to the poem that I think is going to be first—sometimes it turns out that it's last; first and last can oftentimes be flipped. I work in little constellations of three or four poems; you get a little group. It'll be necessary in some books to group together poems that are thematically related, and then, in other books, to separate them—you puzzle it out, you try different arrangements, and then you look at it, and, if you turn the page and your heart sinks, then you know there's something wrong with the order. Some books are very easy to put together, some books are not. One of the things that I've learned is, if a book seems really recalcitrant, nothing I can think of makes the book, as a whole, work; it usually means that something's missing. That was notably true with ***Ararat,*** and I had to wait a year, doing nothing, thinking I can't write another of these poems, I'm done, I've finished with whatever this mode can give me. But, I hadn't finished. The first poem and the last poem were written a year after all the rest. Then, the minute I had those, I could put the book together in three minutes. But, it took a year of waiting.

(Stott) Oh, that's really fascinating. I feel like there are a couple of books where the beginning poem feels like it casts a spell of some kind. Then, I feel like, okay, I'm ready to read more. Another concern that I hear about from students is that they are worried about their process. They like to ask how you do it. Do you want to talk about process at all?

I don't know what that word means, I really don't. It suggests that you can work out a process that will serve you in every poem that you write. That's never been my experience. Everything is done as though you'd never done it before, except at a certain point, when you're used to certain kinds of obstacles, walls, and periods where you get to a certain point and the poem is not done, but you cannot think what the next move is. You can be stuck for a long time. I mean a year, two years, is not unknown to me. I would say, stay away from rigid formulations for how you should work and how often you should write. You have to let time and the unconscious work on your behalf.

(Vasquez) What was the hardest part of starting out as a poet? What advice would you have for a beginner like me?

Be patient and develop a tough skin. You're going to have to deal, if you continue to write, with all manner of public response. If you're lucky, you'll deal with praise and approbation—that has its own set of problems. You'll certainly have to deal with periods of being completely ignored. And then, there'll be mild

regard, which is almost the worst (Laughter), because it seems to have taken your measure and accorded you something microscopic. I've been target practice; I've been on the top of Olympus; I've been treated with contempt. "If you like this sort of thing, you might like her," that kind of remark, and you have to bear up under all of that. And not only that, the humiliation of knowing that, if something has appeared in print, everyone you know, who reads, may have read it. So, you slink around town until the worst is over. And, of course, it doesn't matter to anyone but you, but you do need a certain kind of toughness. That doesn't preclude the porousness that lets you take in criticism. And you have to stay open to that, especially as poems are being written—seek out response, because how many poems worth remembering will anyone write? A finite number. So, you want everything you do to be as good as, as memorable as, it can possibly be. If someone tells you to change something that they see would make for a better poem, try to figure out how to do it. And mainly, just live through those periods when you're not writing, or writing badly. Throw yourself into your life. Let life happen to you. And with luck, it will give you what you need.

(Audience Question) For those of us who don't thrive in a super processed style of writing, do you have any strategies on how to step into writing when it comes to you if you don't have a specific place?

You don't need it. If it comes to you, it comes as an imperative. This is very different from novelists. They have a lot of space to travel, and I think stealing time is not something that's going work as well for a novelist as it would for a poet. If something comes to you, you write it down. And not only do you write it down, if it comes to you, and it has real staying power, it won't leave you. It can begin to torture you, and it will not leave you. If it does, it's not worth saving. So, I think you have to trust in the durability of those gifts. And the impulse to "write it down" becomes the impulse to look at it written down, and see if anything attaches to it, and that may not happen immediately. But, you'll be ***compelled*** to look at it. You don't have to worry about making time. If you're extremely busy, and you have a full-time job, and seven children,

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you just stop sleeping. I mean, sometimes you do that, but you do it not because you've scheduled it. You do it because you have no choice. Someone else could tell you something completely opposite, but I'm telling you what's been true of my experience.

(Audience Question) Do you ever look back at your old poems and find that there's a subject you cannot write about anymore, or at least in the same way? Also, is there anything that you feel like you have lost in your writing since you began?

There are things I've stopped doing. But I don't know that I would call them *lost*. Always, I feel at the end of a book, that I can't do that anymore, but I also don't want to. There are certain kinds of notes. . . I think of my books as either vertical or horizontal. The vertical books go from despondency to euphoria, the horizontal books, like *Meadowlands* or *Village Life,* they're more capacious, varied, social. But if I do one of those books that reaches deep down and lifts up, I have no wish to go back there. Whatever I write next, I have to break that mode; I have to, because I can't best it at that time. I say "I can," as though all this were calculated. It isn't. It all happens quite spontaneously. After a while, I can approach some of those tones again.

I remember, I was about to move to Cambridge from Vermont, and my Vermont garden had been very important to the writing of *The Wild Iris*, which was the book that made the biggest dent in my public life. There were two poets who were driving through Vermont, and they said, "Can we stop in?" And I talked to them about moving to Cambridge, which at that particular point in my life was a great thing to do, and one of them said, "But how will you write?" And I thought, I could stay here forever, but I can't write about this garden again. . . . What? *The Wild Iris* Goes to College? (Laughter) You have no wish to do that, but you also *can't* do that. The end of a book should be when you have exhausted, fully, what it has given you to say, within a certain tone or array of themes. Every book is a closed door. But that's fine. That means you have to find something else. And what I'm interested in is the finding of something else. That's what's exciting.

(Audience Question) When do you know an idea is good? At the beginning, during the process, when the idea comes to you?

Oh, it varies. I mean, if you have an idea, usually a line, you play with it. Sometimes, if your style changes, you have very little in the way of critical apparatus to deal with that change. So, you look at something that's, stylistically, totally different from what's gone before, as far as you can tell, and you think, well, this could be absolutely wonderful, or this could be disastrously bad. And it wouldn't surprise you to hear either. But, gradually, you develop critical apparatus for making judgments about work and new modes. You basically table that while you're working, and you just have to see how things play out. If you're exhilarated, that's a good test.

(Wilkinson) Thank you so much. This was wonderful.

(Stott) Thank you, Louise. I'm so pleased to have had this conversation with you today. It feels like a miracle to me.



Charlie Vasquez is a Weber State University alumnus. He graduated with a B.A. in creative writing in December 2023.

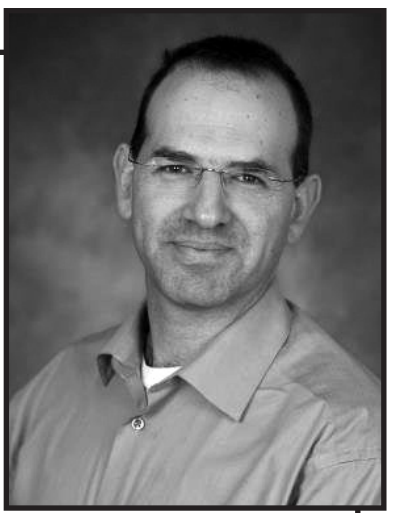


Sunni Brown Wilkinson's most recent work can be found in *Missouri Review*, *Terrain*, *On the Seawall*, *New Ohio Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and *Best of the Net 2023*. She is the author of *The Marriage of the Moon and the Field* (Black Lawrence Press, 2019) and *The Ache & The Wing* (winner of Sundress Publications' 2020 Chapbook Prize). Her work has been awarded *New Ohio Review*'s NORward Poetry Prize, the Joy Harjo Poetry Prize, and the Sherwin W. Howard Award. She teaches at Weber State University and lives in northern Utah with her husband and three sons.

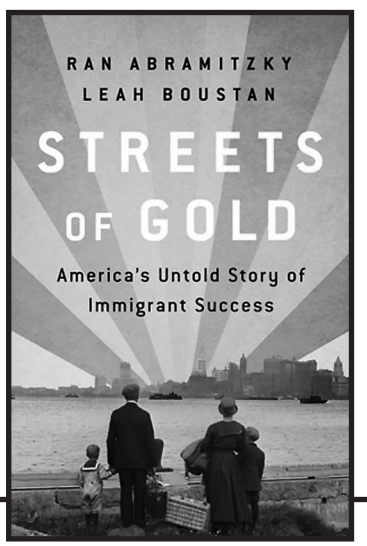


Laura Stott is the author of three collections of poetry, *The Bear's Mouth*, which will be published by Lynx House Press in the summer of 2024; *Blue Nude Migration* (Lynx House Press, 2020), a poetry and painting collaboration; and *In the Museum of Coming and Going* (New Issues, 2014). Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in various journals and anthologies including *Terrain.org*, *River Heron Review*, *SWWIM*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Rupture*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Blossom as a Cliffrose*, and *All We Can Hold: Poems of Motherhood*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize three times and received the Ogden City Mayor Award in the Literary Arts in 2020. She holds an MFA from Eastern Washington University and teaches at Weber State University.

COMBINING HISTORY AND ECONOMICS: A LONG-TERM VIEW OF IMMIGRATION



A Conversation with
RAN ABRAMITZKY



ÁLVARO LA PARRA-PÉREZ

Ran Abramitzky is one of the leading economic historians of our time. He is Senior Associate Dean of the Social Sciences and the Stanford Federal Credit Union Professor of Economics at Stanford University. Abramitzky is a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. His book The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist World *(Princeton University Press, 2018) won the Gyorgi Ranki Biennial Prize for an outstanding book on European Economic History awarded by the Economic History Association. He has also received the Economics Department's and the Dean's Awards for Distinguished Teaching. He holds a Ph.D. in economics from Northwestern University.*

In April 2022, at the invitation of the Office of Interdisciplinary Collaborations, Abramitzky visited Weber State University to discuss his latest book (with Leah Boustan): Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success *(PublicAffairs, 2022). In this work, the authors use vast data sets to put immigration in a long-term perspective and address some of the most hotly debated and controversial topics about migration: Is the U.S. getting an unprecedented level of migrants? Do migrants today assimilate more slowly than in the past? Do migrants hurt native-born workers?*

In our conversation, we discussed the connections of economic history to other disciplines, the impact of immigration on the U.S., and some of the main takeaways of Abramitzky and Boustan's book.

Why did you choose economics as your field of study?

I liked math when I was in school. But there was something missing in math for me because it was about solving abstract problems. Yes, intellectual and logically interesting problems, but abstract all the same. I care about people, not about numbers. I wanted to understand the world. I found that economics was a great field of study for that. On the one hand, it is based on a formal and logical way of thinking about problems. On the other hand, it allows one to study social questions on inequality, immigration, and injustice.

Your books The Mystery of Kibbutz *and* Streets of Gold *are both interdisciplinary in nature. Which disciplines besides economics have you integrated into or have inspired your work?*

I'm an economic historian, just like you. So, as you know, economic history is at the busy intersection between economics, history, and other social sciences such as sociology, political science, anthropology, and others. The economic historian needs to take a humble approach to what economics can tell us and what it can't tell us. We must read broadly and understand things from the perspective of many fields. So, all of these fields have greatly influenced my work in addition to economics.

Is there any new field or discipline that you envision, or would like to integrate, in the future into your research?

I started with history, sociology, political science, and anthropology. Recently, I find myself integrating more insights from linguistics. We economic historians read books and use the qualitative information in books to complement the formal quantitative and statistical analysis. For the longest time, it would be like, "Oh, here's an anecdote, and here is what I read in this book, or that book." But with development in computational linguistics, we can now actually look at a large amount of text and use statistical and computational methods to integrate a reading that is more systematic. This has been helpful for some of the work that I've done with attitudes towards immigration, and how that has developed over time. It is impossible for any research team to read through all eight million congressional speeches. So, we needed the help of machine learning and linguistic tools to identify congressional speeches about immigration and classify them as having a positive or a negative tone. So, I'm excited to work with computational linguistics in order to make use of our comparative advantage of reading books and incorporating that knowledge in a formal way into economic analysis.

You mentioned that you are an economic historian. Is economics becoming more

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receptive to economic history and history in general?

Economics is definitely becoming more receptive to economic history. First, economists understand that economic history helps answer some of the big questions. Why are some countries rich and other countries poor? In order to understand economic development, it is not enough to study rich and poor countries today. We need to understand how they got to be poor and rich to begin with. This requires economic history research. Second, many current economic problems have historical roots, and so economists are receptive to analysis of economic history as a way to broaden our understanding of economics. I am less optimistic about how economic history is effectively communicated to historians. I would like to see more done with that. I am a huge fan of history; a lot of my input comes from historians. I wish there was a better way to communicate with them and create bridges between the two fields. Again, I think that there are plenty of possibilities, because a good economic historian always respects history. They're never condescending about history. I think that maybe some of the division was because historians would say, "You economists, you think you know everything about the world. You show us some correlations in data, and now you think you understand the entire history." No, a good economic historian is always humble. We know that historians know much more about the institutional setting and about history. We would like to learn from them and integrate their insight into our analysis. I think economists and historians have a lot to talk about, but I have not seen that happening to the extent I wish it would.

Let's talk about your latest book, Streets of Gold. *The data you use for migrants in* Streets of Gold *has a strong connection to Utah.*

That's right. Our research has only been possible because of resources like Ancestry.com, Family Search, and the LDS Church. Before resources like Ancestry.com were available, you had to go to some basement within the Census Bureau. And good luck finding who you were looking for, because they housed information on at least 100 million people! But with Ancestry.com or Family Search, it's possible for you to search for your ancestors. We figured, if we could search for our own ancestors, why couldn't we search for other people and make a research agenda out of it? Ancestry.com and Family Search have been incredibly helpful partners. Honestly, as you said, there would be no *Streets of Gold* without them.

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How would you respond to the idea that immigration leads to a "crowding out" of positions for U.S. students in programs across the country?

I think student body diversity within universities is part of what makes the U.S. so great. Traditionally, universities in the U.S. seek to attract the most talented students, no matter where they are from—U.S. students or international students. The U.S. is a great place to come and pursue a degree—it's great for the students and for the U.S.—because then these students go on to become academics; they become entrepreneurs, and they become business people and professionals. They enrich the knowledge of the U.S. and enrich its culture. One of the main comparative advantages of the United States has traditionally been its openness to talent wherever it is found. I don't think it's a good idea to try to limit that potential.

In Streets of Gold*, you find that migrants assimilate today at the same pace or even faster than they did one century ago. Garett Jones argues in his recent book,* The Culture Transplant: How Migrants Make the Economies They Move To a Lot Like the Ones They Left*, that full assimilation is a myth. He states that migrants import their cultural attitudes from other countries and that they significantly reshape their receiving country. He concludes that only migrants who have substantially more education, job skills, and pro-market attitudes than the average citizen should be welcome. Should migration be more selective?*

That's a great question. Reasonable people can disagree about what the optimal strategy for migration policies should be. In economic terms, yes, the children of immigrants are incredibly upwardly mobile. They are doing very well. I think what you're describing has more to do with the assimilation in other, non-economic dimensions. When referencing the extent to which immigrants assimilate into the dominant U.S. culture—giving up their own original cultural identity in order to adopt the culture of the United States— what we find is that immigrants do tend to assimilate into U.S. society. But, it's absolutely true that they don't *fully* assimilate. Immigrants do not completely give up their original identities and become completely American without any trace of their Mexican heritage, or of their European heritage. Instead, they assimilate to U.S. culture while retaining some of what's important to them about their original identity. It's like speaking Spanish to our children so that they can communicate with their grandparents, or perhaps including some of the food and the culture of our heritage. I don't view that as mutually exclusive with assimilation. A person can retain their original identity while still assimilating to the broader U.S. culture. Now, it becomes a matter of opinion. If one concludes that if immigrants don't become completely American, and they don't completely shed their original culture, then they shouldn't be worth having, well, that's one point of view. But part of what is great about America is the diversity and the different cultures. An America without immigrants is also an America without pizza, without tacos, and without sushi. This is a more inclusive approach to what is American. And so, it is true, as Garett said, that immigrants shape part of U.S. culture. At the same time, being shaped by U.S. culture, they become a hybrid version of themselves. So, what does that mean for immigration policy? Again, it depends on your point of view. How much do you want America to be a homogeneous place, with one dominant culture, versus being open to the U.S. having multiple cultures?

You mentioned that Garett stated, "only people who are educated and skilled should be welcomed." It's definitely true that immigrants who are educated and skilled are doing very well in the U.S. They are opening businesses and contributing greatly to the economy, and therefore accepting many of

them is a great idea. However, I don't think it necessarily implies that we should accept only people with high-level skills, because people with fewer skills also do some of the jobs that many of the people in the United States don't want to do. They take care of the elderly. They are working in the service industry. They clean dishes. They pick crops. They work in agriculture. They contribute to the United States. So again, I'm completely on board with bringing immigrants who are educated—that's great. But, at the same time, I think that less-skilled immigrants contribute quite a bit as well.

In the concluding chapter of Streets of Gold*, you have a plea for a "second grand bargain." What would the first step be to achieve that?*

It's definitely true that immigrants who are educated and skilled are doing very well in the U.S. They are opening businesses and contributing greatly to the economy, and therefore accepting many of them is a great idea. However, I don't think it necessarily implies that we should accept only people with high-level skills, because people with fewer skills also do some of the jobs that many of the people in the United States don't want to do. They take care of the elderly. They are working in the service industry. They clean dishes. They pick crops. They work in agriculture. They contribute to the United States.

The attitude towards immigrants today is quite positive. But you also see this great polarization where Democrats are increasingly supportive of immigrants, and Republicans are increasingly negative about immigrants. The great bargain will somehow have to include or bring together opposing views on immigration. In 2021, 75% of the American public said immigration is a good thing for the country. I think it might be time for brave politicians to unite around a more positive attitude towards immigration. In the past, the idea of the U.S. being a nation of immigrants was a result of politicians trying to tell the narrative of American immigration history in a more positive light. I think it might be time for a more positive message about immigration. I think it might even be a winning strategy for politicians to do that.

To follow up on what you just said, there seems to be a remarkable consensus and positive attitude towards migration by at least 75% of the U.S. population, but the divergence is happening in political speeches. How worried are you that political incentives often work with a short-term perspective, whereas your results suggest that we should adopt a more generational, long-term view of how migration works and impacts the country?

I think you've touched on the main message of our book. Immigration policy should take a long-term view. If you take a short-term view, and you look at immigrants who have just arrived to the United States, it could undermine immigrant success. It is true—both today and in the past—that there has never been this quick, rags-to-riches scenario. The idea that immigrants come, and then within a couple of years they are CEOs—it doesn't happen like that, it takes a long time. In fact, many immigrants in our data continue to do manual jobs for their entire lives. It's only the children who are starting to rise and to do very well. When you take a short-term

view of immigration, it tends to undermine immigrant success. When you look at immigration from a long-term view—meaning you look at immigrant groups who arrived here a century ago from Norway, Scotland, England, Germany, Russia, and China—you see how well they are doing today. If you take this long-term view, immigration seems much more successful. So, I think it's exactly right that the negative view of immigration comes from a relatively short-term view that politicians tend to take on as they look at the next election cycle, rather than taking a broader, long-term view of how much immigrants contribute to American economy and society.

It is true – both today and in the past – that there has never been this quick, rags-to-riches scenario. The idea that immigrants come, and then within a couple of years they are CEOs – it doesn't happen like that, it takes a long time. In fact, many immigrants in our data continue to do manual jobs for their entire lives. It's only the children who are starting to rise and to do very well. When you take a short-term view of immigration, it tends to undermine immigrant success.

What are the take-aways from your immigration research that you think everybody should know?

We should take a long-term view of immigration. If we take a long-term view, and we look at the children of immigrants, and we look at immigrant groups of the past, immigrants are doing *very* well. The second take-away is that we should avoid a nostalgic view about the past. It's only from the perspective of a century later that they are doing very well. The third take-away is that I think it is a mistake to design immigration policy based on the belief that immigrants never try to assimilate and integrate into U.S. economy and society. Any way we measure it, we see that immigrants and their families end up doing well in America. While they retain some of their original identity, they assimilate into the broader culture, ***becoming*** Americans. Even within a single generation, immigrants assimilate into the U.S culture.

Thank you so much.



Álvaro La Parra-Pérez is an associate professor of economics and the assistant director at the Office of Interdisciplinary Collaborations at Weber State University. He joined WSU in 2014 after obtaining his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Maryland. Álvaro is an economic historian who teaches about the economic history of the United States together with courses emphasizing the discipline's connections to history and other social sciences. His research centers on Spanish elites in the twentieth century, the consensus in economics, and the history of economic history.

"I TAKE THE URN INTO MY HANDS AND GIVE IT VEINS AND ARTERIES AND A PULSE"



Kira Derryberry

A Conversation with SANDRA SIMONDS

BAILEY QUINN
& ABRAHAM SMITH

When I first encountered Sandra Simonds's poetry, what attracted me was her breathtaking ability to capture the beauty of Florida wildlife. However, what has kept me returning is her ability to grapple with the complexity of our modern society in a way that is vulnerable, honest, and relatable to most every reader. A prolific writer and critic, Sandra Simonds has authored eight books of poetry. She was the winner of the 2015 Akron Poetry Prize and has been anthologized in Best American Poetry *twice (2014 & 2015). Her newest collection,* Triptychs *(Wave Books), debuted in November of 2022.*

Breaking from the epic structure of Atopia *(Wesleyan University Press, 2018) and* Orlando *(Wave Books, 2019),* Triptychs *is composed of triptych poems written in short line form and arranged side-by-side on each page. Simonds's triptychs converse both across the page and throughout the collection, giving the poems a rhizomatic quality as they navigate the grief that stems from the tumult of politics and environmental decline. Backdropped against the Covid-19 pandemic, a time in which many of us felt disconnected from family, friends, and society at large,* Triptychs *medi(t)ates on the nature of time and space, and many of the poems propose themselves as spatiotemporal folds containing moments where time both speeds up and slows down while space both expands and contracts. Themes of loss, loneliness, inequality, and mortality are juxtaposed alongside images of starlight, blooming fruit trees, the ebbing and flowing of the Florida coastline, migratory birds, and technology.*

They emerge and disappear only to reappear in later poems, giving readers a feeling of being haunted by not only the past but the present and future as well.

Alongside her collections, Simonds's poetry has appeared in American Poetry Review, The New Yorker, Poetry, Ploughshares, *and* Kenyon Review. *Her critical work has appeared or is forthcoming in* The New York Times, Best American Poetry, The Georgia Review, *and* American Poetry Review.

Sandra shared her current work through a reading via Zoom with students and faculty at Weber State University in fall 2022. In the months following, I had the honor and privilege to interview Simonds over email alongside poet and professor Abraham Smith.

How did you come to the decision to write triptych poems? Given the visual nature of triptychs, how did formatting influence the direction of your poems throughout this collection?

Art making isn't really about decision making on the level of logic and reason. If logic and reason ruled artists, who knows if there would be any art. Decision making in art is like surfing, catching the right wave, looking back at the ocean behind you, noticing all the other waves, and just sensing when to get on your board and ride that wave as far as you can to shore. You have to ride it way past where you think you can go. Like Frank O'Hara says, "You go with your gut." Sometimes your gut is dead wrong, but I've found that it's mostly right. Why do you catch that wave and not all the other glittering ones? It's hard to say. But once you get on that board, you've made a commitment. Your wave is the triptych wave and not the sonnet wave and not the villanelle wave. You've decided to focus your attention on triptychs. You've narrowed your options, and now the most important thing in the world is to stay standing and not crash into the ocean. And you crash. That's how you write a book of poetry.

In an interview with Bennington Review, *you mention that your books "are interested in form insofar as they have a desperate desire to create new forms that transcend the given or even say 'fuck you' to the given." In what ways did you find writing* Triptychs *liberating? How did writing in triptychs lead to your work "transcending the given"?*

Well, let's start here: the beautiful irony about form is that it only becomes interesting when you break the form. Think of your favorite sonnet. More than likely, it's deviating from the platonic form either with rhythm or rhyme or in the line breaks. The poet is a magician who messes with the form. The deviation *is* the form. You cut it up. You riff on what you've invented, and you start to move away from the form and then return. It's a love game, a point of departure and homecoming. It's a play and experiment which are central to the poetic impulse. There's also something deeply communal about inventing forms. Form isn't something to be trademarked or branded. Instead, it's an invitation for other poets to try their hand at that form. I'm thinking of Jericho Brown's duplex poems as a good example of this. I just did a class visit at Saint Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana, and the professor gave an assignment to write a triptych. One of the students talked about how difficult it was to write one. Poetry is trying and seeing what happens.

As a Florida native living in the mountains of Utah, I have long missed the music of Florida's wildlife. Reading your work brings me back home. In my favorite line from

Well, let's start here: the beautiful irony about form is that it only becomes interesting when you break the form. Think of your favorite sonnet. More than likely, it's deviating from the platonic form either with rhythm or rhyme or in the line breaks. The poet is a magician who messes with the form. The deviation is *the form. You cut it up. You riff on what you've invented, and you start to move away from the form and then return. It's a love game, a point of departure and homecoming. It's a play and experiment which are central to the poetic impulse.*

"Let's Make the Water Turn Black," you are able to capture so clearly the sound of waves as they lap at the shoreline: "and the two waves/ softly decayed/ on the stretched/ beach and they/ could tell from the smell/ of the sand/ in the desert/ that it was spring,*/ the way sound/ fluctuates almost/ indefinitely. . . ." How has Florida nature inspired your poetry and, more specifically, how does it situate itself in* Triptychs*?*

This poem, like all of the poems in the book, is organized in three columns. The first column is a meditation on fire, the second on water, and the third on air. Many of these lines in the water section are inspired from the Zohar (parts of the Kabbalah), a medieval mystical Jewish text. During the pandemic, I was able to learn about the Zohar from the fabulous Daniel Matt, a professor at Stanford who spent decades translating it from the Aramaic. In the Zohar, there's a story where ocean waves speak to each other, and when I read it, I thought I have to put this in a poem. Waves crash but they also decay. Water is mysterious, dangerous, spiritual. Bodies of water want to be looked at. We are both made of water and nothing like it. It can kill us. Dreams and desires are, as Freud says, "oceanic." Water is haunting and haunted. The ocean coughs things up. We find things submerged in water—people, cars, cities, entire civilizations. Florida was once under water and much of it will be again one day. It's good to remember that.

Tendrils of the Covid-19 pandemic have found their way into a few of your poems in Triptychs*, and in your acknowledgements you thank your pandemic writing group. During the shutdowns of 2020, I, and many others, often found comfort and companionship in the reading and sharing of stories. These stories ranged from news broadcasts, documentaries, and books to even thirty-second TikTok videos. What types of stories did you find yourself most drawn to during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how did they inspire your poetry?*

What confusing and terrible times we have all been through together. The stories I found the most moving and relatable were the everyday stories we shared. The ridiculousness of trying to get your kids to do an online PE or orchestra class. Attempting to make homemade bread for the first time. Our (often failed) attempts at gardening. The terror of contracting Covid before the vaccine. My husband is a high school teacher, so he went back to in-person teaching before anyone. There was a lot of anxiety surrounding that. The first vaccines. And the stories between poets—how to stay a poet during this emergency when you have no idea what's going to happen and you're deeply frightened. But poetry and survival are so deeply interwoven—"I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!," as Shelley put it.

Having received both an MFA and a Ph.D., what advice might you give to budding poets as they consider the various academic pathways available to them? How has each degree played a role in your development as both a contemporary artist and an academic?

My advice for anyone is to become an autodidact because you will always learn more outside of the classroom than inside. You absolutely don't need a degree to be a writer, but you might enjoy the company of like-minded people in these programs, and if you like teaching then academia might work for you. I didn't take many workshops in my Ph.D. program, but I learned a great deal about literature, particularly from mentors at FSU like Andrew Epstein and Elaine Treharne (now at Stanford), and that training, in turn, proved invaluable to me as a thinker, writer, and teacher.

Bernadette Mayer passed away today – November 23, 2022. She meant so much to me. And I see a lot of affinities between your poetry and hers. I think of reading as gleaning more permissions. Are there particular permissions you found when you first encountered her richest poetry? I am grateful for any, all of your elegizing thoughts.

I adore Bernadette's writing, but what I think I most admire about her is the way that she fashioned her life as a poet. She didn't care about poetry prizes. She had no interest in being a "professional." With Bernadette, the genius isn't about any one poem in particular, it's about her body of work. Everything she wrote felt like an experiment, something new, a gift to the world. And her focus on the communal creates this feeling in her work that she is in a continuous dialogue with some greater narrative of experimental American poetry. Her sonnet "you jerk you didn't call me up"[1] will always be one of my favorite poems. I reviewed her book ***Memory*** in ***Music & Literature*** back in 2020.[2] A funny note: she chose my book of sonnets for a book prize back in 2011, but I ultimately decided to go with another publisher. I keep her memory alive by using her writing experiments in my poetry workshops.[3]

When I think of the prolific in American poetry, I think of you and Will Alexander. It's such a joy to know that there will be new work by Sandra Simonds in the world – always and soon. I am curious if you run into much pushback? I sense that it could be both a wing and a millstone to be dazzlingly prolific.

Will is an amazing poet, and I'm flattered that you have placed my work in his company. Poetic output varies radically from poet to poet. I know poets who write a book every ten years, and then you get a John Ashbery who wrote a book every year. Have you seen Langston Hughes's ***Collected Poems***? It's enormous. I can't emphasize this enough: there isn't one way to be a poet. There might be a bias against poets who write a lot because I think we still have this (very ridiculous) idea about poetic genius based on very old-fashioned white, patriarchal ideas about the production of poetry—that the poet should be isolated and work all day for years on a single line of poetry and then enter the world with a "well-wrought urn." I'm a mother. I gave birth to two children. Childbirth is messy. Language is messy too. Language is bloody and weird, and so are bodies. Poems are living things, and live and grow in relation to other poems and readers. I'm not interested in perfection. I know my poems could have taken hundreds of different forms and turns—and I love that. I love that they contain the volatile, the various, the mistakes, the glitches and glints. I take the urn into my hands and give it veins and arteries and a pulse.

You read this fall at Weber State University. Since then, so many of our students have commented on your reading style – how much it meant to hear you read, and how moving your reading was. Most everyone

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points out the following: that your cadence and presence felt intimate and neighborly; more than a few students have said that they left feeling that they'd always known you. Amazing! Have you consciously sculpted a performance persona? And do you have any particular performative advice to share?

Performance has never been the focal point of my work. In my early days, I rarely thought about how my poems would sound read to an audience. Instead, I spent a lot of time trying to work with sound on the page so that if the reader were to read the work out loud (not in my presence), it would sound the way I wanted it to sound in my head. But the truth is that people ask you to read, so you sort of learn as you go. One of my first poetry readings was at Emory with the poet Jennifer Knox, who is an incredible reader. It sounds odd to say, but up until then I didn't really realize performance could be part of poetry. Jen was so funny and smart and witty, and I learned a lot from her. There's an amazing article from the student newspaper at Bennington College which reports on Elizabeth Bishop reading at the school. I think it was probably one of her last readings before she died. The students pan her reading. She's too quiet for them. But I also love the vulnerability of a "bad" poetry reading. There's something charming about it. There's this space that sometimes emerges when you're reading where you can almost feel the attention of the audience. Where else does that intimacy exist in life? It doesn't always happen, of course, but when it does, it's a remarkable feeling and it's a feeling that I think goes both ways (audience to poet, poet to audience). A lot of my poems are about everyday life, so there's a spokenness to some of them. I learned something from the New York School Poets about transmitting a sense of intimacy through familiarity, which is much harder to convey than you might think. There's a lot of artifice involved—***sprezzatura***, studied carelessness. "***Ars est celare artem***—"it is an art to conceal the hand of art," as John Dryden put it.

Your first novel novel, Assia*, is forthcoming. So that's on the way! And we are all wondering, what's next?*

It took me so long to answer these questions that now ***Assia*** is out in the world.[4] I'm very slowly working on a second novel and another book of poems.



Abraham Smith's recent poetry collections are *Insomniac Sentinel* (Baobab Press, 2023) and *Dear Weirdo* (Propeller Books, 2022). Away from his desk, he improvises poems inside songs with the band *The Snarlin' Yarns*. Smith lives in Ogden, Utah, where he is associate professor of English and co-director of Creative Writing at Weber State University.



Bailey Quinn is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of English at Weber State University. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Bat City Review*, *West Trade Review*, and *Passengers Journal*, among others.

Notes

1. Read Bernadette Mayer's sonnet "you jerk you didn't call me up" at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49729/sonnet-you-jerk-you-didnt-call-me-up.

2. Read Sandra Simonds's review of *Memory* at https://www.musicandliterature.org/reviews/2020/5/12/bernadette-mayers-memory.

3. See a list of Bernadette Mayer's journal ideas at https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html.

4. *Assia* (Noemi Press) can be found at https://www.noemipress.org/catalog/prose/assia/ or https://www.amazon.com/Assia-Sandra-Simonds/dp/1934819921.

POWER, MEMORY, AND THE REWRITING OF AMERICAN HISTORY

DOUG FABRIZIO


Benjamin Zack


Benjamin Zack

A Conversation with
NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES


Benjamin Zack

Nikole Hannah-Jones speaking with Doug Fabrizio at Weber State University as part of the *Browning Presents!* series on Friday, March 31, 2023.

Nikole Hannah-Jones is an award-winning investigative reporter who covers civil rights and racial injustice for The New York Times Magazine. *She also serves as the Knight Chair in Race and Journalism at Howard University, where she is the founding director of the Center for Journalism & Democracy. She is the co-founder of the Ida B. Wells Society for investigative reporting, which seeks to increase the number of reporters and editors of color in the profession. Hannah-Jones's reporting has earned her the Pulitzer Prize, a MacArthur "Genius" Grant, the Knight Award for Public Service, the Peabody Award, two George Polk awards, and the National Magazine Award three times. She is a Society of American Historians Fellow and a member of the Academy of Arts & Sciences. We would like to acknowledge the generosity of the Browning Trust for making possible this conversation between Ms. Hannah-Jones and radio host Doug Fabrizio, which took place on the campus of Weber State University on 31 March 2023. It has been edited for length and clarity.*

Welcome. One of the things you've written about is that for as long as you can remember, you've been fascinated with the past. Why is that? This was before you learned anything about the Black experience in this country.

Good question. For one, I was just extremely, painfully nerdy as a child. I read a lot. My dad was really a fan of Louis L'Amour westerns. And so, as a child, I just read every book in the house, except the Bible. (Laughter) I started reading books about the Old West. A great aunt of mine bought me the Laura Ingalls Wilder book set, also about the West. I was fascinated by how people lived a long time ago. I was always interested in how studying the past helped you to understand why things were the way they were. My dad and I used to watch documentaries together—my dad also loves history. Even before I started studying Black history specifically, I always held this fascination for the past.

So, you had this fascination with the past, you were a nerdy kid. Before you discovered the date 1619, you were eleven years old, and you wrote a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about Jesse Jackson's campaign bid, and it got published.

Yeah, I was nerdy. (Laughter) I mean, what eleven-year-old is paying attention to a presidential primary? I read the newspaper every day with my dad. My mom was very active in her unit. Throughout my childhood, she was president of her local chapter. In Iowa, we were first in the national primary. During presidential campaigns, everyone was paying attention, even eleven-year-old Nikole. My hometown of Waterloo, Iowa—which I think is about the same size as Ogden—was the most racially-diverse city in Iowa. It had the largest Black population, it was heavily unionized, working class, and very Democratic. Presidential candidates would come to my hometown. I was precocious. I was paying attention to things that my classmates weren't paying attention to. I loved reading the Letters to the Editor because they were regular people who were writing in to the paper. Jesse Jackson did poorly in the Iowa primary—which tells me that I actually was, at that age, attuned to race, even though I don't remember being that attuned to race. I believe that part of the reason he didn't do well was because he was a Black man. I thought he was a very good candidate, so I wrote that. Every day, I would come home and open the newspaper to see if they published my letter. And one day, they

did. I felt so empowered—an eleven-year-old kid who could see something in the world, and write about it, and people could read it. It wasn't really a byline, a Letter to the Editor, but it felt like seeing your first byline. I think that's when I started to think that journalism might be something I wanted to do.

For our audience to understand your story, they have to understand Mr. Ray Dial. Tell people about Ray Dial, because he's amazing.

I love to talk about Mr. Dial. Are there any educators here? (Audience applauds) I applaud you all because it is not an easy time to be a college professor or a public school teacher. Sometimes, you wonder if the work you are doing is having the impact that you hope it will. I can absolutely say that I would not have the career I have without Mr. Dial. My parents enrolled my sister and me into a school desegregation program starting in the second grade. I was bused out of my neighborhood to white schools across town. Our high school was made up of about 20% Black students. Those kids were bused out of their neighborhood to someone else's neighborhood school. So, you can imagine that there was a lot of racial tension in my school; many of us felt that we faced discrimination and stereotyping because we were from the Black side of town. Mr. Dial was a college professor who was brought in to keep the Black students in line. A lot of schools like this would hire a Black male educator who was really brought in to be a disciplinarian. But they had no idea who they were bringing in when they brought in Mr. Dial, because they brought in the man who would radicalize us. (Laughter) Mr. Dial had other plans. (Laughter) Mr. Dial was the only Black male teacher I ever had. He was rail-thin. He had a hearty laugh. He taught a Black studies class, and that class changed my life. It was the first time that I realized that the reason we weren't learning about Black people was not because Black people had not done anything of note; it was because people had decided it wasn't important for us to learn. Because Mr. Dial was a college professor, he was also teaching at a college level at that time, and one of the books he gave me introduced me to 1619. But the most important thing that Mr. Dial did was he showed students that we had a voice, that we didn't have to sit silently and accept what we thought was unfair treatment. He was the teacher who, when my girlfriend and I decided to start an underground Black newspaper, snuck into the teacher's lounge to print the paper in there. (Laughter) The principal was like, "Where is the newspaper coming from?" (Laughter) We planned a walkout because we didn't feel that the administration was dealing with our concerns, and we wanted to turn the Black studies elective into a mandatory course. Mr. Dial was the teacher who said, "Okay, you can go this far. . . up to this line. . . . But when you cross this line is when you can get into real trouble." He would guide

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us in our activism. I just saw him two weeks ago in Waterloo. I've kept in touch with Mr. Dial since I was a high school student.

I just found out that the day that Mr. Dial found out that our superintendent was going to be out of town for the day was the day he suggested we do the walkout. (Laughter) He saw the need of his students, and he was going to bend the rules a little bit, but he was going to bend the rules to benefit us, to encourage us. He always called us "Doctor," I remember that. He called me "Dr. Hannah." It was as though he was trying to pour these aspirations into us that the school itself often wasn't reflecting back to us. He's also the educator who told me to join my high school newspaper. I came in to Mr. Dial one day, and I was complaining about how our high school newspaper didn't write about any of the experiences of the Black kids at the school. You can imagine, with the kind of educator Mr. Dial was, very straightforward and to the point, he said, "Well, I guess you better join the paper and write those articles, or don't come in my classroom and complain about it anymore." (Laughter) So, that's what I did. He got me to join my high school newspaper, which is where I really started to become a journalist. He introduced me to the year 1619. And he put me on to what has been a lifelong quest, to speak to the silences of history.

There is this beautiful moment that you write about when Mr. Dial put the book Before the Mayflower *into your hands. You write in such a beautiful way about when you came across the date 1619. You say that you "imagined the date glowing, like three-dimensional numbers rising from the page." The other thing that you write about is that you had this impulse at the time, which you describe as a "visceral reaction." Because you hadn't heard about 1619, because they weren't teaching about 1619, that it wasn't an innocuous omission, that it was intentional. What was that impulse? What was that sense?*

When he gave me *Before the Mayflower,* I didn't know exactly what the title was evoking. I assumed the title was referring to a pre-American, African story. I came across that date of The White Lion, and I realized that African people had been here before the Mayflower. There was another ship that came here the year before. Lerone Bennett Jr. was a historian and journalist and wrote this beautiful passage that said, "There was probably no more momentous cargo that ever arrived in the United States," and yet, we didn't learn about that. I realized in that moment that history is not what happened; history is what we are *taught* about what happened, what we are taught to *remember* about what happened. I think, sometimes, if you are not a member of a marginalized group, it can be pretty difficult to understand what it feels like to be erased from the narrative of your country. What it feels like to never see people like yourself—particularly Black Americans—because we don't even have a connection. We don't know what country we came from. All of that was erased in the Middle Passage—to realize that our lineage predates this other ship. Every American child knows about the Mayflower. But we were *here*, we were already here. That was tremendously powerful to me. It gave me a sense of pride, that our lineage went back that far. But also, as I say in *The 1619 Project*, it erased me. All these years when I felt demeaned, degraded, and insignificant because we didn't learn about Black folks, I had no idea that there was a whole history that could have been taught. People chose not to teach it to us.

I was obsessed with 1619. It's been ten years or so since I was in high school. (Laughter) Maybe a little longer, but I'm still obsessed with that date and what that date meant for our country. I'm determined to force other people to be obsessed with it as well.

I'd like to go back to something you spoke about earlier. History is important, but what's just as important is how we think

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about what happened. One of the things that you have said about The 1619 Project *is that it is a "work of memory." What do you mean by that?*

Well, what I mean is that I am trying to get us to remember the country that we were, not the country that we have been taught that we were. One of my favorite books is a book written by David Blight called ***Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory***. At that age, I didn't realize there is an entire field that looks at historical memory. I think that most of us think that history is settled—this happened on this day, and this person did it. We don't learn about most of it. What we commonly think of as ***history*** is really ***memory***. Memory is often shaped by power. People in power are the people who name buildings, the people who erect statues, people who determine what our social studies texts are going to include and what they are going to exclude. That's about memory. That's about how we are taught to think about our past. Really, that's how we are taught to think about our past, so that we can think about who we are ***today***.

I sometimes like to ask audiences how many of you were taught that George Washington's teeth were made of wood? (Audience laughs, applauds) George Washington's teeth were not made of wood. George Washington's teeth were made of human teeth. They were made of teeth that were pulled from the mouths of people whom he enslaved. I ask that question because I think it is useful for us to think about how we all come to know the same collective lie. Most of us have heard that story; it is not factual. So much of what we ***think*** we know, what we think we ***understand*** about history, has been manipulated, has been managed. The best example of it is in ***The 1619 Project***. The most contested paragraph in the entire book, out of tens-of-thousands of words, is a paragraph about slavery and the American Revolution. That's because most of what we know about the American Revolution is through mythmaking. It's not based on what actually happened. Memory is powerful. I've written about racial inequality for my entire career, since I was a high school student and had a column called "From an African Perspective." I'll tell you all later what my first investigation was. (Laughter) It wasn't until I did this project that really tried to reshape how we think of ourselves collectively as a country and our ***memory*** of who we ***are*** as a country, that all the powers tried to come against my work. I think that speaks to how powerful memory is, how our self-concept, all of these anti-CRT [Critical Race Theory] laws, are really about memory. When you remove a book about Roberto Clemente or Rosa Parks—books about what happened—what you're saying is you don't want students to know that those

things happened. You don't want students to have this part of our collective memory of the past. That, to me, is the most powerful thing that a storyteller can do, shape our collective understanding of who we are. (Applause)

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You took The 1619 Project *to your editors at* The Times *and you described it as a "simple pitch." I want you to take us back to the moment. We know what it is now; we know the impact it has had; we know how big this thing is and the movement that it started* now. *Take us back to before all of this happened. There is a great story that you tell about you and Wesley Morris, right before the book was published.*

In some ways, I feel like I had been working toward *The 1619 Project* for my entire career. I started off as a beat reporter at the newspaper. If you could get thirty column inches, that would be a long story. My articles kept getting longer, and longer, and longer. I wrote about race. I was a history and African American studies major before I got a journalism degree. How could you write about racial equality in America today without building on the history of how we got here? America has learned this so poorly that you have to build that in. My editors would joke with me, saying, "You were going back to 1950, now you're going back to 1930." I'm like, "eventually I'm getting back to 1619." (Laughter) Eventually, you have to go to the root of it. All of my work is really arguing that the racial equality we see today is a legacy of slavery. Racial segregation, poverty, incarceration, these are placed upon the descendants of slavery. Black is a fiction; it's a construct, made up. People who have descended from slavery are the ones who have suffered the brunt of it. When *The Project's* fourth anniversary was approaching, I was still obsessing over 1619. And all these years later, most Americans still don't know that date, it's still rendered in obscurity. I knew that there would be commemorations, that other journalists would write stories about the anniversary, but I really wanted to use it as an opportunity to do something big. I didn't just want to talk about what happened all those years ago, but to talk about the way that what happened all those years ago would lay the foundation for the very country that would come to be. Across all of American life, our society is being shaped by the legacy of slavery in ways that you don't know or recognize. And so, that really was my pitch: capitalism founded slavery in America. Democracy—there would be no democracy in America without Black resistance. I was

writing about these ideas. I knew it couldn't just be me writing a single essay. If I was going to tell this story, it had to be big. It had to be written by many voices, in many different perspectives. But, then I actually had to pull it off. I didn't get pushback from my editors, and the project just kept expanding and expanding. I felt a tremendous weight once I got them to say yes. You have to deliver it, and how do you do justice to a story?

For months, I researched and wrote my own essay. I also read every single essay in the book, every single piece of prose, looked at every image, and had no idea how people would respond or react to it. As a journalist, the length of time you spend on something, the care you put into it, does not necessarily correlate to the response. There's an app called "Chartbeat." Journalists use it because they can track how long someone stays on your article, how long readers read your article. It is depressing; I don't even look at it anymore. It's like, I just spent a year on this investigation, and the average reader spent a minute and thirty seconds reading it. (Laughter) I knew that I could produce this thing that I felt was profound, and important, and necessary, and that people might pay attention for a day and then move on. But I felt this was the project that I was put on this earth to do. I *had* to do it.

That day, Wesley Morris, who is a very dear friend of mine and an amazing writer—he has won *two* Pulitzers, not *one*—we were in the newsroom together. Before we print the magazine, we print out all the pages and put them together so you can see the entire project. To see an entire issue of the *New York Times Magazine* dedicated to nothing but the story of the legacy of slavery and to see all of these Black writers who got to contribute to this—I feel like all the months of being immersed in the horror, the tragedy, and the hopes of Black people, and to know, we had brought this forth. We looked at each other, it was just he and I in that room; we embraced, and we started sobbing. If you know anything about journalism, you're not supposed to do that. (Laughter) You're supposed to pretend that you don't have emotions, even though you do. And I didn't know, at that moment, how it would go out into the world. But what I did know, in that moment, was that we had done what we came there to do. And no matter what the public response to it was, we had honored our ancestors. (Applause)

You wondered if anyone cared about all this work you put into it, and then it blew up. Why did it take hold in the way it did?

I've asked myself this many, many times. To me, the project is not that novel. To me, the project makes sense. The reason why I pitched the project is because most people have never had that realization; they haven't made those connections. Most people don't have the luxury of spending years of their life reading history, and thinking about these issues, and making these connections. I think that when the *New York Times* puts its resources behind something, it means something; it gives it a gravitas; it means something to the world. But also, I think it was because the arguments that we were making were not about the past. Instead, we were saying, "Look at our world. Look at our system of capitalism. Look at our system of health care." For instance, look at traffic in Atlanta, right? When you're sitting in Atlanta traffic and you can see your exit, it's going to take you 40 minutes to get there. It makes no sense. But that's because it wasn't designed to move you into the city; it was designed to create a physical barrier between Black people and White people. Then it all starts to make sense. I think that it was like that for most Americans; they've been taught this history so poorly. The polling is clear; Americans want to know more. They want to better understand how slavery and racism has shaped our society, because this project was about America today, not just what happened then. I often compare what we tried to do with

this project to the red pill in *The Matrix*. You're living in a society and you think this is just the way that it is. And then, as you read, you start to see that all of this was created; all of this was constructed; it's not natural; we don't have to be this society. That really stuck with people. People wanted to devour it, but they also wanted to keep it. It was really amazing to see, folks were getting their magazines stolen out of their papers. Because the *New York Times Magazine* comes in the Sunday paper, people were saying, "They left my paper, but they took my magazine." (Laughter) This was tens of thousands of words on the legacy of slavery, and people were posting videos where they were driving twenty miles and going to five different stores to find this thing.

I do think part of the success was due to the fact that I published this project under the Obama administration. And to be clear, unlike my detractors, I didn't set the four-hundredth anniversary to fall under Trump; I don't have that much power. (Laughter) Under Obama, the American public, collectively, wanted to believe we reached this post-racial mountain. A Black man is in office, we have banished the past. And I think there would have been folks who were like, "Why are we doing this? Why are we still talking about slavery? You have a Black man in the White House." But we followed the first Black President with an openly white-nationalist President. People had a sense of whiplash, like, what America are we when America produces these two things back-to-back? *The 1619 Project* really helped people to understand the country that they were living in, in a way that the history we've been taught before had not. I guess that's been the sticking power of it. And Trump tweeting about it helped. (Laughter) I owe Republicans royalties, but I'm not going to pay. That's not reparations. (Laughter)

You turned me on to the work of historian Evan Morgan. He wrote about how historians have tried to deal with slavery as an exception in the American story. He talked about the challenge to explain how the people in this country could have developed a dedication to human liberty and dignity, and at the same time developed a system of labor that denied *human liberty and dignity every hour of the day. This is the thing that describes that central paradox in American history. This gets to something else that you talk about, that there's a myth that we have where we have to try to hold these true stories all at once. I don't know if you have an answer to this, but how do you do away with a myth? How do you explode it?*

Myth very rarely withstands the light of truth. To some degree, *The 1619 Project* is replacing one origin story with another. There's always going to be some mythmaking to how we recount any history when a nation wants to understand itself. And I don't think it's all bad. But I think the myths that we have told ourselves about America have allowed us to accept great inequality and injustice, and we don't have to. I love history. Some people think it is dry, but to me, when you read certain historical texts, you're able to make connections that you weren't really able to understand before. Evan Morgan says, "In America, slavery and freedom were born at the same time." And if we were simply taught that fact, it would go a long way toward us having a better understanding of the society that was built up from that. We only want to learn one of those things. I write about this pretty extensively in my essay. We're taught to think of slavery as an aberration in a free society, an asterisk to the American story, that we were founded on ideals and practices of liberty, that slavery was mostly a phenomenon of backwards Southerners, that the true heart of America was the Abolitionist North. Only about 1% of the population of the North were abolitionists. All thirteen colonies practiced slavery during the Revolutionary period. At the end of our first Civil War, which was the Revolutionary War, we could have abolished slavery and started a nation without it, but we

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And also, the true heart of America was Virginia. We think about these words being written in Philadelphia, but who wrote them? A Virginian whose job it was to enslave people for a living, that was his occupation. The father of the Constitution was a Virginian. The man who drafted the Bill of Rights was a Virginian. Our first President was a Virginian. The ideas of republicanism all come out of Virginia. Virginia was a slave society; 40% of the population of Virginia was enslaved. Evan Morgan argues that the reason that Madison and Jefferson and Washington could contemplate a democratic republic was because they knew most of the masses were enslaved and so could never challenge their power. So, we need to understand that our founders were human beings; they weren't demi-gods. They were deeply flawed human beings who were compromised, like many people are compromised, because they wanted to make money. These men wanted to make money and they made money off of slavery. But if we changed the kind of central idea of who we are as a country to Virginia, which is the truth, then we would better understand our most vexing tensions today. We are exceptional; we have exceptional inequality in this nation. We are the most powerful nation in the world, yet we incarcerate more people than any nation in the world. We are the only Western democracy where whether or not you can go to the doctor if you are sick depends on if you have a job that offers health insurance. We have the highest rates of child poverty. What makes us different from the countries that we like to compare ourselves to is our legacy of slavery and our inability to get over it. And the fact that we were founded by a white elite who didn't care much for poor white people, and certainly didn't care for Black folks. And we are still largely ruled by an elite that doesn't care much for poor white folks and it certainly doesn't care for Black folks. If we could understand what the white elite understood at the time of the Bacon Rebellion, that it is those of us who share a material interest of all races, without fighting for crumbs on the bottom, that we could challenge the power of the elite, but instead, we don't. And so, we allow ourselves to be a very rich nation

that is extremely stingy when it comes to our own citizens. This, to me, is why you see the powers aligned against this project.

As journalists, we understand that narrative drives policy. As Americans, we don't tend to make our policy choices based on data. (Laughter) We don't think the research shows us that the best thing to do for someone who is poor is to give them money, and they won't be poor anymore. We know this, right? (Laughter) We make decisions on policies based off of narrative, who we think is deserving, who we think is undeserving, who we think is worthy of help, who is not worthy of help. This project is attempting to change the narrative about who we are as a country. We are not a country of rugged individualism. We are not a country that has believed in equality. We are a country that has had to fight for everything that we have. We are a country that was founded on these amazing majestic ideals that we just have never believed to be true. And I think if we don't stop struggling with that path, we're going to keep accepting this deeply unequal and divided society that we have been. We will keep grappling with this society that many of us want to believe we already have.

I've heard you tell a great story about your daughter. She used to ask you, "Is this person good? Is this person bad?" And your answer was. . .

My answer to her was, "Most people are not good or bad or both, except Donald Trump." (Laughter) We have to have nuance; we have to have complexity. We want everything to be, excuse the pun, black or white, but it's not. Most of us are capable of doing really good things. Most of us are capable of doing some bad things, hopefully not *really* bad things, but we accept a lot. I talk to my students at Howard about this. We study ***The 1619 Project***, and I talk to them about how most Americans, no matter where they lived, were accepting of slavery. Most Americans were not opposed. They weren't abolitionists. They may not have liked the brutality of slavery, but they were largely okay with it if the South contained it to the South. They didn't fight a war to end slavery, but fought a war because the South wanted to break off from the Union. I talk about how all evil systems require complicity. So, it's easy for us to look back and say, "How could you? How could you allow this brutality against humans just so you could have cotton shirts, sugar to put in your tea, and rum to drink?" But then, we think about what we allow now. The capitalism episode of the *1619* docuseries is built largely around efforts to unionize Amazon factories. All of us would like to think of ourselves as good people, but we know that next day delivery is built on exploitation. We know that the materials that make our phones run are mined by child laborers, and yet, all good people look away. So, I think it's just important to always be thinking about how we are all complicit in these systems. And it doesn't mean that we are bad people, but then we certainly can't say that we're entirely good either. And I think that's the most useful way to think about history. Can you look at Thomas Jefferson and say he did some good things? Absolutely. Is it hard as a descendant of people who were enslaved to say that the good outweighs the bad? That's what we have to debate. I think those conversations are worthy of being had. We have a society that hasn't wanted to have those conversations. They want to silence those of us who say, you can't talk about Jefferson without talking about the people he owned. How does a thirty-something-year-old have the power and the wealth to be tasked with writing the new words of a new nation? It's because of all of the human beings that he exploited in his slave labor camp. We've only wanted to tell one of those stories. And I'm just saying, we have to tell it all.

You said something a few months ago to Ezra Klein in the New York Times *about*

journalism and the importance of a healthy press. "If our press is not covering the politics of our country in a way that is honest and in a way that gets to the truth, and is more than stenography, then our democracy can't be healthy." Will you break that down for me? Give me a sense of what you're seeing in journalism.

I think the press, more often than not, doesn't reflect truth, it reflects power. I think that we have really struggled with things like how to cover a political party that is not adhering to political norms anymore. How to cover a president who doesn't seem to care what the rules are in a system of checks and balances, when you realize there really aren't any checks and balances. The checks and balances are largely about people adhering to the way we've always done things. It's become very glaring since Trump first started running for office. We are so afraid of being charged with being biased, of favoring one political party over the other, that we aren't reporting the truth. If I report something negative about Republicans, I have to report something negative about Democrats, even though, clearly, what's happening in the Republican Party is beyond the pale. When we are seeing a breakdown of democracy, we are seeing people who are saying they don't believe in democracy or trying to overturn elections. And yet, so often, you can't tell that from reading the coverage, because we don't want to take a side. But our job is to side with the truth. I mean, I certainly didn't get into journalism just because I thought it would be interesting for people to know things. People do need to know things, but I got into journalism because I believe our field is a check on power, that our field exists to hold power accountable and to expose the way power is used against the vulnerable. When a journalist covers Child Protective Services, we wouldn't write a story that says a child was abused, but the official in Child Services said they did everything they're supposed to do, so that's the end of the story. Right? We would investigate. We'd say, well, they said that they did everything. But, let me show you all the ways that they didn't. And we're not trying to balance, and then dig up, that the child was not in school one day, so maybe they deserve it, right? You don't do that. There's a clear imbalance. We have really struggled with how to cover a political party that has gone rogue. How do you cover that consistently? How do you understand the threats that our democracy is facing? Because so much of our political press doesn't come from groups who have had to fight for democracy. And I think they don't understand the peril because they think everything will work out. And you know what, for them, it probably will. But for many of us, it won't. I am calling for us to really *examine*. And ours is a very defensive profession. We traffic in transparency, but don't actually like being that transparent ourselves. I think part of that is because all we have as journalists is our credibility. There's no reason for you to believe anything I write unless you find me credible. And so, when we are critiqued, instead of us taking a moment and saying, "Is there some truth to that critique? Are there things I should be doing better?," our instinct is often to be defensive, because we feel like if we acknowledge that we have failed in some way, we will become less credible. I actually believe that it is in opening up and saying, "You know what? You're right, I had a blind spot. I didn't get that right. Let me go back and report this," that we become more credible.

(Deborah Uman) What was your first investigative story?

I always liked being a little provocative. So, my very first investigative piece was whether or not Jesus was Black. (Laughter, applause) I was not able to prove that he was Black. But I was able to prove that it was very unlikely that he was white.

(Kaydee Davis) What would you say to people who claim that teaching a more honest version of American history causes more division, or constitutes a threat, to society?

I think that's a very convenient excuse for not teaching the truth. What you're saying is that our history is so divisive that if we teach it, it'll make us more divided. And it also ignores that we are already divided, right? We are already a polarized society. And so often, the sense that we are not divided is based on the silence of marginalized and oppressed people. As a journalist, I don't believe in that. And I actually think it's just not true. I've been all over the country for four years now talking about ***The 1619 Project***, and I can't tell you how many times I've heard from people, "I never knew any of this." And it doesn't make them feel more divided. What it makes them feel is, "So much of my country didn't make sense, and now it's making sense to me, and I want to learn more." And that's really the only way we can ever hope to truly come together as a country, to own up to what our country has done. Not to tear our country down, but to build it and make it stronger.

I'll just give a quick example. We know this in our own interpersonal relationships, right? If someone has done something to you and your family, something that hurts you, and then they're ready to move on; they don't want to talk about it anymore. They want to act like it never happened. You might come to family dinners, but the tension is there. Right? You feel it; you can't get over it, because that person has not acknowledged and owned up to what they did. And then, on that one dinner, maybe you've had too much wine, or bourbon, in my case, and you bring it up. There's a big fight, and then you get blamed. Why did you have to bring that up? Because it's only the veneer that everything is okay. But once you've had that conversation, once you've had that big fight, and that person says, "You know what? You're right. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry, what can I do?," then you can start healing. And that, to me, is the same thing in our country. The reason why we had an insurrection on January 6th is because we have not owned up and atoned for what we did. The reason why we see George Floyd get lynched by a police officer in the streets is because that police officer lives in a society where he believes even if he has witnesses he can get away with killing a Black man. That is a society that is deeply divided, and has not owned up to what it is. But if we want to build a new society, it is through the truth.

(Bailey Shae) What would you say to someone who argues that the past was a different time, that we can't place our present judgments on past eras because things were done differently then?

The past *was* a different time; that's factual. I'm all for placing my current judgment on the past, okay? I don't think there was ever a time when people didn't know that slavery was wrong. I don't hear people saying that about World War Two and the Holocaust, that we shouldn't judge the Holocaust by today's standards because Hitler didn't know that what he was doing was wrong. We don't do that. Look at the words of the people who lived back then. Look at the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said, "We know we have a wolf by the ears. We know that if God is just, he is going to punish us for the sin of slavery." This is Jefferson, a man who enslaved human beings. Look at George Washington; when he was trying to get support for the Revolution, he said, "We have to fight against the British because they're going to treat us like we treat our slaves." He said that; it's in ***The 1619 Project***, footnoted. And then we can look at the fact that there were anti-racist white people back then. All the folks who get so distraught when we talk about racist white people; why don't you ever see yourself in the anti-racist white people? You'd have to believe that these men were children, that

they had no intellect, that they weren't able to know that when you whip a human being, that is wrong; when you sell a child away from their mother, that is wrong. Of course, they understood that was wrong; they wrote about it. The British, when we were trying to break off from that empire, were calling us out for our own hypocrisy. So, my answer to that is, no. If you are a historian, and many historians are having the fight about presentism, or whether we can put today's values on the past, I just want to know when was the time when we had the value that buying and selling human beings was okay?

(Artem Koval) With the assertion that 1619 was America's origin point, how do we move forward? How do we begin using this knowledge to effect change and reshape the U.S. into something that more closely achieves its best ideals?

I became a journalist so I can expose the problem, and then ya'll have to figure out how to fix this. (Laughter) We're not the problem solvers; we're just the ones who point out what the problems are. (Laughter) I really do think, until we have truth telling, until we have an honest accounting of our history, and then we atone for that history, and then we make repair, and then financial and other repairs for that history, we won't be able to move forward. We will always be stuck in this polarized, unequal, divisive society that we have. I'm hoping that we can liberate ourselves to truth. And yes, it will be painful. But we are not living up to the potential of a country that could be great. And let's be clear, Black people suffer the most from our legacy of slavery. But *most* Americans are suffering in some way. They just released new data on life expectancy. Even if you take out COVID deaths, we're really the only industrialized nation that saw a decline in life expectancy. Almost all of that decline is coming from young people who are dying too early from gun violence, from suicide, and from drug overdoses. So, this is not a sign of a healthy society. And I think we have the resources to be a great society, and a caring society, and to take care of all of our people. Our young people are drowning in college loan debt. I just paid my student loans off five years ago. I'm celebrating that I paid it off, but I'm forty-seven years old. When you look at what makes this country amazing—that we truly are the most diverse country in the world, that we truly are a place that can be incredibly generous—if we could steer toward our best instincts as a country instead of succumbing to the divisiveness of our past, I can only imagine what this society could be. But we won't get there by hiding from the truth of what we are.

(Rachel Amedee) If there is only one idea that you would have people take away from The 1619 Project*, what would that idea be?*

If I can send you away with one thought, it is the last chapter of the book called "Justice." It argues that this nation owes not only a great moral debt to Black Americans, but a great financial debt to Black Americans. If you just read the book and you come away thinking that's a sad story, then I failed. What I want you to do is come away with a charge that we can alleviate the primary cause of suffering of Black people in this country, which is that Black people have close to zero wealth. After living in this country for four hundred years, slavery was not a system of racism; it was an economic system designed to extract wealth from Black bodies and to redistribute that wealth to white institutions and white people. Jim Crow, the period of racial apartheid, was also a system of economic exploitation. And so here we are, sixty years after the Civil Rights Movement and sixty years after Dr. King was assassinated. Black Americans have full legal rights and citizenship, but the wealth gap is identical to the time when King was assassinated in 1968. We've made zero progress on that. So, what that means is, you

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can do all the things this country says that you are supposed to do. You can get married, you can go to college, work a good job, but you can't buy into the neighborhoods that other people with the same amount of income that you have buy into. You can't get your kids out of high poverty schools. You can't send your kids to school without student loan debt. All of those things add up. There's a primary cause of that. What I want people to take away is, even when it comes to reparations, even our white allies don't support it. The majority of white Democrats are opposed to reparations. And I really want folks to do a gut check about why that is. How can you learn if you haven't read the book from beginning to end? I know it's a lot; *The 1619 Project* is a thick book, like Holy Bible length. But we have to make financial repair; we have to pay that debt, and it is a collective debt. So, if you didn't sign the Declaration, but you want to take credit for that as an American, then you also have to own the debt that is owed as well.

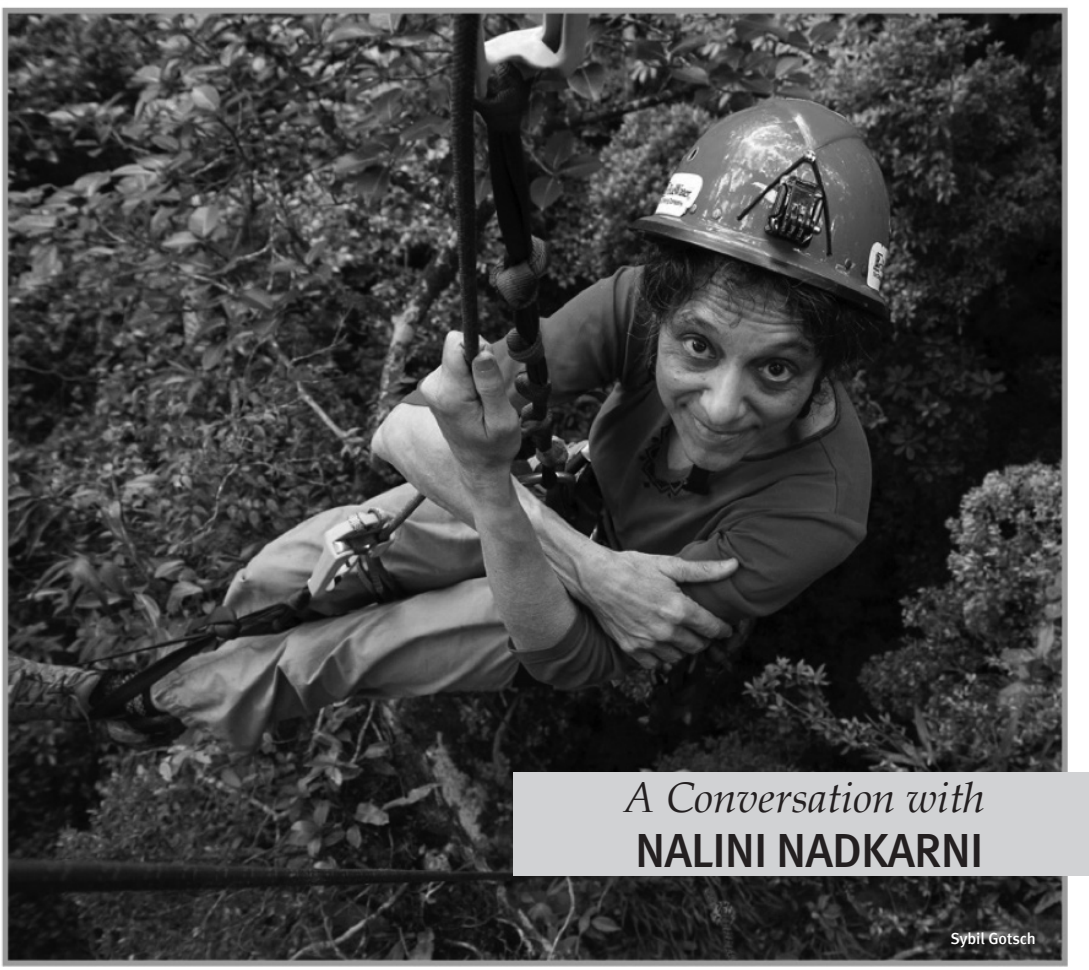
Thanks. This was an amazing conversation. I think we are all called to action after tonight's conversation. So, thank you so much.



Doug Fabrizio is the news director of KUER radio and the host and executive producer of the program *Radio West*. The talk show is syndicated by PRI with a focus on the western United States and especially Utah. His work has been recognized by the Society of Professional Journalists, the Utah Broadcasters Association, the Public Radio News Directors Association, and the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

UNDER ONE CANOPY: ON INCARCERATION, INTERDISCIPLINARITY, BARBIES, AND TREES

HEATHER ROOT



A Conversation with
NALINI NADKARNI

Sybil Gotsch

Nalini Nadkarni (Ph.D., University of Washington) is a professor emerita at the University of Utah with a lifelong passion for trees. Her scientific work focuses on the ecology of forest canopies in Costa Rica and Washington State. She has published 140 scientific papers and received funding from the National Science Foundation and the National Geographic Society. She was recently awarded the Enduring Achievement Award from the National Science Foundation.

Through her love of trees, Dr. Nadkarni has engaged artists, children, people of faith, and incarcerated people to provide greater access to the natural world. She conceived of treetop Barbies to connect with children, initially using secondhand dolls and volunteer seamstresses to make them, and eventually partnering with Mattel to develop a Nalini Nadkarni Barbie. She brought science into prisons by arranging for speakers, developing hands-on conservation projects with incarcerated people, and studying the effects of nature imagery in solitary confinement units. She continues to work with people of faith by linking trees with their sacred texts. Her latest project in Utah explores the ways that increased access to the natural world can improve human health.

This interview took place at Weber State University after Dr. Nadkarni spoke about tapestry thinking at the 2023 Intermountain Sustainability Summit. Her inspiring keynote address focused on weaving scientific knowledge with social values to create a culture of caring about the natural world.

Nalini, I'm so glad for the chance to speak with you today. I've read about your part-time appointment at Evergreen State College allowing you to explore avenues of public engagement. I'm wondering what kinds of things we at Weber State University could do to support early career faculty in developing the skills, the opportunities, and the time to pursue that kind of community engagement?

That is a great question, Heather. It's interesting, because the situation of splitting an academic position, which started in 1992, at Evergreen State College, really stemmed from a personal situation. My husband is also an academic. He and I got married in graduate school. We fell deeply in love with each other, and we didn't want to be apart. We were both headed towards academic appointments, but we didn't want one person on the east coast and the other on the west coast, which often happens because of the scarcity of academic positions and how rarely they become available at the same institution. So, we decided at the very beginning of our marriage that whoever got an academic position first, as long as the other partner could still pursue his or her research, we would go ahead and take it. I ended up getting a position right out of graduate school at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I went to Santa Barbara; Jack came along as what we call "a captive spouse." I had the full-time academic position—all the status, all the tensions, stress, and joy that go along with being a full time academic in an R1 institution. Jack was using my lab space to continue his research, but he was a second-class citizen in that system. That went on for five years. Then, I got an offer to be director of research at a botanical garden on the east coast. The botanical garden was devoted to the study of canopy plants, which was great. But again, Jack didn't get a position with it. So, he followed along, again as a captive spouse. He kept doing

his research in a wonderful way, but never had academic or professional status. And then, a single position came up at Evergreen State College. Evergreen was known as a free-thinking, not-so-hard-core academic institution. By then, we had one child, our son Gus. So, we thought we could split this position. We approached Evergreen with that possibility, and they took the bait. They said, "Well, we'll get two experts for the price of one. You will each have a faculty vote, you'll get your own office space and lab space, and you can each teach part time." That allowed both of us to pursue our teaching, which we both love, at an academic institution.

Teaching part-time also gave us the opportunity to do our own research. We both applied for, and were successful in getting, NSF grants. So, we were supported to do our research as well as teaching. We never got that extra half-salary so we always had to pinch our pennies. But it was worth it to us, because it was the first time both of us were equal in terms of professional status, which I think, to Jack, was very important. It also turned out to be important to me because I realized that I was constantly in a state of apologizing—to him and the world, that I had a position and he did not. It allowed us to be on equal footing professionally; it allowed us to teach in a place that valued teaching and it allowed us to carry out the research that we both loved. Teaching part-time allowed us to pursue whatever else we chose. A big piece of that was raising our children, which was really wonderful. We alternated teaching so that one of us could always be available when the kids got sick, or needed a ride, or whatever. But it also allowed me to pursue public engagement in a way that I couldn't have done if I had had a full-time teaching position or a position at a traditional research institution.

I was able to pursue things like working with faith-based groups or taking the time I needed to build the relationships required to work with the incarcerated, because you have to actively construct that trust a tiny bit at a time. It took two years to get into the prison system in a way that allowed me to do the work that I've subsequently been able to do. It allowed me to communicate, interact, and collaborate with people across the country. With my first ecological projects, my NSF-funded projects, instead of just being restricted to Evergreen State College, the way nearly all of the other faculty were, I was able to go to national and international conferences; I was able to do fieldwork for extended periods of time. So, for me, having that half-time of not teaching, of not having expectations and responsibilities, allowed me to flourish. I was able to be a better parent because I could spend more time with my kids. I think it allowed me to be a more holistic thinker and someone who could enter into other societal spheres like faith-based groups or incarcerated groups. People often say, "Gosh, how did you get to be where you are? You do all this stuff with incarcerated people, faith-based people, and artists. How do you do that?" I think the secret sauce was that I had twenty years, at the prime of my career, to do the wonderful, narrow work of a regular academic, but also to branch out into those other spheres.

So, for a young faculty member at a place like Weber State University or the University of Utah, I really hope there might be a similar mechanism as an option. I would choose to work half-time, get half my salary from the university, and extend myself in other creative ways that may have nothing to do with academics. It could still have something to do with academics, but you could have the freedom and peace of mind to not say, "I'm not doing a good job, because I'm not working eighty hours a week the way all my colleagues are around me." But instead, say, "I'm working twenty hours a week for this, and I'm doing another ten hours of childcare, and I'm doing another ten hours of the other work that I want to do." And if it means living in a smaller house or driving a car that's twenty years old instead of a Tesla, that's a

choice I want to make. Unfortunately, because of this academic structure, that's something that's still an unusual request. My hope is that, as we're learning, really, as a result of COVID, it's not always a forty-hour work week that we should be striving for. Maybe, if we take a little less money, we will have the opportunity to develop ourselves in ways that are positive, fulfilling, and productive.

That sounds wonderful. As I was reading about the work you have done during your career, I was struck by your integrity with the way you handled the situation with Mattel and how you thought about your role within the incarceration system. What practices do you perform to keep yourself grounded in your integrity as you do this tricky work?

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It is tricky work. In academia, every now and then, you're confronted with a puzzle. Is it ethical to take money from Exxon in order to do geological research? Is it okay to bend the rules, even though you might do something that could be regarded as unethical? Maybe it comes from my own personal background—my father and mother were both very ethical people. Telling a lie in my family was the worst thing that you could possibly do. I've also had other role models, people who have kept their integrity despite offers or temptations. So, I don't know that there is a practice that I can suggest, other than constantly asking yourself, "Is this okay, or not? If I looked at this from the outside, if I looked at this from the future, and look back on myself, is this the right decision that I'm making?" Sometimes, I have to look to others and then judge my own response. For example, I was approached a number of years ago by the National Geographic Society. They had been offered twelve Toyota Land Cruisers. Toyota said to National Geographic, "Give these to your top twelve explorers." So, the guy at National Geographic called me up and said, "Nalini, I've got great news. I can give you a Toyota Land Cruiser. It's worth $80,000. You can use it for your fieldwork, or you can sell it. You can use it however you want to use it. All you have to do is to be in a commercial for sixty seconds. You don't have to say a word. It'll be you in the Land Cruiser, going through your field site area and the ad will say 'great explorer, great car.'" Of course, the Land Cruiser is an SUV. Basically, if you were sitting back in your chair, looking at this ad, you'd think it'd be okay to have a giant car like that because National Geographic Explorer thinks it's a great car. And I was like, oh my god, I can't do that. That's a total sellout. So, I went back to the other explorers who had accepted the car, and I said, "Did you think about this?"

And some of them said, "No, I didn't even think about it." I thought about it, but I also really needed that car for my research. So, I went ahead and took the car. I went back to National Geographic, and I said, "You know, I would really like to have a car, but I don't want this Land Cruiser because it's sending the wrong message. So, what about an electric car equivalent? It's much less money, and it gets over eight times the gas mileage. They got back to me and said, "Nope, it's the Land Cruiser or nothing." It was at that moment that I knew that Toyota was trying to greenwash explorers and exploit their integrity in order to sell more of these giant gas-guzzling cars. So, I had to say no. There was no way that I could take that car and think of myself as trying to sell these giant cars to the general public. So yeah, I lost out on an $80,000 Land Cruiser that could have been very useful. But I knew that it was the right decision, and I've never regretted that choice.

You can take a look at the Mattel thing and say, "Barbie is a horrible role model for young girls. She's floofy; she cares about accessories." But Barbie has this *reach*. Everybody knows about Barbie, and our little girls love her. So, if I tweak her in a way that turns her into Treetop Barbie, or Explorer Barbie, I'll be piggybacking on the reach that Mattel has with young girls. Maybe I'll shift the way that young girls think about who they are; who they aspire to be; who they identify with. It was tough, walking into the world of corporate marketing, because they were clearly all about *just* selling dolls. But I think in that case, it wasn't like they were greenwashing me. It was sort of like I was greenwashing them. And it worked. The responses that I've gotten, in terms of little girls who have written me letters, and people who have said, "This really makes a difference in shaping the way young girls think about themselves and about science and exploration," I think it was the right choice. I think about every decision that has to be made when you're invited to collaborate, or when you extend yourself into a collaboration. You run the danger of exploitation. The same thing happened with incarceration.

Mass incarceration is probably the worst aspect of American society that I can think of, in terms of its injustice and in the way that it's set up. I'm not saying that there aren't criminals and people who need to be kept away from general society; there are. But the way we go about doing it, and the injustices that have been embedded in it, are completely wrong and evil. Spending time building relationships with a prison warden or a prison officer, knowing that their mission is to enforce what the system stands for, has been really difficult at times. But again, it's like, let me try to change this horrible system from *within*. I've gotten in trouble with that. People who support prison abolition have really given me a hard time. They say, "Why are you doing this? This is wrong. You're betraying what is right." And my response has been, "Well, I believe in prison abolition, but prison abolitionists aren't going to make incarceration go away. At least what we're trying to do is to shift the system as well as we can." There are people on the inside who are saying, "Yes, these men need access to nature. Yes, they need more access to science education." And look at the positive things that come out of that. So, if we can change those biases, prison guard by prison guard, or prison warden by prison warden, I think that's one way of creating change in a system that seems resistant to change. There's a role for prison abolitionists, and I think there's a role for people like me who have tried to change the system. We all choose the way that we want to try to change intractable systems. I don't denigrate abolitionists; I just feel like the way I've chosen to go about it fits within *my* code of integrity. And I'm going to keep doing it.

I appreciate the way your work is interdisciplinary and collaborative. I'm in a college of science in a botany department. I'm working with students, and I want to prepare them

to contribute to the world. Sometimes, I feel this depth-breadth trade-off. The more that I bring them into cool, collaborative, interdisciplinary projects, the less chemistry and physics they might have time to really nail down. What do you think about that trade-off in the depth and breadth of college education?

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I also experienced that in my twenty-year professional life. I was a faculty member at Evergreen State College. Evergreen was established in the early 1970s on a foundation of interdisciplinary learning and teaching. Every problem, every question that we face in our lives, whether it's changing a tire or getting a COVID vaccine, is inherently interdisciplinary. Changing a tire requires material science, physics, sociology, and economics when you really think about what is involved with a tire. Everything has an underlying value of interdisciplinarity. And so, all of the classes that were taught were always taught in this way.

It was only through my experience with interdisciplinary learning that I was able to pull that together. The University of Utah actually has a campus center called NEXUS,[1] which was established to foster interdisciplinary research, but sometimes the faculty doesn't understand how to implement such work because they weren't trained that way. They were trained to say, "Botany is botany; botany is great; botany is what I do." Instead, they should be thinking, "How do we cultivate plants and what do plants mean to people? How can we get more people interested in botany? How can we get politicians to think about botany when they design their planning for urban parks?" Some faculty don't know how to talk to a policymaker; they may not even know how to talk to a soil person. Evergreen had the vision to produce that in an undergraduate setting, and we need more of it. I see more and more universities beginning to set up centers that foster interdisciplinary growth. I see the National Science Foundation, which funds a lot of the basic research in our country, funding what they call "convergence research." Convergence research is essentially interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. There are new programs now that are fostering engineers to come together with biologists and physiologists. So, I think now there are glimmers of academic values that are aligned within interdisciplinary research, but I think we still have a long way to go.

We talked earlier about incentive structures. How do you think incentive structures at a university could change to foster those connections and skills?

When I think of incentives, I think about research incentives that are already well in place. For instance, one of the things I've been thinking about are student and faculty research trajectories. When you're a graduate student, you usually sit down with your graduate professor, and she says, "Let's talk about your research trajectory. You're going to start with your dissertation work, and then where will that go? Who will you collaborate with, before and after your postdoc? What kind of institutions will you move into? And what resources do you need? You should be going to this conference over here to present your research results." Well, what if we had

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broader impacts on trajectories, or interdisciplinary trajectories as well? Then your major professor would sit down with you and say, "How can you connect your dissertation work with some other discipline? There's a pilot grant that's available from the dean, and that is specifically for collaboration with somebody outside your discipline. So why don't you get together with somebody that you think you should collaborate with to amplify or to deepen the work that you're trying to do? And what if you went and presented this at an arts conference instead of the ecological conference? Here's a $600 travel fellowship to send you to that conference. You will meet other people who are in that field who might be encouraging, interesting, and instructive in terms of your development. You're developing your interdisciplinary persona and your interdisciplinary portfolio. There's an office of interdisciplinary studies to help match you up with faculty across the country. There's an arts faculty member at Utah State University and she knows about you as a botany professor here. Do this project where your students do botanical illustration. I'll give you $10,000 to do that and a semester off from teaching so that you can devote yourself to that."

So, all of these things that are already in place for a straight research trajectory—grants to generate pilot data, travel to a conference—could be applied to fostering interdisciplinary research. Unfortunately, I don't know any universities that actually have it in place. I think there are some things that are embedded in the academic system that, at least at this time, are resistant to that. When I go to tenure meetings in my biology department, and I listen to the way people are evaluating a young professor, I hear them say, "Well, they published this, this, and this, in this botanical journal." Or, "They've been published in *Science*; they published in *PNAS*; they had these other publications where they collaborated with an artist and published in an art journal, but we don't count that." If you're a pre-tenure professor, gunning for tenure, then you're going to be thinking strategically about how you're going to make your CV and your record look the best when you present it to the tenure review committee. So, there are these deeply ingrained rewards and incentives that the academic system, for centuries, has been reinforcing. We're just beginning to have these small voices saying, "You know, it's okay to have a publication about botanical illustration in an artistic journal rather than in the *Annals of Botany* or *American Botanist*." That's just going to take time to change. I think we have to keep chipping away at it. Every time someone like me publishes in a prison journal, or a science education journal, instead of *Ecology* or *Science*, and I get tenure, get an award, or a pat on the back from the dean, the department people go, "Oh, well, maybe

when Heather comes up for tenure, we should keep that in mind?" So, I think there is going to have to be a shift in academic culture, and I hear rumblings of it, I think it's beginning. But it still has a long way to go. It may not help the person who's coming up for tenure right now, or the person who's trying to think about his or her academic trajectory now. But I think those changes are real. And I'm really, really happy to see them.

I want to switch gears. We are here in Utah. Both of us come from the Pacific Northwest. I'm trying to learn effective ways of connecting people to nature here where there aren't big trees.

The scarcity of trees actually makes them more compelling and valuable here. I think in many ways people appreciate trees and forests here in Utah even more than they do in the Pacific Northwest. In the Northwest, you're surrounded by trees. Here in Utah, you have to climb up to the mountains to get to the wonderful bits of conifer forest. For me, it's been difficult to come to love this landscape. Every morning, I wake up, and I look out at the Wasatch, and I think, "What happened to the trees?" It's like a traumatic shock each time. My husband and I both love hiking, and we go out to nature all the time. And so, I have come to have a cultivated appreciation of the landscape here and the biota here. It's not a heartfelt gut-love, like I felt the first time I went to Seattle and thought, "Oh my gosh, this is my landscape." That natural, intuitive, spiritual connection to the trees and the landscape of the Pacific Northwest was so clear to me there. Here, it's more of an intellectual connection. It's like, when are the lilies going to show up in the foothills this year? Or, look at that interesting beetle eating that interesting leaf. It's much more in my head rather than in my heart and my gut the way it was in the Pacific Northwest. And yet, native Utahans who have grown up in the Intermountain West have a positive heart-reaction to this landscape. When they are transported up to the Northwest, they're like, "Oh, my God, it's too dense here; there's too much green; I'm overwhelmed. It doesn't have that openness that makes me sing and feel good." So, I think for me, to get other people attached or connected to this landscape I have to take them through my route—which is more of an intellectual route instead of an instinctual one. Or, I have to say, "Oh, you've already got this instinctual gut connection, that's great. Maybe we can share some interactions or connections that we feel from different places which we both find interest in; which we both find connection to and both feel a sense of need to protect it." There are plenty of people, many of them are my students, who don't miss trees. They think the desert is gorgeous. The Great Salt Lake is like an aquatic desert and you can find it beautiful at certain times. Now that I've spent more time here, I can see beauty here. It's not *instinctive*, but maybe that isn't necessary. Maybe you can be connected to different landscapes in different ways. I think I'm learning that, but it's taken a lot of time.

I read that you have a background in dance.

Dance has been a huge part of my life. My parents had the wisdom to offer me and my two sisters modern dance lessons from a wonderful woman named Erica Thimey. I grew up in Bethesda, Maryland, and she had a studio in Georgetown. And so, I took modern dance lessons twice a week. I did a lot of performances when I was a kid. Then all through college, I did modern dance. I actually double-majored in biology and modern dance. But then I thought, I don't think I can do both field biology and modern dance careers. So, I had to make a choice. I ended up working at a field station in Papua New Guinea for a year after I graduated to figure out what it was like to be a field biologist. Then, I went to Paris and danced for a studio for six months to find out what it was like to be a dancer. At the end, I

sat down with my journal and decided it would be field biology. When you are a dancer, your career is basically over as a performer at thirty years old. As a scientist, I'm sixty eight and still going strong. I found the people in dance and performance were not about being open, loving, and giving, whereas biologists and scientists are. They say, "Let me tell you about what I found; here, have a specimen; what did you find out today?" It wasn't like that within dance. So, that's why I decided to go into field biology and to get my Ph.D. in forest ecology. But I always loved dancing and I still dance. I dance in an amateurish way. I'm obviously not any sort of professional, but I love to dance.

In 2006, I got a phone call from a modern dancer named Jodi Lomask. She was interested in making a dance about rainforests. I ended up bringing her down to Costa Rica—she and her full troupe.[2] We spent ten days down there climbing trees, then they made this amazing dance. She choreographed a dance and called it "Biome." She and her troupe performed it in San Francisco and Seattle. I started the performance with a talk about the diversity and fragility of rainforests. And then they did this amazing dance. We had tables set up in the lobby where conservation groups posted themselves, offering opportunities for conservation. We thought, if these people understand the biology and the science of rainforests and they get inspired by the beauty of them, it could create a desire to do something to protect rainforests or to protect nature in general. And so, it was a real lesson for me in establishing myself as a scientist. To see the world through the eyes of Jodi and her troupe, the bodies of these dancers, and then to understand the power of the combination of biology and dance to inspire conservation actions, was moving. I also learned that Jodi was able to perceive and understand a lot about rainforest biology through her eyes as a dancer, and she didn't want to just translate "the difference between a liana and a vine," or "how male frogs perform parental care." She acted it out; she danced it out; she had her own ideas. I became aware that artists are not just translators of science. They understand ecosystems, relationships, and interactions with a different vocabulary and have different ways of getting those ideas across. Their understanding and ability to communicate is just as powerful as those of scientists. For me it was a learning experience. Because of my own background, I was able to observe her life and think, if I had taken this other path, I might have been like Jodi, with her challenges, her joys, and her interactions in the dance world. As scientists, we think we have it hard, applying for NSF Grants and all. That's nothing compared to a professional dancer. But, I think she'd say, I chose the right life for myself. It was a really interesting coincidence, that I had the opportunity to revisit this alternate way of contributing to life by

I actually double-majored in biology and modern dance. But then I thought, I don't think I can do both field biology and modern dance careers. So, I had to make a choice. I ended up working at a field station in Papua New Guinea for a year after I graduated to figure out what it was like to be a field biologist. Then, I went to Paris and danced for a studio for six months to find out what it was like to be a dancer. At the end, I sat down with my journal and decided it would be field biology. When you are a dancer, your career is basically over as a performer at thirty years old. As a scientist, I'm sixty eight and still going strong.

watching as an observer and, to some extent, participating in a small window of her life.

I love the way art allows us to see what could be. *Sometimes, I feel like science is limited because I do science about what actually* is. *Science is measuring what is here and now, whereas maybe dance is measuring what could be. Do you see a way that we could create a bridge?*

I think the answer has to do with collaboration. When I think of Jodi's training, and what she has had to do, I couldn't do that. At the same time, I went through my training, and what it's taken to get to where I am. I had another interaction with another collaborator. This was a young filmmaker named April Lin. They were an avant-garde filmmaker, and they got a grant from the Sheffield Documentary Group in the United Kingdom. The idea was to link young filmmakers with scientists. They and I had a number of conversations about trees. They wanted to do something with trees and the future of trees. They ended up making a beautiful and meaningful animated film about a tree in the future.[3] It was the composite of three different species of trees that are resilient to climate change. At first, they wanted advice about which species to use, which trees have different characteristics that would make them more resilient, both ecologically and biologically. They ended up with this film that was very avant-garde and sort of hard to understand. But the message was, genetic recombination is not going to be the answer; we're going to end up with these trees that are ugly and make no sense and are monstrosities. So, what we need to do—"we" meaning the viewers—is to stop doing the things that are driving us to climate change and forcing us into this future world where trees are only manufactured and not real trees at all. So, the message that they created through this medium was against climate change. It was a conservation message, but it was done through a medium that I could never have come up with. I think that they were able to convey it through a language that spoke to another population that I would never be able to reach otherwise. It again reinforces that I could never do the dance that Jodi and her troupe did. I could never make the film that April made to send this message to millennials. I think the answer is to find ways to connect through other avenues—whether through the media of dance, or poetry, or avant-garde films. We don't have to become artists, we don't have to become filmmakers, but we can be generous with our knowledge, just as they're generous with their understanding and capacity to create these products. And in that way, I think we can provide visions—wanting visions or hopeful visions—of the kinds of things that are so badly needed right now.

You spoke today about tapestry thinking. What are you thinking next about tapestry threads? What is the next thread that you're most excited to work on?

I think there are two, actually. Human health is an important fundamental thread. I have every reason to believe that it's going to be integrated into this tapestry of nature because it's so needed, so obvious, so well-founded in science and in intuition. The second part is fashion. I have often scorned fashion because, first of all, I buy all my clothes secondhand. I do understand how much attention people pay to clothes. It's a billion-dollar industry, and people really care about it. At first, I thought, I'll use nature stuff as clothing. So, I started making things like moss capes, but it was shedding, it grew over the years. I couldn't wear it inside, and it wasn't really sustainable. So then I started doing the practice of taking botanically correct images of plants, printing them on fabric, and then making them into clothing items. I'd have a tag that describes the biology and the conservation of the species depicted on my jacket, or my tie, or my pants. I started work-

ing with fashion, and as it turns out, there is a place for eco-fashion. There's a lot of self-reflection in the fashion industry itself about the incredible pollutants that they generate, the non-sustainability of clothes, the consumerism involved, and the natural resources that are consumed. The idea of trying to promote conservation through the medium of clothing came to light. When I wear my little jacket with *Piper auritum* printed on it, people say, "Wow, that is a really sharp jacket." And that allows me to speak about *Piper auritum* and say, "It's endangered right now. If you want to contribute to conservation of rainforests, join The Nature Conservancy." It opens up these conversations on a one-to-one basis. And so, with a tag with that information, anyone who wears that clothing can become a walking thread of conservation and biological knowledge to other people who might not otherwise think to pick up a *National Geographic* or even think about the plant that they're walking by. It's this idea of using the value that some people place in fashion as an opportunity for raising awareness and instruction about how amazing plants are and what people might do to help preserve them. The fashion industry is a very hard nut to crack in terms of making it a viable, commercial thing. So, I just keep continuing to kick away at it. I send out letters, interact with people, and mention it in seminars. My work with incarceration started out the same way. I stated that the incarcerated population would benefit from learning about conservation. One day, there was a guy in the audience who said, "Are you serious about that? I volunteer at this small state prison in Rochester; I could introduce you to the warden if you want." And bingo, that's where it started, this big program for bringing conservation to the incarcerated. So, I think that if I am patient and persistent, I will find a company or an individual who will be that right connection.

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So, it's about finding that one connection?

I think so. I gave a single sermon about trees and spirituality at a small church; I gave a lecture at a minimum-security prison; I put together a few Barbie dolls from consignment stores to see what would happen with that. Sometimes it takes fifteen or twenty years, but before you know it, there's Mattel calling you up and saying, "Hey, do you want to advise on Explorer Barbie?" Or the Archbishop of Canterbury wants to talk about ecological justice. And it's not like magic. I've worked really hard to get here. But it was about starting small and being satisfied with that; accepting that there are going to be barriers and obstacles; accepting that you are going to look like an idiot when you're walking down the hallway of a solitary confinement cell block, and people are saying, "What the hell is she doing here?" You've got to accept that, because one day you'll publish a paper that demonstrates that the violent infractions that happen with these men happen less often when they are able to see just an hour a day of nature videos. Seeing other prisons take off and institute the same thing in their solitary confinement cell blocks, that's big. Other peo-

ple go about making change by starting big, with giant grant proposals or other things.

I'm making change in the world through a small tapestry of care and understanding.

Thank you.

Notes

1. The University of Utah has a campus center called "NEXUS,"which is a place that enhances interdisciplinary scholarship, research, and teaching. Find out more at https://nexus.utah.edu/.

2. See more about Jodi Lomask's dance troop at https://www.capacitor.org/.

3. View the film *Tr333*, which Nalini and April Lin collaborated on, at https://vimeo.com/635224156.



Heather Root (Ph.D., Oregon State University) is a mother, botanist, and lover of wild places. She teaches plant ecology, field botany, and introductory classes in the Botany and Plant Ecology Department at Weber State University. Her research focuses on how changes in the environment affect lichens. She has published forty-two peer-reviewed scientific studies about specific aspects of lichen ecology and is exploring ways to expand the interdisciplinarity of her work. She spends her spare time exploring wild places with her family.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY: THE POWER OF TOUCH



Kitenge-clad dancers in Kenya, 2023.

A Conversation with
JEREMY FARNER & JULIE RICH

KATHRYN LINDQUIST

Pure joy radiated from faces Black and white and many other shades when young and old from Weber State University (WSU) first met young and old in Kenya – and everyone danced. All together! Perhaps seventy people – students, teachers, and community members from Kenya and the U.S. – mixed it up in the fine red dirt and open sun with humidity at 90 percent and the temperature a mean 100 degrees Fahrenheit: a curly-haired WSU professor, white-haired oldsters, cornrow-braided or closely cropped-headed kids, girls and women sporting long blond or gray or brunette ponytails. All were led by the kitenge-costumed women head-dressed in beaded bands who greeted our arriving vans by dancing and grinning with arms extended. Everyone shuffled and jumped their bare or sandal-clad feet, twisted and swung their hips, and waved their arms – some swinging zebra-tail flags – to African beats with a little rock and roll, courtesy of bongo drums and loud tin whistles. Sweat running. American hair plastered. Huge grins everywhere.

So began WSU's spring break Global Community Engaged Learning project (GCEL)

in March 2023. Not many university service trips – and they are prolific across the nation – open with everyone dancing. However, since 2008, when Julie Rich, a professor of geography, introduced the concept of going global to WSU's Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL), the trips have highlighted both service and joyous interaction among cultures. CCEL aims to "prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good" around the world (www.weber.edu > CCEL).

WSU is uniquely suited to students' combining scholarly with technical skills because it is both a university awarding post-graduate degrees and a community college offering professional certificates in areas such as healthcare and applied sciences. The discipline of geography, providing studies in global cultures and economies, climatology and natural resources, works hand in hand with the study of construction management and architectural design, which teach sustainable and safe building. That is a winning combination!


Mark Friess

Dancing in Kenya, 2023.

When Jeremy Farner, a professor in the Department of Construction and Building Sciences, helped design and construct a women's center in Mozambique in 2014, GCEL acquired a discipline overseen by superb expertise. All projects emanating from GCEL since, in partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aim to improve quality of life for entire communities.

The March 2023 GCEL trip's primary goal in Kenya was to enable WSU students to help build the Community Education Center for the Taru region encompassing eleven drought- and poverty-stricken villages. Designed by WSU students in collaboration with Kenyan engineers, the center will provide a basement cistern for collecting rainwater; a ground floor that offers a small kitchen and bathrooms (but primarily serves as a spacious assembly hall to accommodate academic, artistic, and cultural productions); and a second floor that will contain a children's library, a general library, and computer labs and classrooms. It will connect remote villages to the world when completed in 2024; it has already changed lives.

No less significant was the trip's intent to enable interactions among visitors from Utah and local people of all ages and occupations: educators, construction engineers and workers, cooks, farmers, preschoolers, micro-business owners and business executives, children in public education and a special-needs school, and some families at their compounds.

Spontaneous acts of generosity and unabashed playfulness, in addition to problem-solving discussions and organized physical labor by all players, so profoundly touched me that I wanted to reveal the extraordinary commitment of these professors and their teaching paradigm. The following is a conversation I led with Jeremy Farner and Julie Rich over the summer of 2023. I've included remarks by two GCEL student-participants, Mikayla Buckway and Kenzie Krause Norton.

Julie, you and your husband, now Professor Emeritus of Geography Deon Greer, initiated these building projects to engage WSU students globally. What motivated you to form GCEL?

(Julie) The path to GCEL began with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India, in 1997, where Deon and I had taken students on a study abroad trip. When I met Mother Teresa, I saw a small woman in her 80s who was passionately serving the poorest of the poor. As I shook her frail hand, I was suddenly astonished that countless numbers of people had been impacted by her, helped by those hands. I suddenly knew how the power of one individual can exact positive change worldwide. This tiny Albanian woman embodied that power. Her touch transformed me.

From 2003 to 2005, Deon and I lived in Geneva, Switzerland, consulting at the United Nations. Many people we met were helping others to alleviate poverty. One, Blondine Enchyma, from Rwanda, was building an orphanage for children who had lost their parents to genocide in 1994. Upon my return to WSU, I reached out to Blondine and asked what she needed for her orphanage. "Water!," she replied. Immediately I knew that if we harnessed the energy and power of our students and university, we could get Blondine and her orphans that water. We talked to organizations that had drilled wells in Africa to determine cost and challenges. We set out and raised our goal of $28,000. Then, in 2008, the students, Deon, and I traveled to Rwanda to help oversee the well digging, install solar panels and gardens, and teach children sports, health and hygiene, and geography.

A few years passed as I progressed to full professor and was invited to sit on the board of the Worldwide Organization for Women. A fellow member, Charlotte Hamblin, with her husband, David, ran an organization called No Poor Among Us, based in Salt Lake City. Charlotte said they sponsored girls to attend public schools in Mozambique and expressed that the area's women also wanted an education so they could feed their children. But they lacked resources, especially a place to gather and learn. I suggested building a women's center, and Charlotte wondered how that could happen. I said that if we put the university behind the project, it would catapult their organization to a higher level of service for the surrounding region.

Deon drew up plans and we were off, working to raise $60,000 with students' help. We brought in Jeremy Farner from the "Design Build" program in addition to professors from dance and women's studies to collaborate with and ran a semester class to teach students about Mozambique: its geography, dance, and challenges faced by women in developing countries, using as our text *Half the Sky* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. We hired workers in Mozambique to start the building. Then, in summer 2014, students and faculty helped complete construction and were on site for the ribbon cutting and celebration. Jer-

The path to Global Community Engaged Learning began with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India, in 1997, where Deon and I had taken students on a study abroad trip. When I met Mother Teresa, I saw a small woman in her 80s who was passionately serving the poorest of the poor. As I shook her frail hand, I was suddenly astonished that countless numbers of people had been impacted by her, helped by those hands. I suddenly knew how the power of one individual can exact positive change worldwide.

emy, Deon, and I worked so well together that we forged an enduring partnership.

Your teaching partnership is remarkably successful in the realms of completed material projects that improve people's health and education in host countries. At the same time, WSU participants are learning while being intensely engaged in service. What deeper objectives motivate you to undertake such complicated projects in foreign cultures and languages?

(Julie and Jeremy) As educators, we desire to generate the best teaching opportunities. Evidence indicates that when academic, theoretical learning is teamed with practical application in real-world circumstances that require specific research and creativity, new and deeper knowledge develops, even during a short study-abroad trip. When students are engaged in a field, learning is accelerated and more beneficial than when received passively, such as by lecture. We set up situations for students to develop skills and increase confidence as they plan and complete GCEL projects.

Part of an excellent education is learning how to be proactive global citizens. This includes experiencing strong collaborations with international communities as well as local organizations—for us, the Ogden/Weber area. Students therefore work with in-country partners to do good, to help reduce poverty wherever they are.

You work with NGO partners to locate excellent projects. What qualities do you insist upon in partners?

(Julie) We want to collaborate with an organization that's in-country, established, and well-functioning, so that we can leave with confidence that the project will continue.

We also look for an NGO that specializes in addressing at least one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Briefly, these are ending poverty and hunger; ensuring quality and equitable education; improving nutrition, good health, access to water, and well-being; improving sanitation; building resilient infrastructure and ensuring responsible construction; promoting decent work opportunities; achieving gender equality; and protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of land, water, and wildlife. The NGOs, working with local village leaders, identify critical needs-based building projects; we GCEL faculty then help them create projects that best meet those needs.

Working within the United Nations SDGs assures that the villages will experience long-lasting improvements to their health, safety, and economies. Hopefully, more equitable justice and education will follow. Because the trips also aspire to provide WSU students an excellent education, I asked former student Kenzie Krause Norton, who went to Thailand in 2015 and Peru in 2016, if the SDGs have played a role in her life since she used them on site.

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(Kenzie) The UNSDGs aligned with my own value system, so they subconsciously affected how I chose a company to work for after graduation. I majored in construction management, a male-dominated industry, but I found a company very forward-thinking in hiring and promoting women. It provides employee benefits such as paid continuing education tuition and vaccination clinics. It promotes a culture of giving to community non-profits through service and donations. We take pride in designing to the environment and building for the elements.

Jeremy, for the Community Education Center in Kenya and other projects, you organized an interdisciplinary design charrette before planning more specifically for the trip. Please describe a charrette.

(Jeremy) Students in architectural design, interior design, and construction management are assembled into teams of five or six. They are given forty-eight hours to develop a schematic design proposal, a conceptual estimate, and a schedule for the building project. Students research host-country materials and methods of construction, architectural limitations, and cultural sensitivities. They also strive to incorporate sustainability practices into their plans. The teams present their design-build solution to GCEL faculty and the NGO for judging. The top three teams are awarded scholarships to participate in the study-abroad trip.

You extend your faculty team across campus to include disciplines that prepare students for the project's specific needs and thus broaden students' knowledge and skills. All professors collaborate to create a semester-long, interdisciplinary course/workshop that students are required to take before the trip and for which they receive academic credit. Please speak about these lessons.

(Jeremy) First, participants must develop skills they will use prior to and on the construction site. We teach them how to prepare and manage construction documentation; prepare pre-construction estimates; develop a comprehensive management plan; prepare preliminary high-level schedules for projects; research local construction/design techniques; and determine project risks and prepare mitigation strategies. Throughout the process, faculty coordinate with NGO partners to select local builders to begin in-country construction. GCEL faculty are sensitive to maximizing a project's positive economic impact on the host country by hiring locals and sourcing local materials. We insist that laborers receive a competitive wage for their work, which includes mentoring WSU students in techniques unique to the country.

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(Julie) The workshop covers the region's geography and how climate, soils, and topography can influence the structure's design for safety and endurance. Students must understand the country's political and economic, ethical, and historical parameters as well as cultural mores and practices. They must be able to identify the proper way to address humanitarian needs defined under the UNSDGs and develop the confidence and knowledge to step in and meet them. They learn basic language phrases, of course, in order to engage with local people.

(Jeremy) We invite students and faculty from such other disciplines as (1) library science to create a library organization system; (2) computer science to build computer labs and install and teach computer/IT systems; (3) interior design to build sound-dampening devices that simultaneously beautify spaces with vivid colors and textures; (4) medical professions to conduct health screenings and lessons; and (5) business to help people create micro-businesses. Some students major in foreign languages, social work, dance, nursing, and art. Often their knowledge is called upon to address an unplanned project, such as organizing a chicken co-op or building a garden, or a skill is employed just for fun, to create joy, as dance is such a universal language.

Construction management and architectural design students also learn how to oversee other students when they arrive on site and observe how their plan is operating, as well as ensure quality control. Faculty work alongside to assist, guide, and be available for questions.

Some of your longer excursions, up to four weeks during a summer break, have taken unexpected turns as you were engaged on site. Please tell us about one.

(Jeremy) We are always alert to change, especially to opportunities. In Peru, students retrofitted a building into a women's center and commercial soup kitchen, which would serve lunch to school children and elders. In the evenings it would be a for-profit restaurant managed by women who volunteered in the daytime soup kitchen. As we were building, it became obvious that daycare services for volunteers were needed. WSU students thus designed and built a pre-school in an abandoned lot near the women's homes, providing a safe place for youngsters. One student decided the women's center needed stairs, so he built them. After completing the project, we had time to lay a mile-long waterline to a rural community and build five community water spigots. Residents had been walking a mile or more to get water in buckets for cooking and drinking.

When students notice a problem or need, they make it a personal project and solve it themselves. A student in Thailand (2015), where we built a kitchen and dining hall for an orphanage, designed a system and bought materials for capturing rainwater in tanks. There, students used extra funds to build a playground and equip it. When the children saw the swings and slides, pure joy shone from everyone's faces! Also in Thailand, students observed an elderly couple living near the orphanage who had to walk many yards to a community toilet. Students built a small bathroom near their lean-to with a running-water shower and porcelain


Mike Moon

Julie Rich and friends mix mud for bricks, Fiji, 2018.

squat pit toilet. In other countries, students cordoned off a piece of land and planted a garden. One student sent photos of really deplorable school bathrooms home to his mom, who rallied her friends to send him the money needed to build new bathrooms–separate ones for boys and girls, still squat toilets but with decent walls and roofs.

Please describe a project you are particularly proud of, one that was perhaps especially impactful.

(Jeremy) In Accra, Ghana (2022), we partnered with Ghana Make a Difference (GMAD), an organization that is involved with rescuing child victims of slave trafficking on fishing boats. They also take in special-needs children ostracized from society due to physical and mental challenges. Over fifty students, faculty, and staff from WSU worked with local Ghanaians to prepare to construct a new school by using local materials and incorporating two new brick-making machines to produce over 3,000 bricks that interlock, requiring no mortar. These bricks were used to build the school and two on-site foster-care homes for trafficked children unable to be reconnected with families. Savings from making a total of 30,000 bricks allowed eight local Ghanaians to be retained and paid a salary for twelve to eighteen months to complete construction of the school and housing.

WSU interior design students implemented solutions to dampen noise in the existing GMAD buildings using local fabrics that enrich the classrooms and concrete dining hall. A fresh coat of paint on the GMAD gate and the assembly of shelving and organization of all books in the library based on grade level added to the trip's success. A team of WSU geography students helped train the older GMAD children in map-making and global information systems. Rainwater collection on the main building, using a gutter and downspout system, allows irrigation of gardens and the children's playfield. WSU nurses provided health clinics for the children and villagers.

That is an astonishingly comprehensive and extraordinary gift for very fragile children. Given the complexity of these projects, and their coordination with on-site entities, have you ever had one go awry?

(Julie & Jeremy) Our first women's center project in Mozambique (2014) demonstrated a glitch in communication between cultures. We drew up plans and sent them forward in the metric system, as that is what Mozambique uses. However, the Mozambican workers assumed we had used the American measure system of feet, so they converted the measurements into meters again, tripling the building's size. When we arrived to help finish, the roof was sagging from its own weight. We had to build columns and beams to make it structurally sound. However, all the space was being used, so it was a providential mistake. It reminded us to double-check the measurements and anticipated results with all players.

As a participant in Kenya, I was happy to see that reflection is an important component of the interactive process for WSU students, professors, and community members. Please describe these types of reflections.

Over fifty students, faculty, and staff from WSU worked with local Ghanaians to prepare to construct a new school by using local materials and incorporating two new brick-making machines to produce over 3,000 bricks that interlock, requiring no mortar. These bricks were used to build the school and two on-site foster-care homes for trafficked children unable to be reconnected with families.

(Jeremy & Julie) Each day, faculty assemble students at the job site and review the project's progress. They observe strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. They discuss frustrations as well as the day's highlights. The larger group reflections in the evenings enable participants to make observations, ask questions, and discuss challenges. We create a safe space so everyone feels comfortable opening up. Many times tears are shed or laughter erupts. This is when we all feel the camaraderie of working together for a common cause and the joy of serving together.

Julie, you also pose many philosophical questions at a day's beginning for evening discussion. Some that I heard are: Why is it important to be flexible? What brings about happiness – true joy – for the people you observe and yourself? What do you want your legacy to be? What is the power of choice? I was happy to hear people consider – and hear others' contemplations as well – aspects of their working day that will affect their lives forever.

On another topic, back in Ogden, some people might remark that local populations could benefit from this service without the obvious expenses of international travel. What do you say to them?

(Julie) I have received those comments. We have completed many projects in the Ogden area, but there is something about taking a group of students thousands of miles away and placing them in a country and culture that is completely unfamiliar. They may lack cell service; running water is a luxury, accommodations are very basic, and there may be a language barrier. They may know only two people in the group among forty. They work hard physically, usually in hot, humid conditions. Many factors contribute to a feeling of vulnerability that makes them more teachable because they can concentrate on the moment. At home we are pulled in multiple directions. Focus enables these students to observe more clearly and really listen to the world around them. It creates an ideal learning environment.

Mikayla and Kenzie, you each participated in two GCEL trips. What impact did they have on you?

(Mikayla) My work in Ghana sparked something in my heart. My experience was something you could only dream of. Being able to help others, having that be your only focus, and being outside of your comfort zone was everything I needed. When I returned home, I looked for opportunities to help me feel I was making a difference in my own community. I volunteered at the Ogden Lantern House and created quilts for humanitarian efforts. The world is a crazy place and there are so many people less fortunate than I am. If I can help them, I want to.

What has really influenced me is meeting people I am volunteering with and volunteer-

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Jeremy Farner

Unknown children spontaneously held students' hands when they walked through a village in Ghana, 2022.

ing for. I now have friends all over the world. In Ghana, I met a group of teenagers that have so much potential and light. I still talk to them and keep up with their lives. Learning their stories was both eye-opening and heartbreaking. They all came from different situations, but that didn't stop them from dreaming big. In Kenya, we were fortunate to rub shoulders with local workers on the construction site, and even though we didn't speak the same language, we became friends and learned from them. So many little moments of joy happen on these trips. I even found joy in inconvenient times, like missing our plane and driving across Kenya in a hot bus. You learn things about yourself and grow when you least expect it and when you are pushed out of your comfort zone. Now when I look at going on trips, I search for a program where I can do some sort of service while I'm there. This summer my friends and I chose to go to Fiji with a volunteering agency. While we were exploring the beauty of Fiji, we were also helping the community. We held an after-school sports program every day and played with the children and taught them. It was a great experience.

(Kenzie Krause Norton) From these GCEL trips students realize they have more in their souls than they knew. You have these crazy goals to build an orphanage, for instance. You're exhausted, emotional, away from your families for the first time, and then you get home and you're like, Wow! I did that! I was brave. I got on the plane. I worked harder than I've ever worked. I cried. I was rejoiceful. I've never felt that level of gratitude before. I had never felt that level of gratitude *from* someone. I've also never *given* that level of gratitude like, No, thank *you* for letting me do this for you! That kind of condensed service changes who you are and how you think about things. When your whole focus shifts, you're never the same. The experience changes the depth of commitment. Now service is a daily thing. It doesn't have to be a big project. It can even be opening a door for someone or picking up litter. But I do think the big projects are a catalyst for the daily engagement.

You see the poverty. But the people love where they live; they love their life. We're there to try to add to that. For us to see that people don't all live like we do shifts your perspective on poverty. When you're in an area with tremendous poverty, you get a feeling of overwhelming gratitude for the life and amenities you have at home, and then you get that warm feeling when you give to others. I think that's what I've held onto, the hugs from the women in Africa and the tears on their faces because they're so thankful that you had something as simple as a Band Aid. You take that feeling and wonder, How am I gonna be able to feel that every day of my life? What can I do to keep that feeling? I think it keeps you humble. Implementing that humbleness, that sense of How can I keep this feeling alive in my daily life?, has transferred into my time at Habitat for Humanity in Ogden.

Out of Thailand came my career. It's where I really got to know Jeremy, and then this

trip. I was pre-med for two years, and I ended up changing my degree to construction. I love my job [with Big D Signature], I love my career. But bigger than that, I got asked to sit on the board of Habitat for Humanity right when I got home from Thailand. Then, with Jeremy and a few others, I built an entire house in a few months for Habitat. I ended up working for one of the donors who put money into that house. My job with her led to my present job. My position on the board of Habitat led to my time at the Ogden Downtown Alliance and on to Primary Children's Hospital board for their corporate and community fundraising. That's been incredible.

Kenzie's reflections evoke small examples of connection from the Kenya trip. WSU students, after observing the young women at the compound hired to prepare and serve our food as well as clean up the dishes, joined these local girls when they returned from working on construction or visiting schools and families. Although obviously tired, they wanted to help and create relationships. They engaged in "girl talk," according to Mikayla – chatting about differences in dating and kitchen tools while cooking rice over a fire and washing dishes in a tub. At karaoke night, they all danced and sang together and even invited some of us older people to join them. The dancing, the touching in the conga line hopping across and around the stage while we sang-yelled "Sweet Caroline," "Yellow Submarine," and other great songs – it was all such fun, such joy!

Other moments of true, exhilarating joy in Kenya: At the Ndohivyo School for the Mentally Challenged, where we helped put on Special Olympics, the school kids constantly reached out, loving to be high-fived whether receiving ribbons on the winners' stands or not. After all the contests and mini-celebrations, all the cheering and jumping and dancing – each event at a school an occasion to dance – they loved to grab our hands and be twirled or wiggle and bounce off us to the raucous music. Much laughing. Grins that devoured faces.

On one of our twice-daily visits to a village home – like most of the houses we visited, one- or two-room mud huts and a thatched roof containing maybe a mattress or two – the woman of the house, a fifty-year-old mother of eight and grandmother, demonstrated how she supports her family by mining building stones down in the family quarry. After she used her sledge-hammer to break off large stones from the pit and lugged one to the surface, student Ruby Vejar told her she wanted to buy a rock. Soon several of us had selected small chips to buy, and this lovely woman found herself richer by several dollars, a small fortune. Quiet joy all around! Ruby and other students were themselves in Kenya only by generous scholarships and gifts; Ruby works when in school to send money home. WSU students also know poverty.

Again, changing topics, it's clear that most of the cultures GCEL has assisted are populated by people of color: Asian, Latino, and African. People might accuse participants of GCEL of wanting to be seen as a "white savior," engaging in self-promotion by having their photos taken with children like these. How would you respond to such charges of neo-colonization?

(Julie) I have had the opportunity to visit over one hundred countries. The first time I was in Africa I found it culturally amazing, with stunning vistas and a rich diversity of wildlife; it captured my heart. In South America, I explored ten of thirteen countries, engaged with the population, and dined on delicious cuisine. In Southeast Asia, I explored a culture that was so different and enchanting. I have learned much about the world through explorations—the more distant the location, the greater the lessons. I want my students to see these beautiful places and the people we share the planet with. I want to introduce students to the diversity of

countries and cultures, for them to experience the richness of societies and environments on Earth. This exposure to all types of diversity is a powerful education. They work side by side with someone from Africa, or Fiji, or Peru and learn about their life. They learn that people may not have many material items, but what they have is much more valuable: they take care of each other and build strong communities. Their dreams and desires are similar to our WSU students'. We are alike, even though there may be differences in language, religion, and culture.

Now, consider the flaming W painted on a wall in Thailand or "Weber State University" stenciled on a building in Mozambique. To some people they may appear to be signs of colonization, like claiming territory, planting a flag. Why are they there?

(Julie) Our flaming W is usually alongside the logo of the NGO we are working with. Often the logos are a splash of color on a blank wall. In some villages we paint a tree, and the workers, students, and children make leaves by dipping their hands in paint and placing them on the branches. This becomes a visual reminder of the collaborative nature of our work—hand in hand we build a more promising tomorrow.

(Jeremy) In Mozambique, a little kid named Kelvin, who watched and helped us intently, wanted to be an architect. When we returned to the village a few years later, we found that Kelvin had painted a purple flaming W on a water tower, one we had no part in building, to honor his friends from far away.

You two have deeply impacted – profoundly touched – your students, colleagues, and friends around the world. People reading this exchange should know what students say about you.

(Kenzie) The professors, Julie and Jeremy, aren't going on these trips and coming home and doing nothing. I haven't met two people who care about their community more than they do. It's cool to watch them implement community engagement in their life. They're the perfect definition of leading by example. What I did with them was eight years ago, but it feels like yesterday. To see how I've developed and grown, and where I am now compared to where I was then—it's crazy! The way they have changed my outlook on life is part of their legacy.

Kenzie and Mikayla, thank you for your generosity of time and spirit in everything you do. Jeremy and Julie, I am grateful for the opportunity to know you and work with you. Joy through learning, doing, and touching people energizes your gifts to the world. Thank you.

Resources

For information about Weber State University's Center for Community Engagement, see https://www.weber.edu > CCEL.

For information about Weber State University's Global Center for Community Engagement, including a list of countries and projects as well as videos from trips, see https://weber.edu/internationalstudies/gcel.html.



Kenzie Krause Norton (B.S., Construction Management, Weber State University) is a project engineer with Big D Signature. She has traveled with Weber State's Global Community Engaged Learning project (GCEL) to Mozambique and Peru.

Painting walls in Thailand, 2015.



Mikayla Buckway will graduate from Weber State University with a degree in interior design in 2024. She has traveled with Weber State's Global Community Engaged Learning project (GCEL) to Ghana and Kenya.

Dancing under a parachute at a schoolyard in Kenya, 2023.



Jeremy Farner (Master of Construction Management) is an associate professor in the Department of Construction and Building Sciences and director of the Wadman Center for Excellence at Weber State University. He owns and manages a design-build company.

Twirling in Peru, 2016.



Julie Rich (Ph.D., Geography, Oxford Univ.) is a professor of geography and dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Weber State University.

Conferring about education in Fiji, 2019.



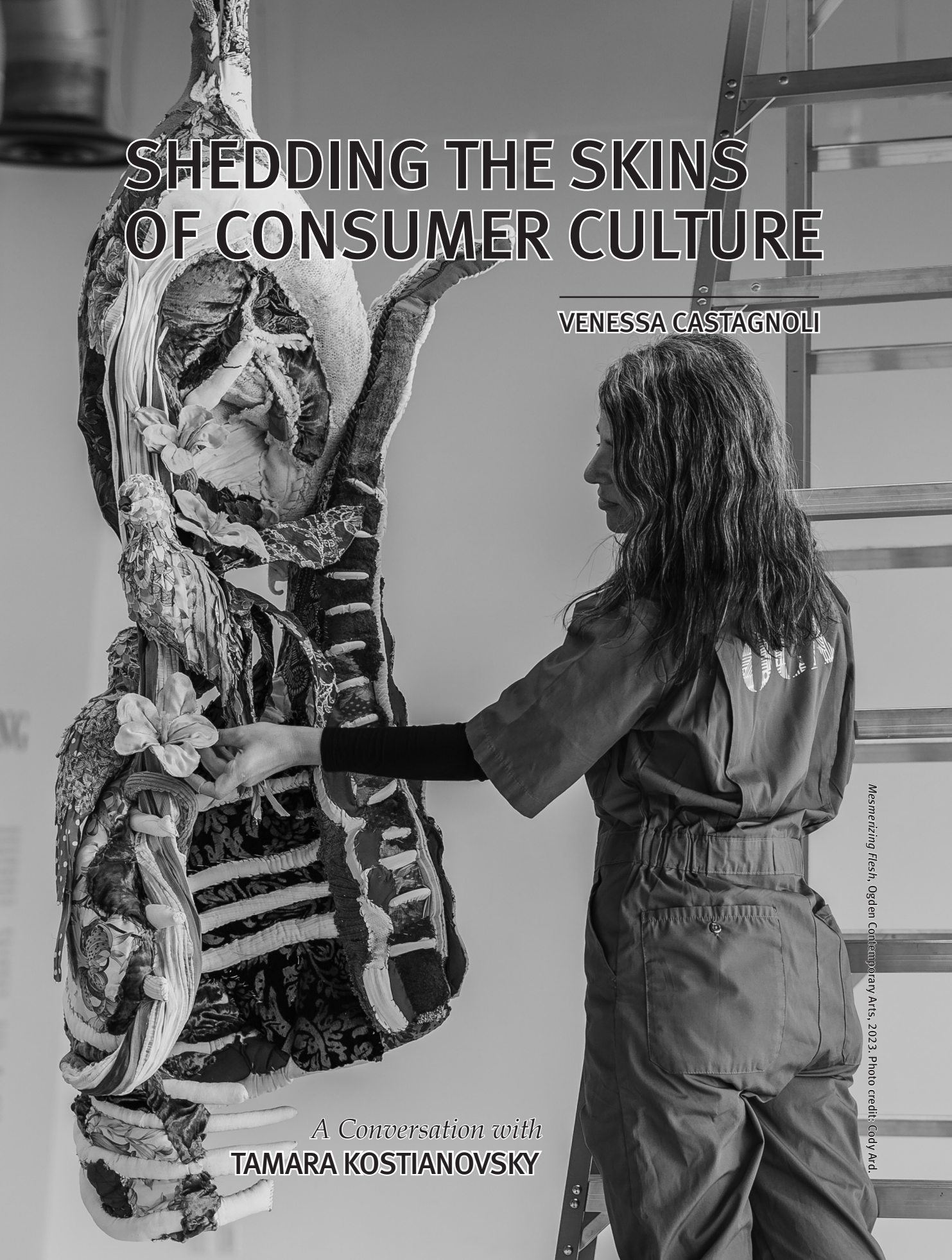
Kathryn Lindquist (Ph.D., American Studies, Univ. of Utah) is a retired teacher of humanities at the University of Utah and a former trustee of Weber State University. She is on the editorial board of *Weber*.

Celebrating a Special Olympics win in Kenya, 2023.

SHEDDING THE SKINS OF CONSUMER CULTURE

VENESSA CASTAGNOLI

A Conversation with
TAMARA KOSTIANOVSKY



Mesmerizing Flesh, Ogden Contemporary Arts, 2023. Photo credit: Cody Ard.

In the winter of 2023, Ogden Contemporary Arts presented an exhibit by globally recognized textile artist Tamara Kostianovsky. Mesmerizing Flesh *centered around a kinetic installation featuring the artist's life-size animal carcass sculptures. Made from floral fabric and discarded textiles, Kostianovsky's sculptures transformed symbols of carnage into visions of regeneration and rebirth, as exotic birds and vegetation emerge from forms akin to hanging meat. Kostianovsky's work for the exhibition touched on strong themes including violence against humans and animals, consumer culture, and environmental devastation.*

Kostianovsky's main installation was a site-specific collaboration with OCA and the first time her work had been displayed in this manner – on a ceiling-mounted moving track. "I have played around with the idea of kinetic elements before but never on this scale or with this intention and production behind it," said the artist. Five new sculptures from Kostianovsky's Tropical Abattoir *series moved throughout the gallery in a continuous loop, reminiscent of a conveyer belt in a meat processing plant. While unsettling in their anatomy, the carcasses themselves were far from gruesome with the bright tropical presence of Caribbean and Latin American landscapes – particularly the artist's home country of Argentina, where beef production plays a major role in the local culture.*

In the same space, Kostianovsky presented a second installation featuring her Actus Reus *series, which she had been evolving for the past sixteen years. These sculptures, more direct representations of hanging meat, were made from the artist's own discarded clothing. In using fabric reminiscent of a woman's wardrobe, Kostianovsky references gender-based violence and violation of the female body, particularly during times of dictatorship in her Argentinian upbringing.*

Kostianovsky's overarching use of discarded fabric is also a commentary on the negative effects the fast fashion industry has on the environment. Her third series represented in this show, Nature Made Flesh*, continues this thread of environmental concern as the artist imagines a world made from the remnants of consumer culture. Tree stumps and abandoned logs are symbols of devastation, yet are made with alluring colored fabric that offers a utopian feel and inspires a more sustainable future.*

As you look back on your career as an artist, how would you describe the path from college to professional artist? What challenges did you face, and was there a moment when it all clicked and you knew this was the path you wanted to pursue?

My educational path was a little unorthodox. After high school, I went straight into the School of Fine Arts in Argentina. I don't know that it would be the equivalent of college in the United States, but it definitely put me on a path to pursuing art. If not professionally, it gave me a mindset of being very invested in art. I did that for four years; I got the basic education of an art student. I then worked on my own for a couple of years, and then I had an opportunity to come to the United States to study art. I received an MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Once I came to the U.S., things became a little more professionalized. I think the idea of being a full-time artist wasn't on my radar as a possibility when I was living in Argentina. It became clear, here in the U.S., when I had art professors who were artists. From a very young age, I had a strong vocation for the arts. I tried to fight it a bit because I knew it would be a hard life, but I always kind of knew that that was what I wanted

to pursue. Challenges have been there all along, and continue to be there; it's not an easy career path. But I think the fact that you can wake up and do pretty much whatever you want, your own work, and not have to respond to a boss, and be very independent, and pursue your vision, is such a privilege and a luxury—how can you complain about it? The main career challenge has been mostly economic. Things have not clicked overnight; it's been a process. Things have started to align themselves as the years went by. I didn't feel that alignment until recently, perhaps within the past four years. And I'm 15 years in, you know, so it's kind of a long path.

Yeah, it doesn't happen overnight. So, you grew up in Argentina, where the meat industry was abundant, and it obviously influenced your work by looking at it. What prompted you to relocate from Argentina to the States and establish your studio here?

I came to the States to study art. I had family living in Philadelphia. They encouraged me to do an exchange program. I came to Philadelphia to live with my aunt and uncle for a few months and pursued a continuing education program. It was there that I realized that there were MFA programs that I was not aware of when I was in Argentina. I didn't know how things worked here. Once I became involved with all of that, the idea of going back to Argentina became less and less attractive. I didn't find that in Philadelphia early on, because I didn't quite integrate into the social fabric, but in New York I found a lot of immigrant artists like myself and people who were in the same situation. So, the like-mindedness gave me a community, and for that I was very grateful. I wasn't so much on my own. Argentina obviously has a big tradition of art and a fantastic art community as well, but it's a solitary experience—it's not institutionally supported. It leaves you with a feeling of. . . I don't know. . . it doesn't seem as clear-cut, or professional, as it seems here. And I was very attracted to that.

I think the fact that you can wake up and do pretty much whatever you want, your own work, and not have to respond to a boss, and be very independent, and pursue your vision, is such a privilege and a luxury – how can you complain about it?

Could you talk a little bit about how your father's work influenced your career? And were there any other family members, friends, or artists who inspired you or helped shape your practice?

My father was very artistic. He was a doctor and a musician as well; he played the violin. He had rehearsals once a week; I was dragged to them as a child. He was very encouraging of me pursuing the visual arts, which, he said, was something that I showed some ability for. He was a plastic surgeon. When I started going to art school, he had an office a few blocks away from the school, and he suggested that I come to his office and help out a little bit—open the door, make coffee, things of that sort. It was there that I encountered a world behind the skin. He mostly did nose jobs and face lifts—things that were considered small operations—but they were horrific, and very crude. You could literally see inside of somebody's face, or leg, or tummy, whatever body part was being attacked at the time. I think seeing the intensity of the blood, and the saturation of fat tissue, was very poetic. I saw it from the perspective of an art student. I would transition from painting class to my dad's office. I would walk back and forth, and so red was not red anymore. It was sort of, how can I turn this into the red of blood? I mean, I was still painting still life, and the assign-

ments that were given to me at the time, but I had the experience of color and texture that influenced the way I saw things. Those images of open bodies still haunt me today. It's not that I was particularly impressionable. I think anybody in that environment would have reacted like that, if they hadn't fainted first.

Right, how could you not make that connection?

Absolutely. And then, in terms of other influences, I think that once I started expressing interest in the visual arts, I took some art lessons with other artists. As I said, things are less institutional in Argentina's art world. For example, I would go to an artist's home, and there would be two or three of us taking an art lesson at that home. It was sort of a domestic environment. The professor, the artist, would be cooking dinner, or taking a nap, and come back to see our work every hour or two, and we would spend long afternoons there—that was really amazing. Later on, I took some workshop classes, again, at an artist's studio, in which there were larger groups of people who were committed to making art. There were also independent artists teaching groups of people, but it wasn't like a "school of art." This was after graduating from the School of Fine Arts, which would be similar to a bachelor's degree here.

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Mesmerizing Flesh, Ogden Contemporary Arts, 2023.

There are many materials to choose from when you're creating these realistic sculptures. Could you expand on why you chose textiles? And, will you also talk about the internal structure of your sculptures? And, because it's such a great story, will you chat about your experience purchasing feathers from eBay?

Sure. In 2001, during my first year in the U.S. as a student, the Argentinian economy was in default. There had been a run on banks, and Argentina's currency lost its value. So, I was in the U.S. with Argentinian money, and, overnight, the money depreciated. I found myself with few financial resources.

As an international student, I wasn't able to take a job. And so, purchasing acrylic paints and things of the sort—which are kind of expensive—seemed impossible. One thing that had happened, anecdotally, in the first few months of me living in this country was that I shrank most of my knits in the dryer. Because I had never used a dryer before—we tend to air dry our clothes in Argentina—I put all my sweaters in the dryer for way too long and was left with a collection of doll-sized clothing that definitely did not fit. But, it was freshly scented, and it was clean, and it had memories—clothing tends to hold that. So, I looked at these shrunken textiles as materials to make art with. It coincided with a time in which I was becoming aware of the work of feminist artists of the 1970s and '80s, who performed and put their bodies directly into their work. To me, using my clothing was a type of performative act. It was like an indirect surrogate to my own body. If I was making clothes or art out of my body, I was kind of in the work, without necessarily being there. Textiles stuck. And, over the years, the waste of clothing that you don't wear anymore. And then, I had a child who was going through all these growth spurts, so I had the remnants of children's clothing that, of course, have a lot of memories. The influx of materials kept coming up, and continues to this day.

In regard to the story of the feathers, at one point a friend suggested that I look into making birds out of fabric, because I had focused on cattle for a very long time. I went on eBay to buy feathers, and I thought I would try to replicate them, in fabric, as a starting point. A few days later, I got a box in the mail, not a manila envelope, as I was expecting. The box was actually quite heavy, so I left it in my studio. I had an unheated studio at the time, and I knew that something was wrong with the order that I had placed. Within a few days I gathered the courage to open the box, and to my surprise there was a dead pheasant in the box. It was cold; my studio was like a freezer. The bird was frozen. It was intact. It was hard to believe the bird was dead, there was something so real about seeing it there. I tried to pluck out the feathers, but I didn't have the patience, and I was too nervous. And then I was like, okay, maybe I should just cut the feathers. Within an hour, I had a scene of carnage in my studio. There was blood everywhere, and feathers—it was just really horrific. Before I went into the butchering, I first took the bird by its legs and hung it on one of the hooks that I had in my studio from my previous sculptures. The bird was just majestically hanging there. The wings were spread out. There was something in the legs that was very anthropomorphic. It kind of reminded me of an image of a crucifixion. And I was completely smitten by that image. Talk about haunting images, that was one. I proceeded to make birds for a very long time. It was not very different from what I had done before. In this case, it was bird carcasses, but I had worked with beef carcasses forever. So, it was a natural progression of that journey. The experience made me realize how consumer culture is integrated into our understanding of the environment and our relationship to birds and other living beings. In the same way that I received a dead pheasant, I could have gotten a pair of sneakers, a T-shirt, or whatever—it was just merchandise, circulated freely. That was a very powerful experience, I must say.

To me, using my clothing was a type of performative act. It was like an indirect surrogate to my own body. So, if I was making clothes or art out of my body, I was kind of in the work, without necessarily being there.

Yeah, and a really great story. (Laughter) As an artist making work with what some


Austin Luckett

Nature Made Flesh, Ogden Contemporary Arts, 2023.

may call "shock value," you're probably walking a fine line between self-expression and earning a living. Have you been asked to censor your work for certain environments? Depending on where you are showing, different countries, universities, or independent galleries, does your work output change for the audience? Are you, for example, censoring your work? For a recent exhibition, The Botanical Gardens in Denver, for example, was interested in your florals and bird pieces. How did this selection come about?

There's a range in my work, and I am so appreciative of that. OCA chose what I would I call the most daring work, the most radical work. I'm so pleased with the way the exhibition shows in your space. This is really a dream come true. But also, there are some other bodies of work that are a little less in your face. For example, the bird imagery, the living bird panels that I've been working on, and the tree stumps, they do not have blood. I think that makes a huge difference. I mean, there are still dead trees, and they suggest violence done to them. There are traces of sharp tools that cut them in half. They're just as violent, in my mind, as the carcasses. But the lack of red, and blood, and fleshy materials somehow makes them a little bit more palatable to a general audience. I think that, for the most part, people shy away from confrontational experiences. But yet, if you think about your consumption, your diet of meat or chicken, there's a lot of all of that, but it's hidden behind the scenes so that people can eat meat and avoid looking at those images on a regular basis.

In terms of censorship, I've had a few experiences, which were difficult for me. Early on, a group exhibition on the topic of meat in Boston got PETA really fired up. And it wasn't just my work, it was the whole exhibition. My work was the tamest in a really radical show. More recently, there was an instance with a gallery that had undergone a traumatic event. There was a university gallery where something horrible had happened within the university, and they declined to show my work, which was committed for an exhibition. So, I feel, on one hand, in the case of this university,

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Mesmerizing Flesh, Ogden Contemporary Arts, 2023.

very understanding of what happened. I'm a mom too, and I wouldn't want a child who had gone through trauma on campus to see something that might be triggering. I think it's easy to pull the triggering work and not do a more introspective view of what's happening in this society. I think that society is getting increasingly more violent, as we speak. And if my work is going to repel people, then I'm going to be left with very few exhibition opportunities. On the contrary, I would hope that my work is an invitation to reflect on how violence is so rampant in the U.S.; not just in the U.S., it's a worldwide phenomenon. But I think that now that violence has another type of proportion, because of weapons that are meant for killing people, not just for hunting.

I'm hoping that the work invites a reflection on these topics and is not censored. And also, the idea of something being triggering is also very delicate, because you avoid going deeper into things. If there is something that's triggering, it creates a culture of people who are not prepared to deal with hard things and who cannot truly overcome them. It's sort of like avoiding them, putting them behind the scenes. So, I think that's a difficult question. I think that freedom of expression is important. My work around violence has been made thoughtfully, from the heart.

Many artists who are working with delicate subjects should contribute to this discussion and not be censored in times of crises.

It's about creating dialogue and giving us a vehicle for discussion, and to come together and actually talk about it and learn from it. That brings us into my last question. Your work speaks of some very heavy themes of violence against humans and animals, consumer culture, feminism, and environmental devastation. Yet, in your newer works, you incorporate flowers, moss, and birds. It's like a life emerging from the carcasses. There seems to be a lighter and more hopeful presence. Could you expand on that transformation in your work?

The early carcasses that I created, when I was starting out in my career, were made out of my own clothing. They were like surrogates to my own body. They spoke primarily of violence done to the female body. They were very much influenced by the history of the dictatorship that I lived through when I was growing up in Argentina in the '70s and '80s. To me, those works were political and denunciatory. The work that I've been doing more recently has been influenced by the climate crisis. I think that it's very hard to find artists today who are not dealing with that, to a certain degree. It's so much in our face, we're living through it, and not just in New York, but all over the world. I started feeling that there was a need for me to make work that provided a positive alternative to the scalding tendency that we have in that environmental action. I have always tried to push not turning on your lights, not driving, and doing this, and doing that. I think that what I'm doing with the work is, maybe in a utopian way, trying to propose a future for the Earth. These images of carnage and violence come out of a new understand-

ing of nature, where we realize that we *are* nature, that we're a part of it, and a new life can arise. On the other hand, I think there's something that has to do with staging waste. The works are made out of discarded clothing, textiles that would go into the landfill. There's something overwhelming about the amount of waste that we produce that is beautified. And last, what I'm hoping the work will do is to create, to form, this idea of environmental awareness in order to give the viewer the possibility of reflecting on how the purchases they make in their everyday consumer life may affect the environment. I think it's a common thing to hear—I've heard this a million times amongst women—that if you buy something new, you have to take something else out of your closet. That makes a really good proposition for keeping a neat closet, but I think that before buying something you already had, not only should you think of what you're getting rid of, but what's going to happen to that item? Can you reuse it? Can you recycle it? Do you really need the new article of clothing that you're buying? If so, I'm not against buying it. But, are you buying something that will last? Or is this a fast-fashion item? I think those are questions that, if we all ask ourselves, and act upon them, will reduce the scourge of textile pollution. I think that the environmental crisis has definitely impacted the way I work, on a material level, on a consumer level, and also in giving an image of hope for a future. We need to realize that we are part of nature, we don't just need to live in harmony with it. I think that that's something that I'm trying to do with the use of discarded clothing—animals, trees, humans, we are all shrouded by the same textiles, right? It's sort of like the same skin or the same material.

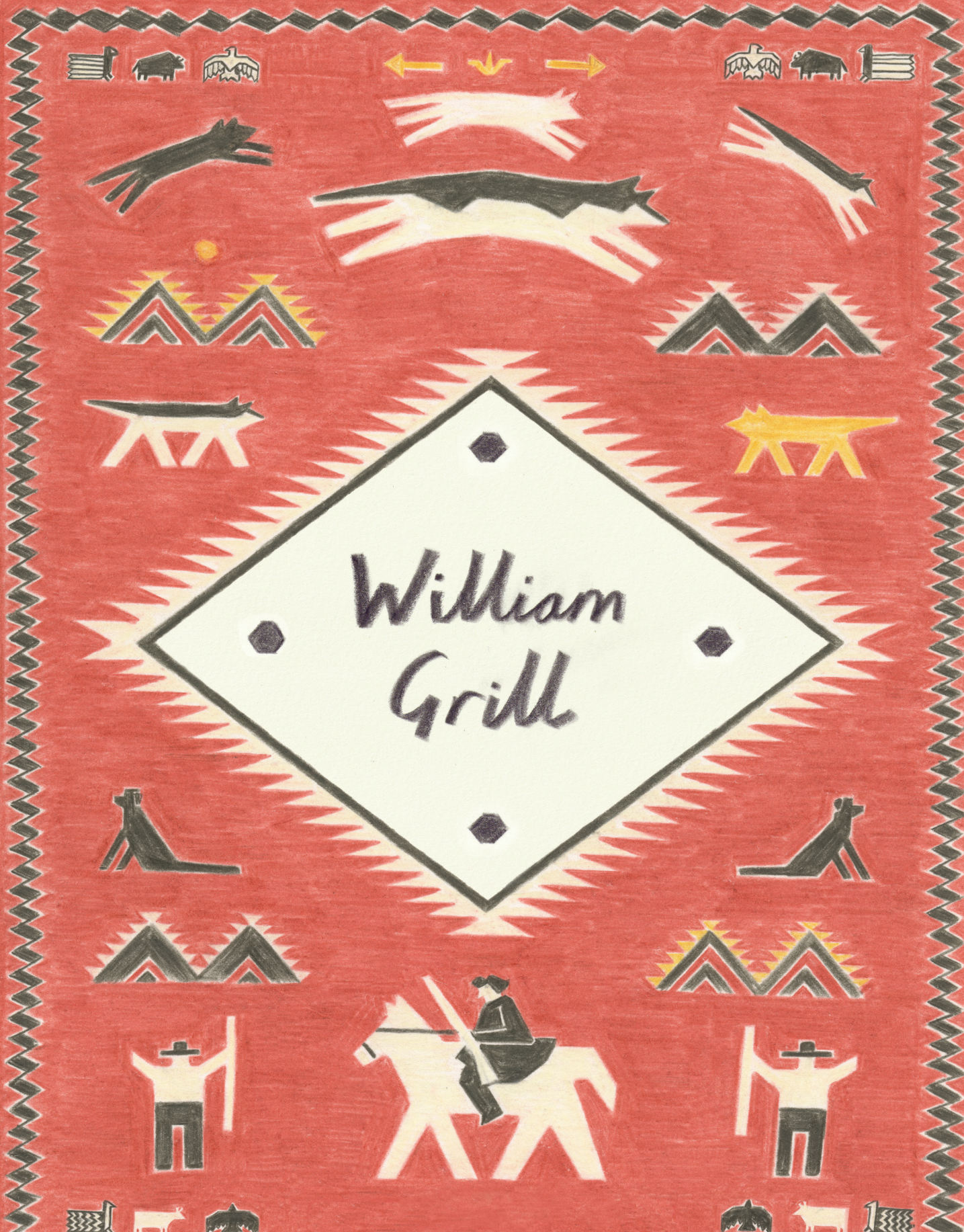
I think that what I'm doing with the work is, maybe in a utopian way, trying to propose a future for the Earth. These images of carnage and violence come out of a new understanding of nature, where we realize that we are *nature, that we're a part of it, and a new life can arise.*

Thank you so much.



Cam McLeod

Venessa Castagnoli is the executive director of Ogden Contemporary Arts, a non-profit art organization. In her role at OCA, she maintains an exhibition schedule and an Artist-in-Residence program; she has developed the Artist Factory, a robust youth education program, and redesigned the Platforms outdoor exhibition space into a sculpture park, which now houses permanent installations. Venessa has experience both as an artist and curator and early in her career created O-Town Arts, a contemporary art collective based in Ogden. Her artwork has been shown in the Utah Museum of Contemporary Arts, the Finch Lane Gallery, and several state-wide exhibitions and public art settings.



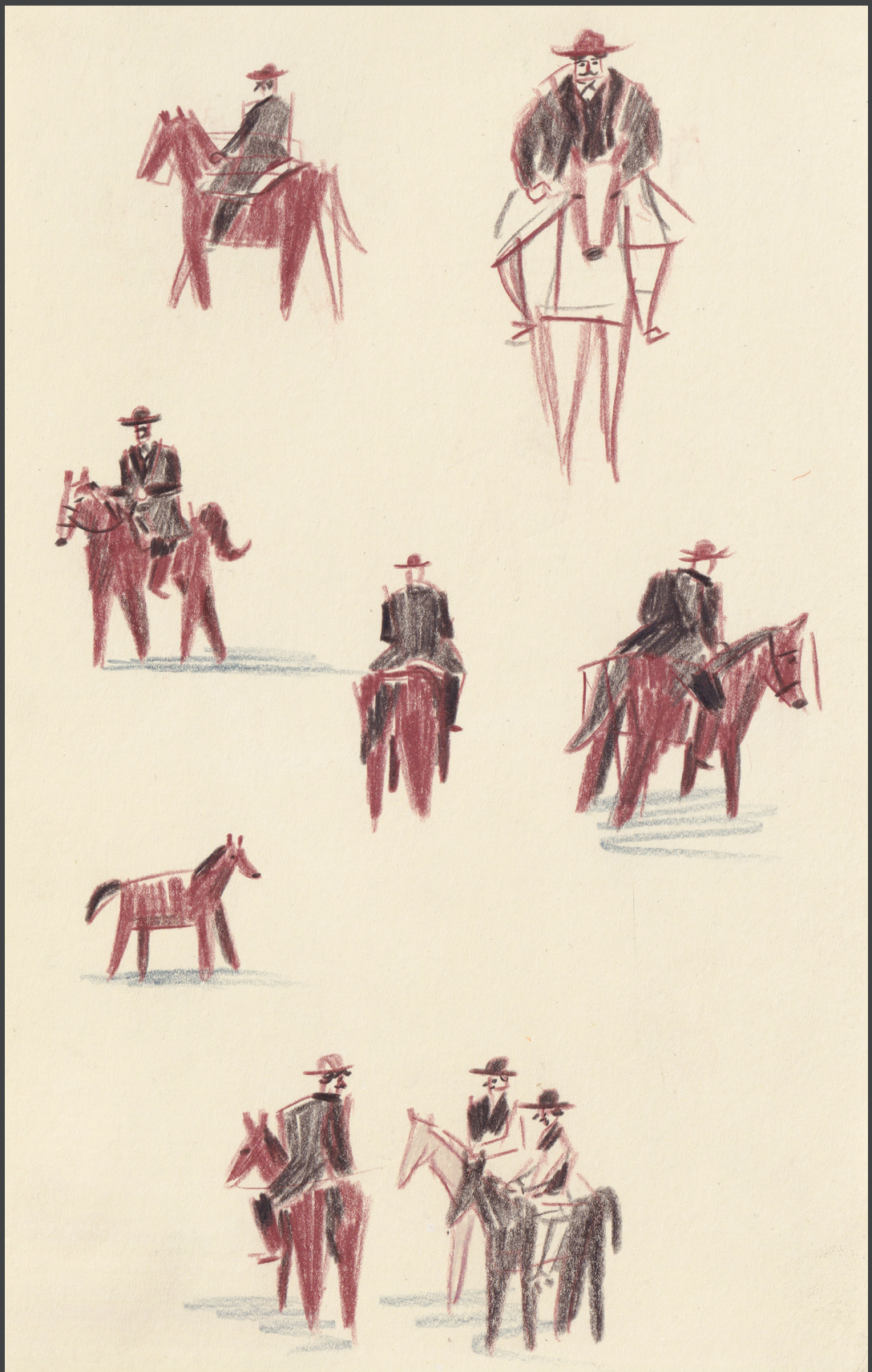
Cover Art, from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



Big Sky, from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



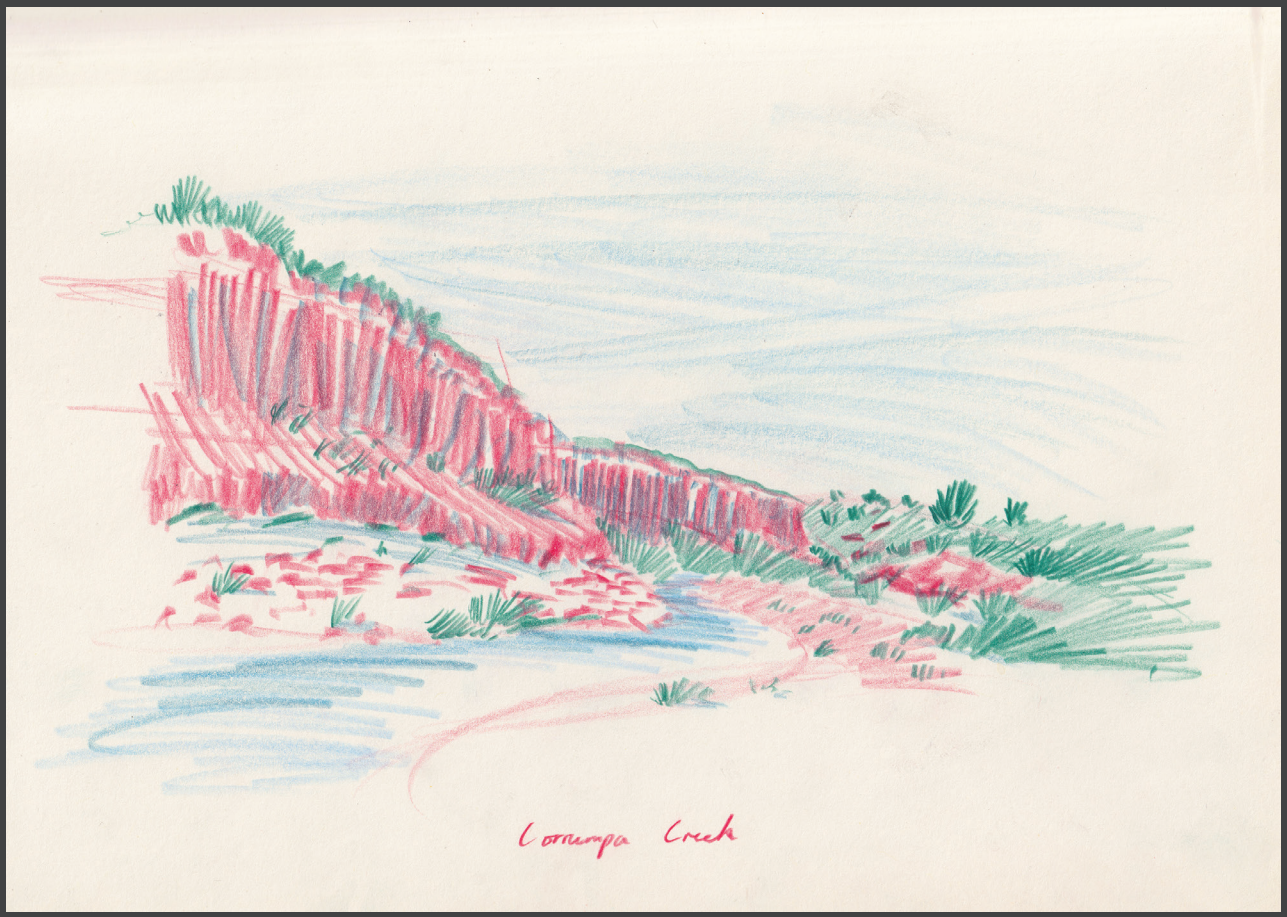
The Chase, from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



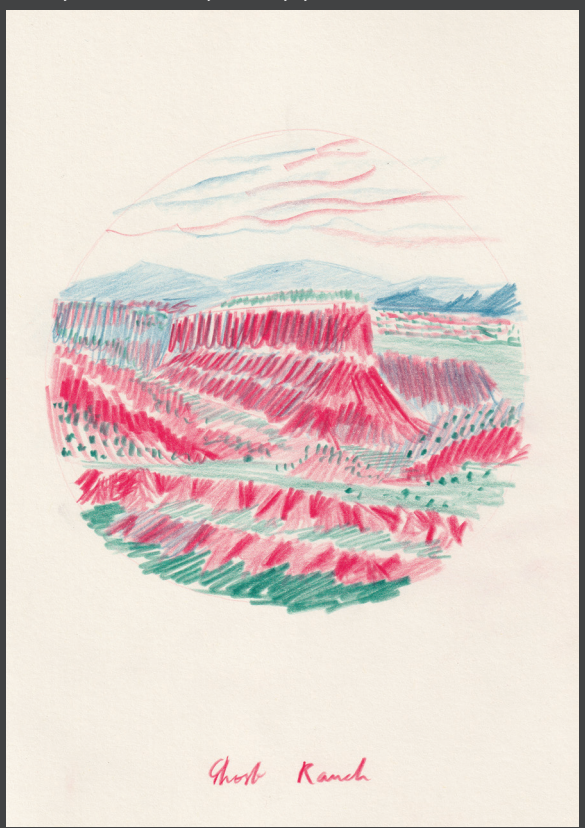
Cowboy Sketch, in preparation for "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



En Route to Santa Fe—I-85 South, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



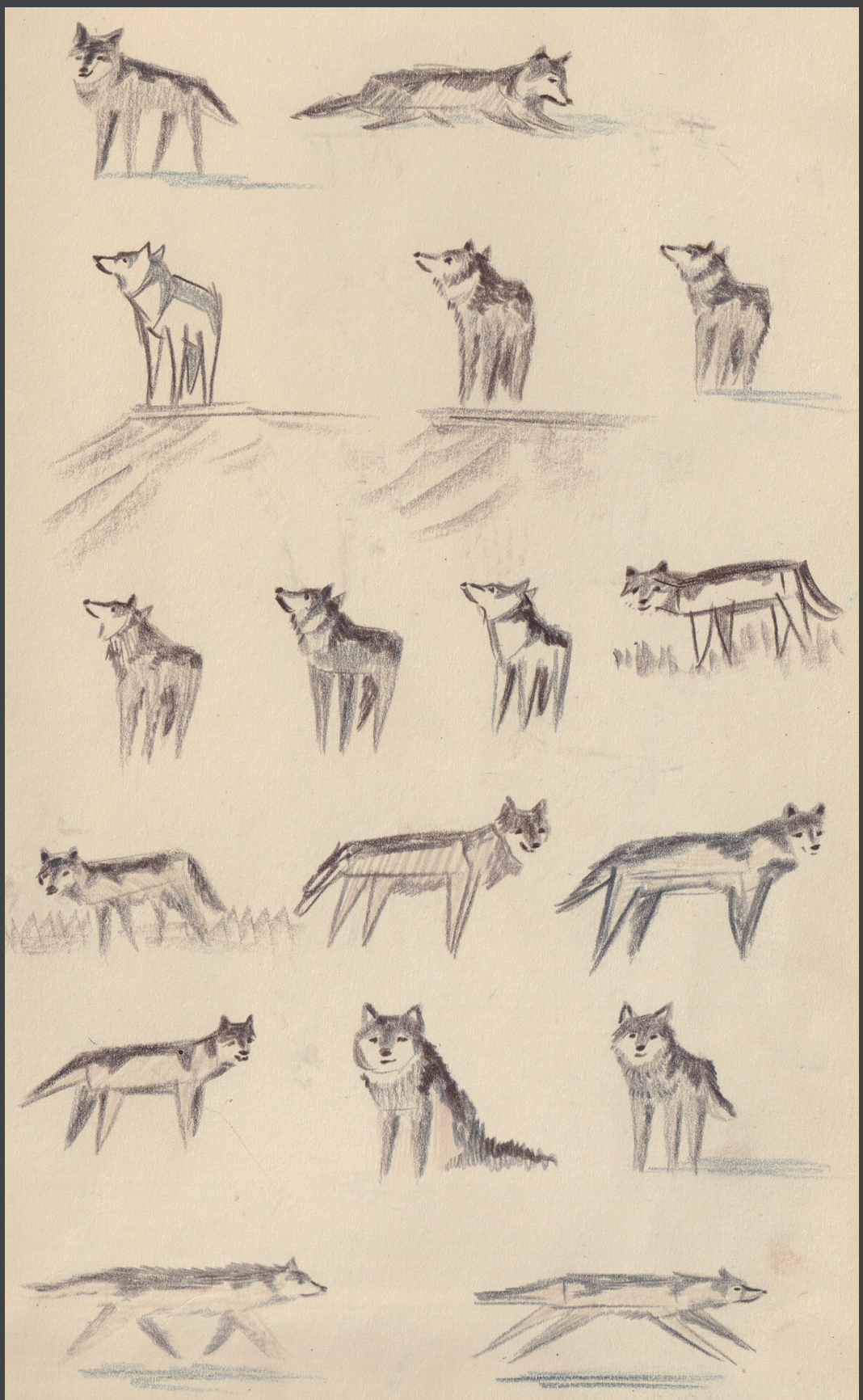
Corrumpa Creek, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Ghost Ranch, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



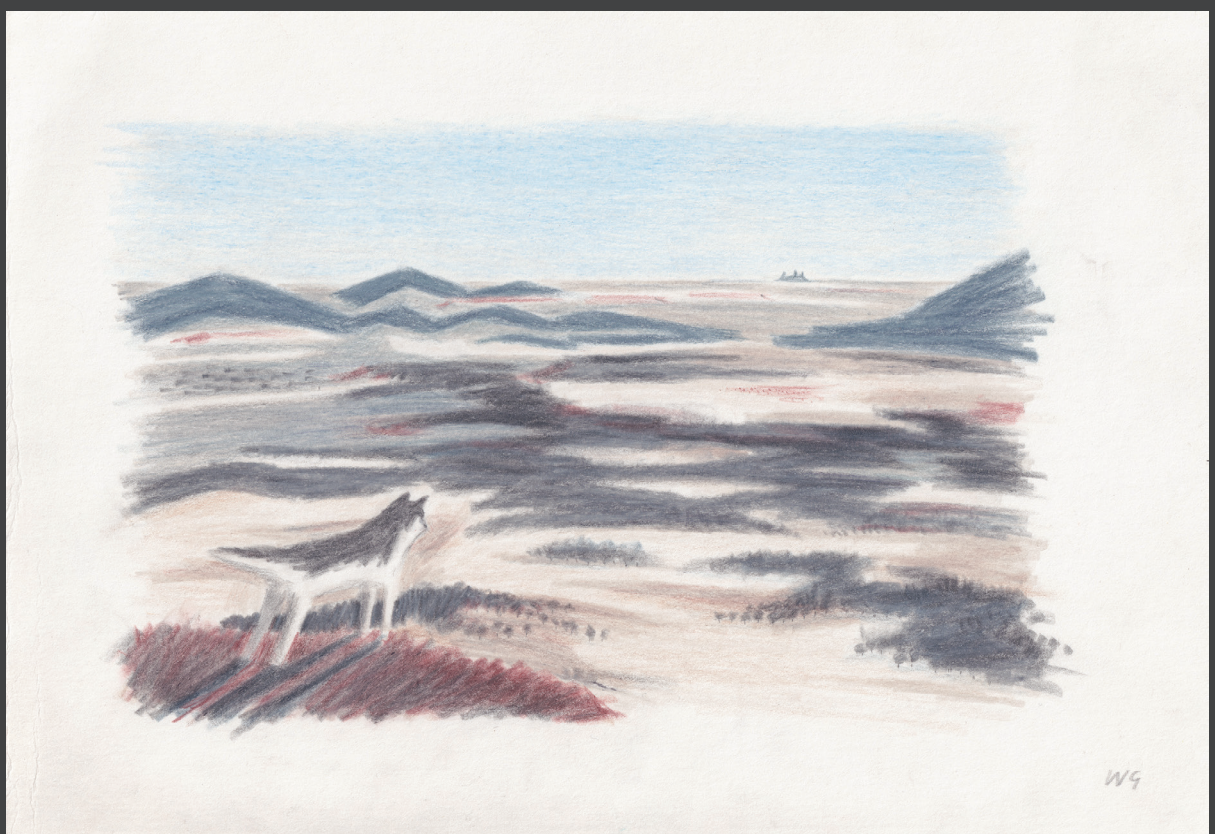
Cotton Woods, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Wolves Sketch, in preparation for "The Wolves of Currumpaw," pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



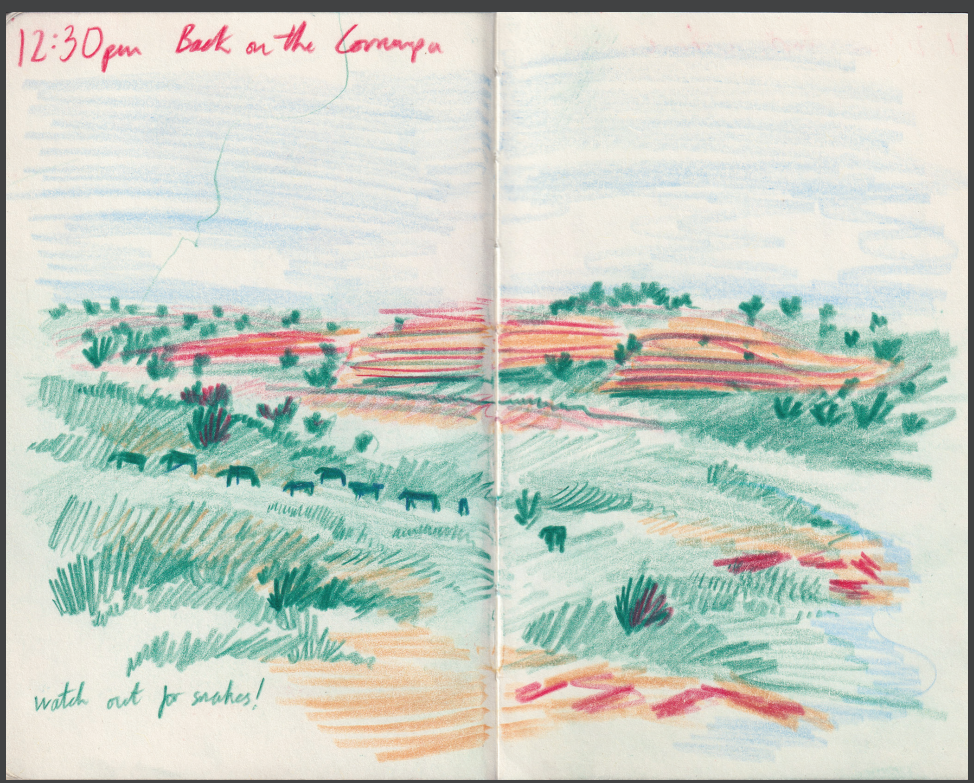
Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Lobo Surveying His Kingdom, from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



Corrumpa Creek, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



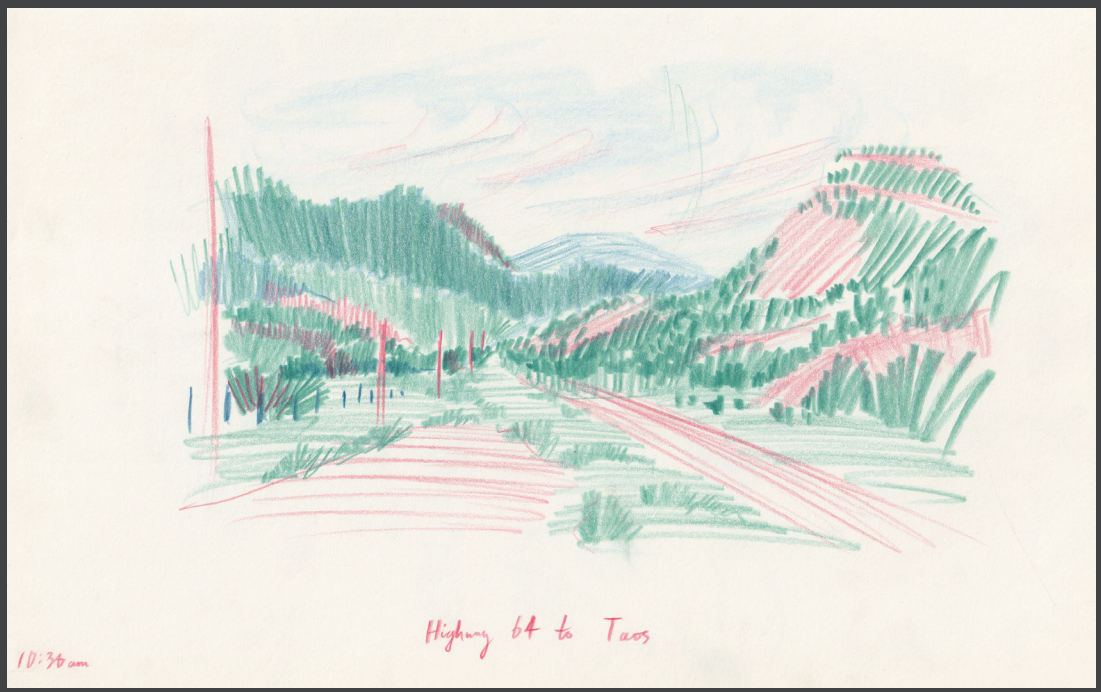
Back on the Corrumpa, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Glossary (detail), from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2016.



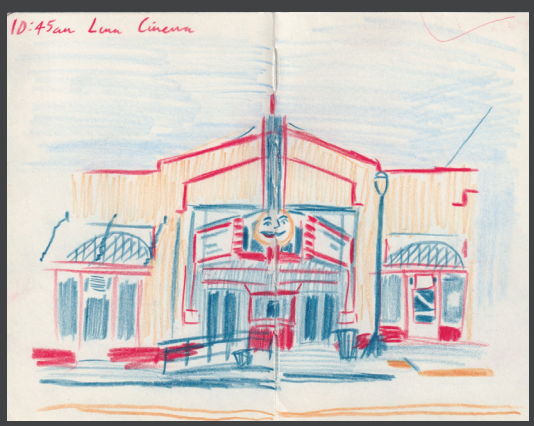
Seton Castle, Inside the Main Hall, Santa Fe, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Highway 64 to Taos, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



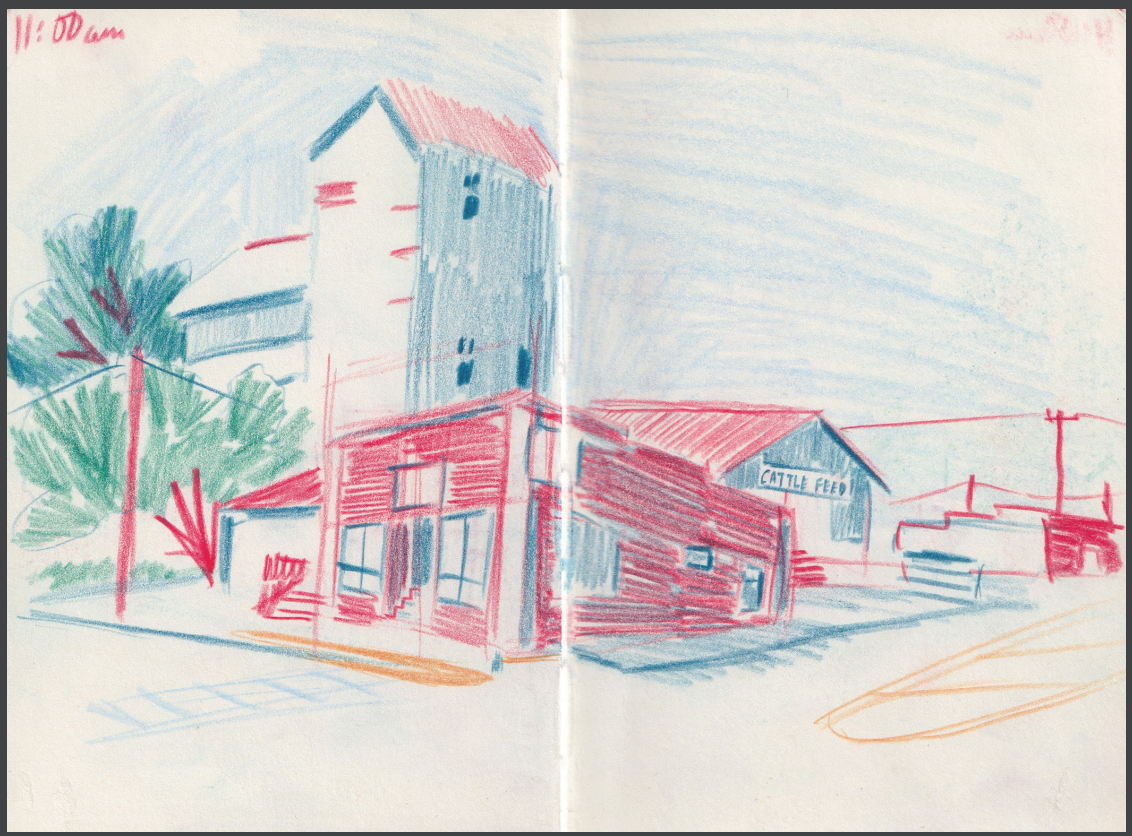
Clayton—10:20 a.m., colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Clayton—10:45 a.m., colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



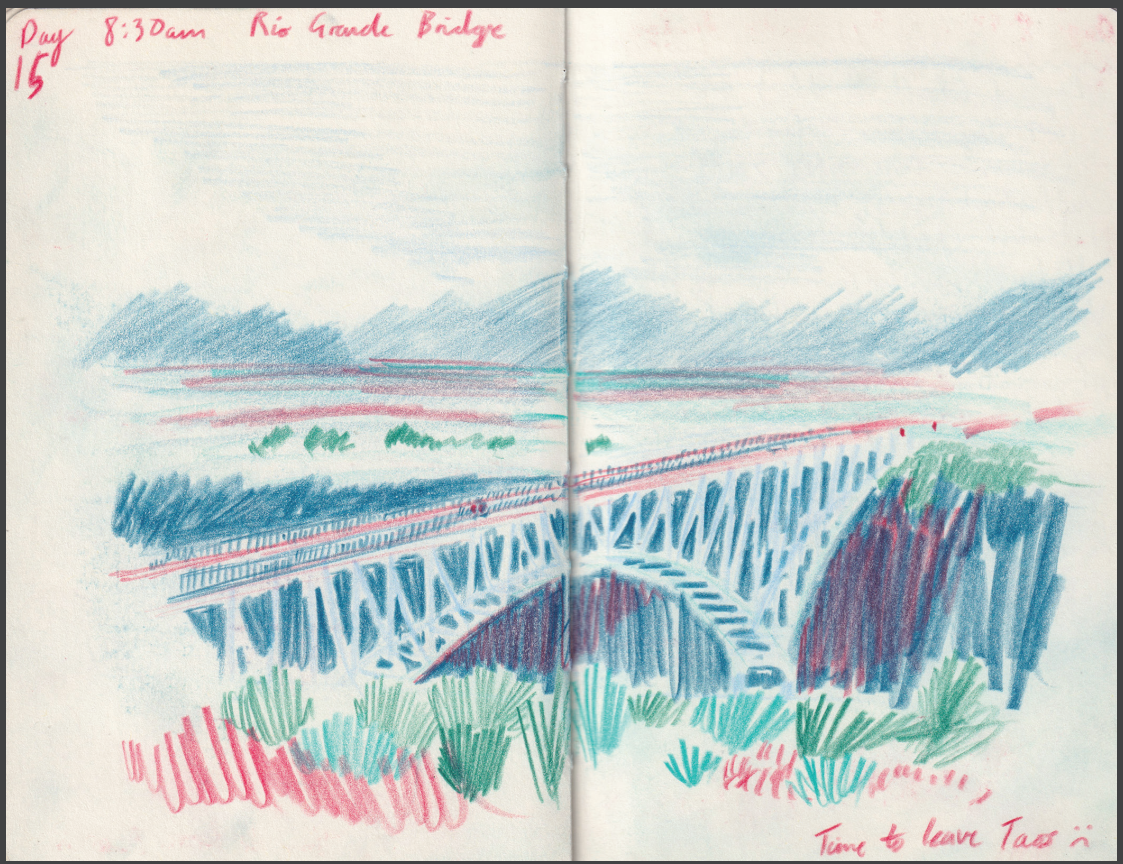
View from Capulin Volcano, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Street Corner, Clayton—11:00 a.m., colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Hotel Eklund, Clayton—11:15 a.m., colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.



Rio Grande Bridge, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.

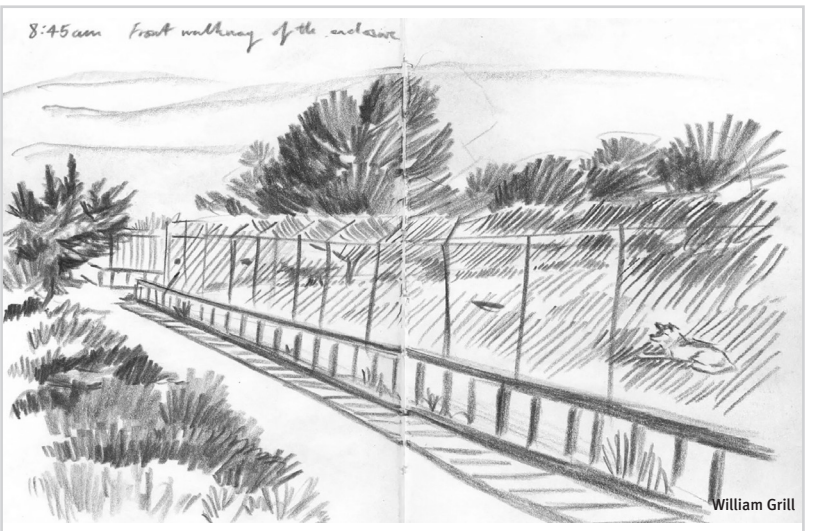


The Wolves of Currumpaw Closing Spread, from "The Wolves of Currumpaw," colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.

WILD SPIRIT

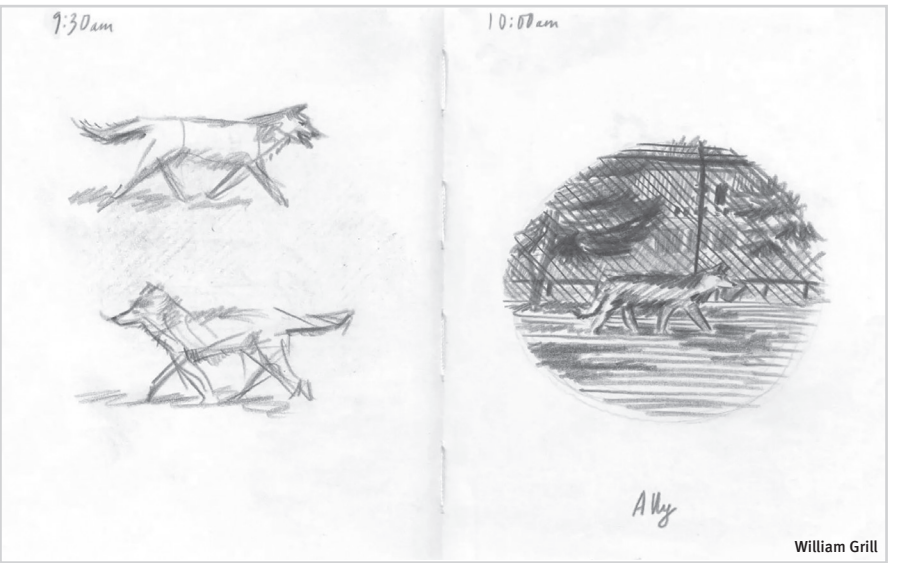
AN APPRECIATION OF THE ARTIST WILLIAM GRILL

MELORA WOLFF



***First Walk of the Enclosure*, colored pencil on paper, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, New Mexico, 2015.**

Wolves lie in smudges of earth, alert. They raise their noses. The artist's pencil shadings and lines suggest, in the shifted angle of the animal's haunch, that a scent wafts on air. He repeats and adjusts with his pencil the shape of the wolf's body, the rough fur, the thick nape, and watchful gaze. His lines stir, too, a sensory realm of smells and howls and echoes. His style appears *naïve, childlike you could say*, he notes, *but true*. This has been his style and his habit since he was in school. *I suppose it's pleasing to me. I enjoy it. Drawing fast sometimes, those first sketches, it's not too forced, and they're often a more honest version of the self*—or, it seems, of many selves: artist, watcher, traveler, wolf, writer, part of nature and student of it, lover of the earth and all its wildness. He seems to know these creatures, not only from close observation, but from within. The wolves turn to face him; they are all honest versions of themselves. In the wisp-thin grasses he creates, their gaze remains calm, neutral, or even in some drawings, curious. Or maybe his sketched wolves have no human look at all, only the uncanny, true stare of wolves. Their shapes tilt; they lean against a wind; they stand on the drawn line of a precipice looking past and through the white space of paper below them that will become, in his larger drawings for his second book, *The Wolves of Currump-*



***Ally*, colored pencil on paper, Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary, New Mexico, 2015.**

aw, the vast expanse of New Mexico's plains in 1893. Suddenly, a lone wolf runs, fast then faster, toward the edge of Grill's sketchbook page, startled by hunger or by a sound.

He has always worked with colored pencils. In school, he knew he wanted to work in color, and to keep things simple. The pencils—inexpensive, familiar—*take away the pressure*, he says, of "making art," a phrase he delivers in quotation marks, before he adjusts to "drawing." Pencils are liberating. He holds the pencils overhand. He makes bold, thick, decisive strokes. He prefers to use the side of the pencils for this effect, instead of their tips, because this allows him more freedom of movement. He draws not just with his hand, but with his arm, with his shoulder, and with certainty. He draws in the sketchbooks often, outdoors. Sometimes it's uncomfortable, but *it's good*, he says, *isn't it, to be inside an uncomfortable situation? If you're out in the elements, it's more exciting. And the work is always better for it.* His body is hot, cold, and maybe *your bum is wet, too, because of the log you're sitting on while you draw*. Most often, he carries with him three pencils in a chosen palette, balances all three of them in one hand and the sketchbook on the palm of the other. Just three pencils, he says, *makes decisions easier, creatively. I quite like sticking to something.* The wolves run in blue and grey packs; the hunters set their traps and study wolf tracks in rust-browns; earth-reds become the plains of the vanishing west; and the "passing realm" of the wolves, their mesas, are the palette of wolf pelage. As nighttime comes, maybe he switches pencils, for midnight and bruised blues as silhouettes of hills and as shadows that rise between earth and sky. In Lobo's story, and in all stories the artist likes best, *the landscape takes on its own character. Landscape* ***is*** *a character.* In his first book, *Shackleton's Journey*, for which Grill won the Kate Greenaway/Carnegie Medal for Illustration (as the youngest recipient in

50 years), pack ice breaks into haunting jigsaw shapes, and glaciers and ice-slopes loom knife-like above the freezing expeditioners; in *Bandoola: The Great Elephant Rescue*, the jungles of central Myanmar burgeon as lush habitats, or as future graves for elephants that must be protected. As characters, landscapes threaten, inspire, hide, punish, awe, and enfold humans and animals alike. Grill's signature clusters of tiny, precise drawings in montage-style advance the simultaneity of scenes and events, and these smaller drawings carry us forward to the large images that express the scale of landscape and wilderness. In *The Wolves of Currumpaw*, the pale blues, greys, and whites of clouds that billow at mid-day become, fittingly, the same subtle colors of Blanca, the she-wolf, beautiful mate of Lobo, the grey wolf King of Currumpaw.

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Just as I met the artist William Grill by chance in 2016 in a bookshop in Bath, England, the artist found the story of Lobo the King by chance in a bookshop. On a recent video call from his home in Bristol, England, William lifts the old copy of Ernest Thompson Seton's true stories and turns its pages with care. Unlike Grill's own illustrated book about Lobo, Seton's original 1898 story is *rough and quite brutal*; but the story of Lobo's endurance in Seton's relentless hunt to capture and kill the notorious wolf drew the contemporary artist's interest immediately. *I noticed the book on the shelf because of its blood-red spine, and because of its title,* ***Wild Animals I Have Known****.* Striving to know animals deeply—and to understand Seton, too, the famed hunter who changed his predatory ways to become a dedicated protector of wolves and wildlife—Grill makes an intimate graphic narrative about the unexpected relationships that form between wild animals and humans struggling to survive and to share Earth. He recalls the *demon wolves* of childhood tales like ***Little Red Riding Hood*** and ***Peter and the Wolf***. He considers the pervasive human fear of wolves—of what they might do, or about what or whom they may attack. *We treat some animals so differently than others, don't we?* At Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary in Rameh, New Mexico, he watched the wolves each day to prepare for his book. And drawings made at locations, on actual sites, *are more true to life*. Zoerro is the first wolf he sketches at the Sanctuary. Zoerro lies down but looks up. Alert. Regal. *Looking past me. Through me.* This is a wolf similar, possibly, to



***Zoerro*, colored pencil on paper, New Mexico, 2015.**

Lobo, as he pictures him—that is, based on photographs he has seen of Lobo's pelt, and on Seton's own 19th century drawings. *Wolves and dogs are so similar, and yet one is demonized, while the other is our favorite animal, our best friend. It's interesting, isn't it?* In the book, he draws Lobo attached to the neck of a heifer, which seems to twist and plunge heavily downward into a swirl of dust at the bottom of his page. The two animals spin in a brown tumult. He turns this image into motion and speed; the wolf pack surrounds the heifer, lively and focused. Theirs is an undemonized hunger, their need for food a benign necessity he draws into their eyes, with empathy. He observes the wolves in the light of day; in the light of their passing history, and of our own; in the light of themselves—*quite frightened and shy, really*, he says, *and manipulated by a human-caused problem*. The animals they once hunted are gone, they can no longer eat what they're used to eating, they're forced to eat livestock. *And then, we try to eradicate them for it. The wolves are trapped in an impossible situation engineered by humans.* He will not draw demons. He determines to draw the wolves in a positive light. True light.

You must love what you draw, he says. *The Wolves of Currumpaw* is, in many ways, a collage of multiple love stories told as one: there are drawings of Seton as he prepares his poisons and pursues his love of the hunt; drawings of Lobo and of Blanca, who will be used to trap her loyal mate; drawings of Lobo, running beneath a full moon ringed by its own light-haze, the wolf like a fleet spirit carved on a cave wall as he searches for his lost Blanca; and of Lobo, captured at last, his eyes turned toward the vanishing kingdom of the Old West, *resting on the far away plains, his plains.* And there are drawings, in the end, of Seton as a man first chastened then changed by regret for his actions, and by his respect for the wolf Lobo, whose story endures now in William Grill's work. As in all of William's books, animals and humans respond

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to each other's needs and flaws, often in startling, transformational ways, and their true stories become moral, emotional journeys. He recalls walking the same land in the United States that Lobo and Seton traveled, trying to see it as they had. *It's so important to see how someone can have one viewpoint, and then change,* William says. *Seton was all by himself out there, mostly. He didn't see anyone for three and half months apart from some ranchers. I was alone there too, and there were a couple of days perhaps I started to get a sense of what he might have felt. You're a character in the story. It gives you energy, it helps you to appreciate, doesn't it, and perhaps that's what happened to him. You experience something, and meet that thing you might be afraid of, and it opens your mind.* When we open his book to the penultimate chapter of *The Wolves of Currumpaw*, we see his art with all our own senses open now. His elegiac drawing of a rose-colored dawn depicts a flock of birds stirred to flight by the death of the grey wolf, Lobo. We may sense their passing shadow, or hear the susurration of their wings as they ascend in graceful formations across two pages. William Grill's drawing of this dawn is both lament and homage, an image of a wild endurance as a true love. The once empty pages fill with these wings of remembrance for Lobo, Blanca, Seton, an Old West, and a lasting tale. The artist's birds rise, fully alive, into a morning sky.



Melora Wolff is an essayist who lives in upstate New York, where she teaches nonfiction and directs the Creative Writing program of Skidmore College. *Bequeath*, a collection of her personal essays, is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press in September 2024.

CHANGING WOMAN

MICHELLE EFFLE


Judith Zimmermann on Unsplash

Norther Lee had just blown into town on the wind of her namesake. While she usually spent her winters under the Aurora Borealis in the sub-zero tundra just shy of the Arctic Circle, last winter she decided to bask in the sun and saguaros, baring skin amidst the red rocks of the hallucinatory Arizona landscape. Summer once again found our paths crossing on the black sands of the Redwood Coast in California. We were geared up for weeks of environmental and agricultural work scattered between hikes and drinks and art and music. This was the life.

Norther had spent the colder months trying her hand at silversmithing inspired by her high desert ramblings and wanted, to my surprise, to make me a ring. How could I say no? So, one evening after work, she came to my cabin with a canvas bag under her arm and a piece of string between her fingers. Unfurling the canvas bag onto the table, I was able to see a handful of cabochons—reds and blues and whites glinting in the lamp light.

"Your pick," she said, spreading her hands to display the gems like a magician. I felt that somehow this had become a solemn affair, that this could be a much more important decision than I had initially thought. Scanning the assorted stones, I was surprisingly underwhelmed—that is, until I saw the solitary piece of turquoise.

The teardrop shaped polished stone wasn't the brilliant robin's egg blue or waxy green of any turquoise I had seen before. There were the expected sky blues, but the complexities of color strayed into greens, ochre, and greys, flecked with umber. My hand was drawn to it, and reverentially I picked it up.

Almost with a sadness Norther sighed and said, "Ah, yeah of course, that's my favorite too. One of the last stones mined from the Seven Dwarfs Claim in Nevada. That stone is geologically different from any other turquoise in the world. The claim owner extracted all he could and filled the mine with

dirt a couple years ago. No more after that."

Well, that information sealed the deal. We decided the stone would be housed in a simple silver setting, so as not to detract from the worlds contained within the turquoise itself. She knotted the string around my finger, then slid it off to take measurement of the band; the best tool we had to size a ring in our rural setting.

I was allowed to spend some days with the stone cabochon before she started crafting the ring, to "get to know" it. I researched turquoise, its geology, its cultural significance, its locations around the world. What was so different about this particular piece than all the turquoise I had seen in the past?

Turquoise is a copper and aluminum phosphate gemstone. Its iconic colors are caused by variations of copper (blue) and iron impurities (green) deposited by circulating waters amongst sandstone and limonite most often found in the more arid regions of the world. Traces of this host rock create the delicate spiderwebs of browns and tans within the gem and are referred to as its matrix. This stone has been a highly valued mineral both culturally and monetarily for thousands of years around most of the world. Iran, China, Egypt, and North America hold most of the world's deposits, and it gets its common name from the French meaning "Turkish stone," a nod to the trade routes responsible for its early global distribution. While turquoise is considered rarer than diamonds by availability, it is not nearly as hard or as valuable.

I found myself wondering why Norther mentioned the mine this stone came from, if turquoise is so readily available. What seems to set Seven Dwarfs turquoise apart from other stones is its complex chemical make-up—a combination of variscite, chalcosederite, crandalite, and gem silica, giving it a much wider range of colors than the typical azure blue or green.

I stared at the colorful stone as it rested in my hands, pondering the weight of time it took to come into being, when the crandalite swirls and its milky ochre hues transported me to the waters of the Yellow River in China. The Bronze Age Erlitou peoples of this region mined turquoise dating back from 1900-1600 BCE and would use it to decorate ceremonial masks and daggers, utilitarian cups, and vessels as well as valuable jewelry pieces for nobility (Xiaoli). Its usage in holistic medicine as well as in talismans for protection, wisdom, good fortune, and peace have made it an integral part of Chinese culture, both ancient and modern. Trade upon the silk road brought an influx of the highly prized Persian turquoise and gave it its modern day nomenclature, while explorers from the west exported the Chinese gems across the globe.

Protection, healing, good fortune. These properties are associated with turquoise throughout the cultures of the world. Ahmed Teifascite, a 13th century Arabian authority on gemstones goes

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on at length about its virtues, stating that "Turquoise possesses the quality of becoming clarified in times of clear weather, and vice versa, becomes dull and obscure when the weather is dark and cloudy" (Pogue 14). He then refers to Aristotle's theory that the stones take on the aspects of those who wear them: "The turquoise is a stone which. . . possesses the property of removing from its wearer the danger of being killed" (qtd. in Lowry 25).

I was amused by this promise of longevity, when the matrix of sandstone interlaced in the gem in my hand transported me to the dunes of the Sinai Peninsula and the ever-standing pyramids of ancient Egypt. I was brought to the temple of the goddess Hathor, sometimes referred to as the Lady of Turquoise. She reigns over the sky, the embodiment of beauty, joy, and, unsurprisingly, mining. A goddess adorned by the solar disc befitting her rank, flanked by the horns of the bull—representing fertility, childbirth, and motherhood—she is a regal sight to behold.

The mines at Wadi Maghareh were a mere 2.5 miles from the temple of Hathor in the region circa 3000 BCE. The most common color scheme used in Egyptian themes have been turquoise, the cobalt blue of lapis lazuli, and the reds of carnelian, all set in gold. These colors are used in pigments decorating the ancient papyri scriptures and in temples all over Egypt. From Tutankhamen to Cleopatra, we find turquoise protecting, shielding, and signifying beauty. Here we find the opaque gem buried amongst the pharaohs and the common folk alike to ensure protection on their journey from the land of the living to the underworld.

I spent time in the underworld of the Egyptians, and when I resurfaced, I was traveling from the underworld of the Navajo (Diné) people to the lands above. "*Dotl'izhi* (turquoise) is an integral part of their creation myth, stating that when the Diné people came up from the Underworld, the land was covered in water. They dug channels to drain the land with shovels of turquoise tipped with coral" (Hill 11).

In this new land there was no sun or moon to guide the people during the day or night. First Man volunteered to help bring light to the world. From his hogan he took a piece of turquoise he had brought up from the underworld and said, "I shall make the sun and hang it in the sky by day to light the people." First Man chipped away until the turquoise was flat and smooth, round as a disc. He then painted a face upon the disc and gave it to *Johano-ai,* The Sun Carrier (Hill). He is known as a young man who often rides a beautiful turquoise stallion. The Diné say that when the weather is pleasant, with blue skies free of storm, the Sun Carrier has mounted his turquoise steed.

I was reminded of Hathor while hearing the stories of Changing Woman—also named Turquoise Woman—who is the most revered goddess of the Diné people. She embodies many aspects in Diné lore. A symbol of the sky, she changes with the seasons—growing old in winter and being reborn again in spring. She is present at the ceremonies welcoming girls into womanhood and during childbirth. She herself gives birth to the children of the Sun and is said to have created men and women from pieces of her own skin to become the ancestors of the Diné people. The Diné pay respect to her at every ceremony through song, reverence lifting high to the turquoise blue skies of her domain. In these ways she embodies the same fertility, growth,

and abundance associated with this stone throughout the world.

When I had chosen, studied, and returned the stone, it was late April. Winter's chill still kissed the air and the possibilities of the coming summer lay open before me like the fields of new grass surrounding us.

As that summer turned to fall, Norther Lee invited me to her place for dinner. I brought some homemade wine and blackberry jam—offerings of the season's bounty. She made a shepherd's pie and salad, pulled from the fertility of her garden's soil.

Sipping wine after our meal, she pulled a small cloth-wrapped item from her pocket and placed it in front of me. My immediate confusion was rapidly replaced with excitement, seeing the spark in her eyes that compelled me to open the gift.

I carefully untied the scrap of cloth from the weight it contained, and I could feel Norther Lee staring in anticipation. The flash of silver was surprising as it tumbled out of the wrappings into my open hand, two solid bands of silver connecting to a simple setting accentuating the teardrop shape of the stone I had picked out months before.

There, at summer's wane, with fields fallow and thoughts shifting towards the future months of cold and introspection, a ring bearing past possibilities shone upon my finger. How could you thank someone for a gift of such magnitude? A gift bearing the blessings of numerous gods and goddesses. A gift foretelling my true nature according to long-dead philosophers. A gift purporting to stall death in its tracks. A gift running from the world below to the one above in rivers of stone.

I took the ring in one hand, slowly sliding it onto the middle finger of my other, and looked up to the mountain silhouettes on the horizon illuminated by the rays of the setting sun. They reminded me of the pyramid-shaped burial mounds found in China, Egypt, and the Americas. I saw the fading blue sky and envisioned paths trod by horses made of stone. These paths led from the Sun's world above to the underworld below, carrying me from one plane of existence to another. How could I possibly express my thanks for a gift containing such multitudes?

I did the only thing I could think of. I stood and took my friend in my arms, hugging her close for what felt like an eternity. I willed that she could feel the gratitude pulsing from my person in every heartbeat. I tried to express my raw emotions through this embrace, as something physically solid to remember, before we were ushered inevitably

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into the times ahead. After I was confident that I conveyed my thanks without too much awkwardness, we passed the rest of the evening reveling in the late summer's bounty.

That dinner eight years ago was the last time I saw Norther Lee. She's been up in Alaska counting fish and living in a yurt, forever enamored by the dancing lights of endless night. I myself still wander the world, inspired by ever-shifting landscapes and seasons, and the mysteries that await those who roam. The turquoise ring solidly sits upon my finger, at times a bright blue reflection, at others simply an obscure grey stone, perhaps a match to my passing moods, but most likely just a change in the light. I hold it dear, for it anchors my present incarnation to the past while leading me headlong into an unknown future, and the person I am yet to become.

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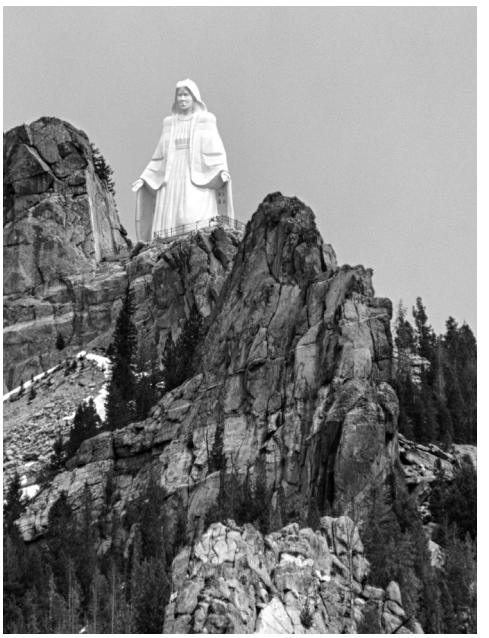
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Michelle Effle was born and raised in the heart of Hollywood, California, in the 1980s. She left home at an early age to travel and study the cultures and natural environments she encountered along the way. Michelle has published fiction and reviews in *Lurker Magazine* and art contributions in *Henbane Magazine.* She uses visual art such as silkscreen posters, murals, and mandalas to bring attention to social and environmental issues around the world. She is currently expanding her work to include nonfiction writing while pursuing a B.S. in natural resources in the Pacific Northwest.

BUTTE, MADONNA

C.R. BEIDEMAN



Our Lady of the Rockies. Photo credit: Kenneth John Gill.

In my backyard, I adjust the new telescope, focusing on Our Lady. The telescope given to me by my grandparents had been "lost in the divorce," according to my father. And then on my thirty-eighth birthday my fiancé gifted me one. I live at the Continental Divide in a valley cradling Butte, Montana. Atop the divide perches "Our Lady of the Rockies"—spitting image of the Blessed Virgin, except she's ninety feet tall and externally lit. Butte keeps a nightlight.

I spy a lone mountain biker up there at sunset, parked at the railing and supposing himself unseen. It's an eighteen-mile ride out and back. The other option is a bus tour, but it eats three hours. I wonder if he'll make it home before dark. Our Lady lights up around the same time my solar lights do, but tonight there's another light source. I sense it, somehow. Perhaps we keep a small tide within us from before we crawled out of the sea. I hover over the eyepiece as Our Lady glows brighter than her usual luminescence. How many visions has this glowing icon inspired among travelers on I-90, who suddenly see there in the sky that sign from God they'd thought they'd never get? But for tonight only, a swollen full moon rises behind her, and I'm thinking it's a sign because what are the odds on my first night with a new telescope? I don't know.

Our Lady wears a halo. This draws me right into the eyepiece, and I'm there on the mountain in freezing, windswept air. She's stone-faced against it, not a wince. I can trace every flawless feature. Her shadowed recesses echo in the moon's shadowed craters, and I'm filling with dread. I've never seen the moon so unnaturally close, not since the night I tried out my first telescope. I remember a cold fall night like this one. I remember Dad had to focus the complex instrument for

me, and that it was about the last time I knew him. Like that child I imagine cataclysmic asteroid impacts—mere puffs of moon dust as seen through the eyepiece. But I understand what they mean now. *Poof*—there go the dinosaurs. *Poof*—there but for the grace of God.

The moon lifts off behind Our Lady like a great ship. I refocus. One might take offense to mountaintop religious iconography, just as one might take offense to the thousands of white crucifixes lining Montana highways. But Butte is a woefully disenfranchised, God-fearing miner's town, and I don't begrudge them a statue. As a first-time homeowner, it's neat to have a statue to look at from my backyard, and tonight she's compelling—eclipsing the moon as if to insert herself into the cosmic conversation. Yet, her light covers me with graveyard dread—that feeling that in the sky and beneath your feet lurk terrible portals to Heaven or Hell.

The tidal pull between that flawlessly-hewn visage and that asteroid-blasted lunar surface stirs up my fear of becoming bone dust. I'd once been satisfied with the cosmic notion that my star-forged heavy elements will eventually end up in a supernova crucible jettisoning better elements to more supernovae fusing even more perfect elements in a kind of path to God. But when I almost died by myself in the wilderness, I envisaged a creator with a human face. God's a companion in such times. While the crater-faced moon silently foretells the end of the universe, Our Lady glowing palely beneath whispers: *Shhhh, it isn't so.*

Her countenance glows blessed but also, with the moon behind, severe—like Lady Liberty. The chamber of commerce hatched a plan to bypass the three-hour bus tour with a gondola. And after that I suppose a zip line. Butte needs all the help, don't get me wrong. It's a superfund site, and Blacktail Creek is poisonous. It feeds the Clark Fork where all the brown trout are dying. I suspect my attic's full of cancer in the form of arsenic from the one-hundred-year rain of mining particulate, and it makes me want to move before too long, though I just got here. I'm on a list to have the arsenic sucked out by a member of the EPA dressed like an astronaut. Thus, in contrast to Our Lady, Butte's face is ugly. Not like Bozeman: an hour east and in a greener valley. I'd never, ever, ever be able to afford a house there. But I left Bozeman for another reason: the same reason I left Breckenridge, Colorado, fifteen years earlier. So, while a tourist-snatching gondola might hoist property values here in Butte, I wonder whether one day soon my first home will be my first Airbnb.

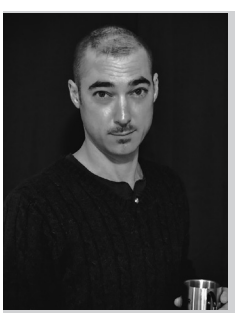
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Our Lady's a tourist draw but also tribute to miners entombed in the unbelievable ten-thousand miles of tunnels beneath Butte. . . and to miners above ground, alive but dead. . . and the women who loved them, and the women who birthed them. Butte was basically a century-long experiment in turning men into ants. Above my house lurks the Berkeley Pit, "a huge open-pit mine that would destroy whole neighborhoods and displace communities" (Parrett). This brings a certain amount of anxiety but no more than, say, the overdue-to-erupt Yellowstone caldera. The mining company stopped dewatering the mines in 1982, the year of my birth, and it's weird to think about that sixteen-hundred-feet-deep toxic reservoir and myself. How we've each grown. I imagine pockets of gas miles below where the water couldn't get, ready to pop and sink half the city. I imagine writing Lovecraftian stories about creatures down there—mutant mole men, or the Berkeley Pit becoming a sort of *very wrong* primordial ooze that gains consciousness and does evil upon the townspeople who throw themselves in like lemmings. The pit stinks, most mornings, like gas. If you'd like to stare into the maw, admission is $2.00.

A Domino's Pizza sign buzzes above my alley, but the moon radiates silence as it slides behind, then up and away, until it's just one astral body in a field of them, a field to which I now have access, thanks to this gift. I suppose Our Lady's also a symbol of hope. Just hope. Hope that the damage done by the Anaconda Mining Company can be mitigated. Hope that there won't be cancer and $8.00-per-hour jobs and fentanyl. Time was the sky over Butte hung blackened with toxic soot—same time as the First World War was blackening Europe—and still a pall hangs almost visibly over the porcelain statue's downcast gaze. So, I angle my telescope higher, above Our Lady and above the moon. As the northern hemisphere tilts away from the light and into darkness, I feel the gravity of the end of a long year here on Earth, and I want to think about Saturn for a while.

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C.R. Beideman writes from Butte, Montana. His fiction appears in T*he Saturday Evening Post*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, and *War, Literature & the Arts*. He's broken the same leg four times, and if you look real close you can see him in an episode of *1923*.

HUNTING THE ANTHROPOCENE: FINDING HOPE IN THE RAINFOREST

KEVIN MAIER


Kevin Maier

My twelve-year-old wants to shoot a deer more than you can imagine. He's dropped scores of ducks; he was lucky enough to find an emperor goose last year; he's an ace on sooty grouse out of tall old-growth spruce trees with his .22 and he's even notched a handful of caribou tags on two different trips—one a spectacular bull on a special youth-only hunt. But if you asked him, he'd tell you he'd trade it all to finally connect with one of the spooky Sitka blacktail deer roaming the forests and mountains near our home in Southeast Alaska.

He's spent a month of Sundays slipping and falling up and down the dripping mountains of the Tongass National Forest that surround us here in Juneau with nothing to show for it save for the requisite bruises, festering devil's club spines in his hands, and perennial wet feet.

He started coming with me at age seven, mostly on shorter late-season hunts that involved more sitting than walking. But there isn't much for low elevation still hunting these days—which is to say, we don't have as much snow driving deer down during our five-month August-to-January deer season—so these trips were more efforts to give Mom a break than to fill the freezer. Since he turned ten, and his walking game and leg length are more in line with his motivation levels, he's been making the brutal bushwhacks through soaking blueberry and salmonberry bushes, climbing the steep old-growth hillsides littered with

wind-thrown and rotting Sitka spruce and western hemlock, making it from the boat up to 1500 or 2000 or 2500 feet with no complaints. Even my hunting friends have noticed that he's a pretty dang solid walker—and to be honest, he's more motivated than me to cover ground these days. For the last two seasons, I haven't hunted a day without him.

After four years in a leadership position at work (chairing the humanities department at the small regional university here in Juneau), I returned to civilian ranks this year. This welcome return to regular life means I have a bit more time to hunt, but more importantly, I have the flexibility to bail out on a Thursday or Friday for a long weekend when the marine forecast is right or the rut is on. I figured this'd be the year my son would finally get to fill one of his blacktail tags.

Everybody debates when the rut actually happens here, but nobody debates that October and November weather is gnarly in Southeast Alaska. I can't imagine there is anything more miserable than 35°F, 20-knot winds, and heavy "snain"—what we lovingly call that weird mix of rain and snow that we often see falling in the Tongass this time of year. Going with conventional wisdom, that come Veteran's Day you should drop everything but your deer call and your rifle and get to the woods, we had our overnight bags packed, our Grundens hanging by the door, and we were hoping for a long weekend off the boat somewhere on Admiralty Island, where exposed crossings mean the pressure is lower and the deer both more abundant and less spooky. Our neighbor had his six-person tipi tent ready to go and a stack of presto logs to jam in his packable woodstove to keep it hot. I swapped out the 168 grain .30-06 shells for a box of 180 grain, tossing a couple of 220 grain monsters in there for good measure, as word had it that the bears were still up and about, and moving from wolf and black bear country to islands with only brown bears requires a change in safety protocols.

The folks at the National Weather Service decided we'd have different plans for Veteran's Day weekend—a gale warning kept us home, and gusts that peaked at 90 mph near the harbor meant that we were really happy to be eating pancakes in our kitchen instead

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of out in a friend's 22' Hewes Craft, let alone our 17' skiff. We went for a walk behind our house in the heavily hunted road system mountains. It was windy. It was a nice walk. The supposed peak weekend of rut came and went.

The following weekend's forecast looked marginal and, most notably, wet. Tongass wet is a special and spectacular wet. You don't need to Google "atmospheric river" to get a sense for what was in store; for my dollar; that's the most accurate and eloquent description of the once-rare, but increasingly common, rain events we now seem to get here any month of the year. This forecast also came with small craft advisories, so I called my friends at Ward Air, the premier float plane charter operation in the area, and tentatively put my name on the schedule for a Thursday morning flight. Given the forecast, I figured there was no way we'd make it out in a Cessna 206 operating on visual flight rules—I didn't even cancel my Friday meetings.

Our bags were packed, though, and there was a fly-in public Forest Service cabin available on a lake that was still unseasonably unfrozen, so our neighbor and primary hunting partner convinced us we should make what I thought was a perfunctory trip to the hangar to shoot the breeze with the pilots and get some hunting reports. Even at 9:45 a.m., as we loaded our gear into a van to head to the float pond, I didn't believe we were going.

By 10:45, however, I'd paid for the USFS backcountry cabin, entering my credit card number to the clunky webform via my phone as we were taxing on the float pond, and we had hastily unloaded our dry bags in the lovely pan-abode cedar, one-room cabin. Then we had our hunting packs in a little jon boat always stored at the cabin, and my son and I huddled in the bow as our friend channeled his years as a fulltime river guide and silently rowed the three of us across a small lake for some walkable terrain.

It always takes longer than expected to slow from the frantic pace of the front country and get into the rhythm of the forest. It takes more than dropping out of cell range and putting your phone on airplane mode to tune out the noise of daily life. Spotting a deer on the misty hillside an hour into a slow reconnaissance shuffle is a pretty good way to jumpstart the process and focus your attention on the immediate present.

Excited by abundant sign, we were moving too fast to spot deer in normal conditions, but the wind and rain kept both our scent and our sound masked as we walked. The three of us spread out in single file, down a well-defined game path. At the same time I spotted a shape oddly parallel to the ground in some leafless blueberry bushes, my hunting partner spotted another larger one moving down the hillside straight for us. He got my son lined up on the deer and slipped ear plugs into his ears. Locked on my deer, I glanced over to see my son raise his rifle just as some of the largest blacktail antlers I'd ever seen peeked around the corner.

As ten feet separated my usually dead-eye shooting son and what I now know was a genuine hog of a blacktail, I was shocked when the gun went off a second time, and then a second later, a third, as the deer made a quick exit stage right. I was out of position to safely shoot backup, and my hunting partner figured there'd be no way he'd miss, so he didn't pull the trigger on his .375, even though he had the vitals in his scope.

An hour of searching later, we confirmed that he had missed. A quick test shot at a stump revealed that it was buck fever and not a misaligned scope. Sobbing and language too strong to be coming from a mouth filled with braces marked the next hour, but we regrouped and carried on, covering a mile or so of some very deer-y terrain. By day's end, we'd seen nine deer. That may not sound like a lot, but if you've ever hunted blacktails in the north end of the Tongass, you know that this is a very good day. (Hunting closer to home last year, for comparison, that's almost as many as my son and I saw in a month of pretty hard hunting.)

No more shots presented themselves, but hopes were high that'd we'd get him a chance to redeem himself. The next two days were wet—like ring-your-gloves-out-every-fifteen-minutes wet. Making our way down a spectacular brown bear highway—what we call "Grandfather Trails," where four distinct footprints make deep holes at regular intervals from hundreds and sometimes thousands of years of ursine marches—we were equally worried about bears and that we'd overtop our 15" Xtratuf rainboots as the deep prints formed swampy pits. (Rain gauges later confirmed that we weren't crazy: in a 24-hour period, nearby weather stations measured 4.75" of precip). At the end of our second day, an hour from the rowboat and with forty-five minutes to the 3:14 pm sunset, my hunting partner was working a hillside above us and dropped a beamy three-by-three. It was all hands on deck to get it quartered and hauled through the forest in the rapidly fading light back to the lakeshore. We all scratched the next day as the winds kicked up and made the wet even more serious.

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We awoke on Sunday anxious that our noon pickup wasn't possible. Rain drove down in waves on top of the metal-roofed cabin. As nautical twilight broke and we made requisite visits to the outhouse, we found that, just like the last few days, the ceiling was locked at 600 feet and seeing across the short lake was barely possible. Didn't seem like a day for visual flight rules. We nevertheless packed our sleeping bags and cook gear into our dry bags, grabbed our hunting packs, and set out to spend a few last hours in the forest, with our InReaches and VHF radios handy and lunches for a full day, so we could make a quick change of plans if the plane couldn't make it.

Headlamps lighting the way, we rowed across the lake in the flat-bottomed skiff to a new hillside. My son and I turned our headlamps to high beam and climbed up a steep pitch,

clutching blueberries to keep from sliding back down each step, arriving to fresh tracks on a meandering game trail atop an 800' bench. We made our way along this trail, ducking into muskegs, blowing our calls vigorously. We'd agreed in advance to try an array of new tactics, hoping to avoid the scratch from the day before, but also a bit too desperate to be effective.

In the second or third muskeg we encountered, my son pointed out a scrubby cedar tree, its fine needles standing out from a forest dominated by hemlock and spruce. We'd found these rare gems before, so he knew the story about this endangered species. We both instinctively turned our gaze upward. A few more steps, and we realized we were in a magnificent grove of yellow cedars. None of them huge—and there were certainly a few standing-dead trees and a handful of others well on their way to dying the slow death precipitated by a rapidly changing climate—but this was the real deal.

In an ironic climate twist, without the usual snowpack serving as winter insulation, genuine groves of yellow cedars like this one are rapidly vanishing from the north end of the Tongass, their shallow roots freezing, killing the trees in the process. It's a sad story of climate-driven forest succession, and we have several friends studying the phenomenon. I snapped a grainy picture of my son delicately holding a branch of a two-foot tree, with the tell-tale paper-y bark of a larger specimen in the background, adding a waypoint on my GPS so I could send the coordinates to my forest ecologist colleagues, and we both sat down to blow our deer calls for the last forty-five minutes of our hunt. As we got our lunches out, the clouds broke for the first time since we'd arrived. Suddenly, nearby peaks revealed themselves for the first time, glistening with fresh snow. The mist lifted, and the rain even tapered off. Unfortunately for our deer hunting chances, the steady breeze switched directions, too, and we'd just winded the large opening we were hoping we could entice an eager buck into with hand-carved cedar calls blasting out our best fawn bleats. It didn't matter. As we sat there, waiting, eating our sandwiches as quietly as we could, we were both happy to be sitting in this magical grove of elders, even if we were anxious about our collective futures.

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As I age, I wonder how long I'll be able to keep up with my two vigorously healthy boys. I can control a lot of the variables that determine how long my body will be able to handle the rigors of this terrain, but the lack of November snow that historically pushed deer to lower elevations during the rut might mean I age out before my parents' generation aged out of blacktail hunting here. Like the equipment we carry and the clothes we wear, hunting tactics change over time. The global weirding of our weather is forcing us to be more adaptable, and to cherish these moments in these endangered spaces even more than we normally would.

So for now, maybe all I need to know is that my son loves to hunt—and that he really wants to get a deer to bring home to his mom and younger brother—but he also loves the process. The cedar grove moved him as much as it did me—he noticed it first, after all. This ability to find beauty in a broken world, the resilience to miss and to keep trying—these are requisite survival skills for the next generation of hunters, as much as the next generation of humans.



Kevin Maier lives as a guest on the unceded territories of the Áak'w Kwáan, on Lingít Aaní. As professor of English at the University of Alaska Southeast, he coordinates the Environmental Studies program and teaches a wide range of classes in writing, American literature, and the environmental humanities. His current writing projects explore the intersections of climate politics and outdoor recreation. Recent publications have appeared in *Camas*, *The Drake*, and *Western American Literature;* he is the editor of *Teaching Hemingway and the Natural World* (2018) and, with Sarah Jaquette Ray, *Critical Norths: Space, Nature, Theory* (2017). When not in the classroom or behind a screen, he spends his time trying to keep up with his two boys in the mountains, forests, and waters surrounding his home in what we now call the Tongass National Forest.

CATTLE DRIVE

DAVID TIPPETTS



Looking west on the Cornwell Ranch. Photo credit: Cornwell Ranch.

Our neighbor gave my wife some plants a few years ago, a small orange flower, daisyish, with dandelion-like leaves. "You just poke them in the ground and they grow." We did, and they're now in their tenth generation in our front flower-bed. I weeded that bed one day a few years later and happened to pull one by mistake. I crushed the leaves in my hand, and the scent that came to me created a Madeleine-memory. It's sagey, but with hints of mint and, I swear, undertones of orange and honey. I smelled that very odor many times riding across the Montana prairie when my horse happened to step on a particular plant, and only at those times and circumstances. It was one of those sensations barely noticed at the time; there were more interesting things going on, but it hit me full force while I knelt weeding the flower-bed.

A cascade of associations took me back to my first, and only, cattle drive, when I was fourteen.

It was the year before my family bought our own farm. We lived outside Glasgow, Montana, on an acre of land where I was responsible for caring for chickens and rabbits while I daydreamed of horses and steers. I had seen all the movies, read all the books. Valley County was one of the last places in the country to be settled. The old-time West still existed in northeastern Montana. Large cattle ranches ran thousands of head of cattle—the Etchart Ranch south of the Milk River and the Cornwell Ranch to the north were two of the most prominent.

Some of the older men in town had lived the open range days. Al White, sometimes called Horse White, refused to ride in a car. He rode around town on a Quarter Horse gelding, his saddle and bridle studded with silver, both Horse and his horse tricked out with every piece of leather filigree he could afford, town kids trailing after him. An old one-eyed man, half-Native American, he was known as a champion

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roper and rotated his services to every rancher in the county during branding season. While delivering newspapers, I sometimes sold him a copy in one of the bars on Front Street. For me, it was like an encounter with a movie star.

Brownie Doak, my stepdad's best friend and army buddy, worked for the Etchart Ranch and stopped by our house occasionally to yak. I stood in silent awe listening to stories of cattle and horses while checking out his riding boots and sombrero, and wishing for the roll-your-owns he smoked. I knew the lingo from reading Will James, and I knew the difference between the real thing and the fluff the movies pushed.

One of my best friends was Mike Hemmert, who lived on a farm west of town out on Tampico road. They were a small operation, with sheep, cattle, alfalfa, and wheat. They also had several horses; I angled for invitations to go out and ride every chance I got. Mike and I, along with his younger brother, Neil, spent Sunday afternoons riding every trial in the vicinity. I usually rode Blacky, who would rear back onto his hind legs if coaxed just right, just like Trigger in the movies. I ignored the danger of the horse turning over backwards on me until Lyman, Mike's dad, saw me doing it one day and gave me hell.

So I was thrilled when Mike called and told me his dad wanted the boys to trail a dozen Hereford bulls from the farm up to their summer pasture north of Highway 2. A real cattle drive! I was in. It had to have been in June; that's when the breeding was done. The gestation is nine months in cattle, too, so the calves would be born in February and March—early, to gain as much weight as possible before the fall calf sale.

Lyman came to town the night before for supplies. I rode out to the farm with him wearing my straw hat, jeans, riding boots, and a western shirt. Lyman was a quiet, tough, no-nonsense man with a good head for business. We boys slept in the "bunk house," a shack Mike and Neil fixed up with cots and a cast-off dresser.

We left at daylight after a pre-dawn breakfast and a series of cautions and instructions from Lyman, mostly about doing the job and getting back home. "No fooling around. You hear me, Mike? I don't want you running the legs off those horses. Just do your job and get back here before dark." It seemed inevitable, but it was lucky for the memories that we violated every one of his directives before the day ended.

I rode Pete, a tall Quarter Horse sorrel. I think it was Lyman who specified his own horse, Pete, for me. I also suspect I was invited because Lyman harbored a delusion that I would be responsible, a brake on his own boys' wilder impulses. I was a year older than Mike and three years older than Neil. Mike rode Blacky that day. Neil was humiliated onto a half-Welsh pony, trotting to keep up, with the promise from Mike of a change in mounts at some indefinite, maybe illusory moment later in the day.

Mike was a cross between Huck Finn and Alfred E. Newman, the *Mad Magazine* icon, careening wildly between faith and the gutter. We obsessed together, sharing gleaned information about female anatomy, but also about horses, cars, and sometimes theology. While I was delighted with farm work, Mike hated it and couldn't wait to grow up and leave. But then I had the distinct advantage of distance, the work being an occasional indulgence for me, while Mike had to deal with it and his hard father every day.

Mike blocked the eastbound direction of Tampico Road, standing Blacky broadside in the middle. The bulls, all strong young Herefords, about a dozen of them, turned west on the gravel road as if they'd been rehearsing, trotting out in single file, the rising sun glowing off their burgundy humping asses. It was more a matter of us keeping up than doing any herding.

The road ran straight for about three miles. The Great Northern Railroad blocked the leftward approaches, so we had to worry about only a couple of farm lanes on the right. Because I was on the fastest horse, as we would later prove when the racing started, I galloped ahead and blocked the lane to



Loading cattle in the 1950s, Cornwell Ranch. Photo credit: Cornwell Ranch.

Paulina Stevens's cabin. I watched the bulls plow on past at a hard trot, shouldering each other for the lead, scarcely looking my way. The two other boys bounced along behind. I fell in and we all grinned at each other. The morning was cool and beautiful, the sun glowed on our backs and necks. We were mounted, free of adult supervision, and headed for the wild country.

We made the three miles to Tampico bridge in record time, the occasional farm truck creating the only excitement when we had to herd the bulls to the shoulder to let the traffic pass. The bridge was an old rusty overhead truss affair, single lane. It stood high above the river, creating a rattling, metallic echo in the small jungley canyon below. The bulls went across just fine. The horses balked until we got off and led them singly; one of us threatening from behind with a stick. On the far side they stood with legs braced, huffing, bobbing their heads in relief while the bulls, now unattended, milled in

the roadside, munching brome-grass, unconcerned.

We got the outfit moving again, headed northwest toward a range of grassy bare hills that hid Highway 2 from view. The road was open on both sides, with meadows extending to the hills, perfect for horse-racing.

It wasn't fair, but it was fun. We let the bulls wander and graze while Pete ran the legs off the other two horses going away. I have a visual and aural memory of leaning over his neck, seeing the ground fly under us, the blur of white stockinged legs, Mike shouting at me in the far, far distance. We ran several heats, argued over the ground I had to give them to make it fair. Poor Neil on his pony wasn't in the running at any distance, got mad, and refused to race, refused to be coaxed. "I'm going back home and tell dad."

"Go ahead, big baby," Mike calling his brother's bluff.

"I will."

"Nobody's stopping you. Think you can get that scrawny thing back across the bridge?"

No answer.

Then it got boring. We rounded up the bulls and headed on up the road, Neil sulking along behind.

I don't remember crossing Highway 2, the two-lane that runs through northern Montana between Duluth, Minnesota, and Seattle, Washington, so we must have missed any traffic. Across the highway we had only maybe another half mile to the gate of Hemmert's summer pasture. After crossing through the gate, we pushed the bulls along until we found a bunch of cows and watched them getting acquainted.

We were now in high prairie country—buffalo and blue-joint grass, blue larkspur and wild rose in full bloom, sage, cottonwood and ash trees in the coulees and along the creek bottoms. The horizon ended miles away. The big blue sky hung overhead lighted by the June sun. Meadowlarks preened and sang in the sage, hawks hung motionless overhead. The fresh prairie wind wove unceasing patterns in the vegetation. Nothing civilized stood between us and the Canadian border, some sixty miles to the north.

A few days earlier, a three-day rain hung over northeast Montana and the hills came green with new growth as soon as the sun came out. I don't remember the prairie looking so beautiful. It was that day more than any of the dozens I spent on the prairie in the years that followed when the landscape entered deep into my DNA. The grasses, shrubs and trees, the birds and animals, the light and shadow, became

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as familiar as family. But above all it was the smell of sage and grasses in bloom, the unknown flowering plants that came to life after the rain. It was a lifetime commitment, a bonding that oriented my compass to eastern Montana no matter where I happened to live in later years. That was what the nameless flower I grow in my front flowerbed meant to me when I smelled it. It's probable Pete stepped on a near relative a dozen times that day, sending plumes of olfactory signals deep into my subconscious, waiting fifty years to trigger these memories.

We sat on our horses, watched the bulls sniffing around the cows, the bunch milling and bellowing. Mike grinned after a few minutes. This was the moment we were supposed to turn around and head back home. "To hell with this, let's go swimming."

I looked around. Nothing but grass and sage. "Where?"

He turned Blacky north, away from home. "Just follow me."

We rode north another mile, faster now that we were free of the bulls. We came to another gate, opened it and rode through onto Cornwell Ranch land. The ranch consists of almost 25,000 acres encompassing all of the Buggy Creek drainage. Another couple miles farther north we intersected with Buggy Creek Coulee. It was getting toward noon and warm.

The prairie descended into a series of grassy benchlands, then hills cut by shallow coulees leading down to a half-mile wide valley where the creek ranged from side to side, snake-like, guarded by a broken line of cottonwoods and willows. Buggy Creek angled from the northwest, rising somewhere in the wilds beyond the horizon toward Canada, and flowed southeast crossing Highway 2, emptying into the Milk River a dozen miles from where we stood.

We stopped our horses for a moment before heading down to the creek, just looking over the valley. I saw several teepee rings at the edge of the hills near us and pointed them out to Mike and Neil. It didn't take much imagination to see the teepees a hundred years before in that wild place. Excited, we got off our horses and searched for arrowheads around the circles of stones a few minutes, without success.

At the creek we wandered southeast for a half-mile looking for a good waterhole. The rain had freshened the creek. In the deeper washes crystalline water magnified the sandstone bottom while reflecting the sky. Mike led us along. He had high standards in swimming holes, but soon we found the perfect one. Mike galloped ahead whooping. Neil and I, Pete towering over the unfortunate, unnamed pony,



The Homeplace, Cornwell Ranch. Photo credit: Cornwell Ranch.

ambled along behind. We were now about fifteen miles from home, and five of them beyond our expected location.

A horseshoe bend curved against the north side of the valley where an old beaver dam backed up the creek. On the north side of the channel, the creek cut deep into the hill exposing a sandstone ledge that jutted out over the deepest part of the pool. It was about a ten-foot dive into the water. We could have sold tickets.

Within a few minutes we tied the horses to willows, piled our clothes on the grass—topped by hats and boots—and edged into the cold water, guarding our tender parts, the goose bumps rising. Mike was first on the ledge, his naked prepubescent form skylined above the rock.

Neil took the opportunity to get even. "You're chicken. You won't do it. Kill yourself and I get to ride Blacky home."

Mike performed a perfect intrepid cannonball. Soon we were taking turns risking our tender feet on the stone and jumping off. Exhausting that novelty, we took a breather and sat in the shallows talking.

I don't know who saw the men first. I know it wasn't me. One of the other boys went quiet and stared up at the sandstone. I looked and did a double-take. A row of three cowboys sat on their horses above the edge of the cutbank, grinning, watching us from under wide hats in full regalia. Good horses, catch-ropes coiled and tied to the cantle, they were knights of the range.

"Well, well. Look what we found." Chuckles, more grinning. "What kind of fish are you?"

Nobody answered. The sudden humiliation ground us into silence.

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"I think we got us some minnows here. Yeah, minnows." General laughter.

Mike found his voice and told them who we were. "We brought the bulls up from the place this morning." Then his voice trailed away, probably thinking about his dad and the absolute instructions from this morning. "We. . . we just wanted to take a swim."

There was some muted discussion among the three. "Don't know much about minnows. Do minnows usually eat this time of day?"

"Yeah." We answered it in a chorus, suddenly aware of our hunger.

"Well, get out of there and get dressed. We'll wait for you. We got chuck on in a half hour." He jerked a thumb northwest, upstream, still farther from home. It took us about a minute and we were mounted and ready.

Their Stetsons were felt rather than straw, their saddles the kind I could only finger and stroke in Scotties Leather Shop in town, but never hoped to actually own. We must all have felt like poor relations riding next to them; I know I did. Only Pete

stood up to the quality of their stock. "Nice horse you got there." I glowed with pride until Mike explained it was his dad's and I was just a friend of the family. Tommy Cornwell, cousin of the Cornwell twins—owners of the ranch—worked with my stepdad at the post office, so there was a connection when I mentioned it. One of them knew my stepdad, so I was placed and accepted anyway. I gave Mike a secret glower.

We rode up the creek northwest for several miles. The Cornwell riders rounded up a few stray cows and calves as we went along, driving them along with us. A plume of dust marked our destination, and as we drew closer, the bellowing of a thousand worried mother cows.

We rode into the scene like movie cowboys, our escorts yipping for attention. "Look what we fished out of the creek, everybody. We got ourselves some minnows." General laughter, a more complete explanation from one of our new friends. An official invitation came to us for lunch from a foreman, then everybody went back to work and ignored us.

The sight could have been made in a movie. We were goggle-eyed. About twenty cowboys worked alongside a row of branding fires in several teams. A large temporary corral of steel panels held the cows with their unbranded calves. A couple hundred yards to the south the horse herd was held in place by a rope corral, a *remuda* in cowboy talk. I had read of them in history books and in Will James's fiction, but never expected to see one in reality; but there it was, maybe fifty head of horses standing quietly, held in place by a single circle of rope. The branded calves stood, looking shocked, in a smaller corral near the cows, adding their higher bawling to the cacophony.

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The ropers, riding highly trained horses, entered the large corral and moved slowly through the cows, then with a flip of the rope heeled a calf. Others hazed the terrified mother back away from the gate, and horse and rider dragged the calf out to the fire. The three-man crew wrestled the calf, branded it with the red-hot iron, vaccinated, castrated, and disinfected it, then turned it loose in the calf corral, dazed, shaking its head, humped up in pain, to bawl fruitlessly for its mom.

We three sat with a few other visitors on the top rail of the corral fence and watched, as if at a three-ring circus. My hero, the one-eyed Indian, was one of the ropers, and I watched him time

and again stalking through the herd, his horse adjusting to the movements of the calves without guidance, the blinding snake of the rope around the rear heels, and the horse moving now on automatic to the gate. No fuss, no drama, no twirling loops. Just quiet competence; he made it look effortless.

I don't remember how the food arrived, but soon everybody formed a line and filled plates. We boys felt shy and held back, hyperaware of our trespass, our lack of legitimacy. "Git on in there and fill up." One of the foremen herded us into line with the workers. We ate the superb meal, sneaking glances at the riders sitting on the ground around us. Talk floated over our heads about ropes and horses, plans for the next day.

I see the three of us that afternoon, quiet. We didn't talk much to each other or to anyone else. We just watched, or maybe in my case, witnessed, trying to notice everything, each detail of the work, the animals, the equipment. For generations, these ranchers had developed methods and traditions that melded the capabilities of trained horses and super-skilled men into the machinelike efficiency we saw that day. This was 1957, at the cusp of profound changes that would end forever the kind of scene we were able to witness. In fact, it was already an anachronism. I didn't know that, of course, at the time. I was just a cowboy wannabe, taking in everything.

It's possible we made intention motions of getting on our horses and going home; I do remember some reluctant discussion of doing that, one or two side-mouth murmurings between me and Mike. "Naw, stick around. We'll take care of all that later." We were only too happy to comply. Maybe they saw us as the audience they needed, appreciative, admiring. We sat, open-mouthed, eyes wide for the rest of the afternoon.

Before we were aware, the sun was westering, and the option of riding home became moot. We would never make it before dark. The foreman came over to talk to us. "We'll put your horses up in the *remuda* tonight. You can ride back to headquarters with one of our outfits and come back for them tomorrow." In the back of all our minds was the specter of a very angry Lyman Hemmert, and the trouble we were already in. Mike made a weak gesture toward minding his dad for a change. "I think we'd better try to get home." But none of us relished the prospect of twenty-five miles in the dark and getting the horses back across the bridge. We didn't insist and found ourselves in one of the ranch trucks, headlights boring a hole through the dark, Neil slumped half-asleep in the seat; Mike, for once sobered by facing his dad, stared straight ahead beside me.

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The Cornwell Ranch headquarters cowered us still further. We sat at the huge table, served by a real cook, abashed and silent, surrounded by the combined Cornwell families, the foremen, various invited guests, our eyes casting sidelong glances at the walls covered in ranch memorabilia—lynx pelts stretched and padded with felt, stuffed deer heads, old photos of champion horses and riders. Conversation about ranching politics floated over our heads like gossamer. The house itself addled us, unused as we were to grand dimensions, interior display.

Someone had called Lyman, and eventually he drove into the yard in the family station wagon, hat in hand, apologizing for our intrusion to the Cornwell twins, and rescued us from our social imbalance.

Lyman took me straight home, maintaining a mask of rigid stillness. I could only imagine the conversation between him and my mother, who could be as scary in her own way as he was in his. We were all beyond exhaustion, and the silence in the car endured like something out of balance, unbreakable. Mike waited stoically for me to be dropped off, for the beginning of sure punishment.

Neil was asleep.



Montana born and raised on a nineteenth-century farm with woodfires, outhouses, Saturday bathtub on the kitchen floor, cattle, tractors, and a shoal of younger siblings, David Tippetts has published memoir in *Montana Magazine*, *Permafrost*, *Memoir*, *Rosebud*, *Alaska Quarterly*, and *Weber Studies*, as well as fiction in *Camas*, *Sling and Stone* and the *Whitefish Review*. He won honorable mention in the 2004 *New Millennium* Fiction Competition and was a finalist in *Narrative Magazine*'s 2022 competition. He is a past board member of Writers@Work.

TURN OF FORTUNE

TERRY SANVILLE



Krzysztof Kowalik on Unsplash

White. White. Everything white. Windswept. Frozen. Snow-covered, a foot deep on the asphalt parking lot at the end of the high mountain road on the Rocky Mountains' eastern slope. Only the wind's occasional groan disturbed the silence. Ryan and Grace cuddled in the front seat of his Subaru. He kissed her on the mouth, his hands exploring her body. She responded to his eager touch by unfastening hooks, buttons, and zippers. The car's windows steamed opaque.

At the growl of engines the couple pulled apart. A Mercedes SUV and a Ford Bronco crunched into the far end of the parking lot. Four men dressed in parkas got out of the Ford. One of them swung open the rear gate, retrieved a duffle bag and walked to the Mercedes. A woman dressed in street clothes and carrying a briefcase got out of the SUV along with two bodyguards. The man opened the briefcase and examined its contents, then handed over the duffle bag. The woman inspected its contents.

"What's goin' on?" Grace whispered as she hurriedly pulled her clothes together.

Ryan had cleared his steamed window and stared at the hooded figures. "I . . . I don't like it. Looks like some sort of drug deal."

"Maybe they haven't seen us."

"I hope you're right. I've heard these cartel guys don't leave witnesses."

"Why? We're not doing anything."

"Yeah, but these boys don't take chances."

"How would you know?"

"Hey, I watch TV."

The woman got back into the Mercedes and it tore out, spinning its tires on black ice beneath the snow. The four men climbed back into the Bronco. But the last one pointed in the direction of Ryan and Grace. The car backed up and drove straight at the Subaru, barely stopping before hitting its driver's side door. The four piled out, guns drawn and pointed at the couple.

"We're screwed," Ryan muttered.

Grace let out a soft whimper and clutched his arm.

"Get out of the car," the lead narco yelled.

They complied. "Hey guys, what's goin' on?" Ryan whined and clamped down on his urge to pee.

"You'll never know."

"But we didn't see—"

"Shut up."

"Listen, maybe we can work something—"

"I said, shut the fuck up." The narco stepped forward and pistol-whipped Ryan, who fell into the snow. Grace screamed.

"You shut up too or you'll get the same."

"What do ya wanna do with them?" another narco asked.

The lead guy paused, as if trying to solve an unexpected problem. "Take them up the trail. Make them disappear."

The second narco brandished his Mac-10 and motioned toward the trailhead. "Move it."

"Please, we didn't see anything, won't say anything," Grace pleaded.

She helped Ryan to his feet and they moved along the bare trace of a trail that notched the steep slopes in a long upward sweep. In knee-deep snow they moved slowly. Ryan touched his jacket sleeve to his bloodied forehead and winced.

"Hurry the fuck up," the lead narco called after them.

"Yeah, yeah," their executioner muttered.

Grace led the way, followed by Ryan, then their escort. All of them breathed like exhausted distance runners by the time they rounded the curve of the peak. To their right the mountain dropped away, the slope near vertical with a dense Douglas fir forest at its base far below.

Along one straight stretch they paused to catch their breaths.

"Come on, man. You don't hafta do this," Ryan said, his chest heaving in the high altitude.

"Like hell. The last time we let some nosy bastard live, my brothers did a nickel at Florence."

"But we don't care about what you're up to," Grace chimed in.

"Shut the fuck up, both of you. Now get movin'."

Grace stared into Ryan's eyes, her baby blues tearing up, either from the cold or from thoughts of their impending death. Ryan clamped his mouth shut, his mind racing. *How the hell did we get involved in this mess? Talk about bad karma. But this guy's not the sharpest tool in the shed. There might be a chance . . . .*

They continued climbing, crossing snow-filled ravines, their breaths white smoke in the frigid afternoon air. The trail narrowed and Grace had to kick the snow out of the way to move forward, the drop to their right dizzying. *I bet this is where he'll do it,* Ryan thought and slowed until the narco was almost on top of him.

"Move your ass," the narco said.

In a flash, Ryan whirled and grasped the guy's gun hand and shoved it skyward. With his free hand he grabbed the man's shoulder and pushed. The narco fell sideways, eyes wide, screaming, a finger pressed hard against the trigger of his machine pistol. Grace and Ryan hit the ground as a wild volley of rounds sprayed the mountainside. But in a few seconds there came a crunch from below, sounding like a watermelon being dropped onto rocks. The white silence settled in.

"Are you all right? Were you hit?" Ryan asked, carefully pushing himself up on wobbly legs.

"I'm fine, I'm fine. But I think I wet myself."

They clung to each other for a long time, their bodies shaking, then turned and gingerly peered over the edge of the cliff. The narco must have hit at the base of the slope and rolled into the trees. They couldn't see anything from their perch.

The wind picked up and they flattened themselves against the mountain.

"A long way down," Grace murmured in a shaky voice.

"Yeah, that . . . that coulda been us. Still might be."

"What do you mean?"

Ryan sucked in a deep breath, his body shuddered, then calmed. "The others will have heard the shots and think he killed us. But when he doesn't return they may come looking. Sounds like this might be a family deal. The guy mentioned his brothers."

"Where can we go?" Grace asked and groaned. "Another hour or two in this cold and we'll be frozen like fish sticks."

"Just keep going like we planned."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Really. The Mountain Rescue shed will give us some shelter."

"But what about those idiots back at the parking lot?"

"Just let me think—by the time we reach the shed I'll have something worked out. Now let's move."

The pair hustled along the trail that gradually widened. In a few minutes, they crossed one more shoulder of the mountain and turned into a side valley that sloped upward to a high ridgeline. The last storm had dumped tons of snow that covered the trail and filled the valley. At its upper end and off to one side stood the Mountain Rescue Service's shed, partially hidden in the stunted trees.

"Be careful climbing," Ryan warned. "The Service hasn't cleared these slopes yet. An avalanche is possible."

"Great. We'll either get shot, suffocate, or freeze to death."

"We gotta hurry. It may take some effort to break into the shed and set up what I want to do."

"I've got yellow ice all along the inside of my leg. So I'm all for hurrying."

"Follow me. I want to leave clear footprints for those fools to follow."

Grace gave him a confused look but stayed quiet. They pushed up-valley, moving directly toward the shed, the snow hip deep. When they reached their goal, both slumped against the building's front wall, heads between knees, the cold thin air burning their lungs as they tried to catch their breaths. Gradually the color came back into Grace's face.

Ryan stood and moved to the shed's padlocked door. "This lock's gonna take some work. Look for something to smash it with."

They moved under the trees and scraped snow from the ground. Grace found a head-sized piece of granite that Ryan took and hefted above the padlock. It took a dozen blows before the lock fell apart and the couple pushed inside. Gray light filtered in from a barred window. They found folding chairs and a card table against the wall and a rack full of equipment and supplies used by rescue teams and the slope maintenance crews.

"Help me look," Ryan said and began pawing through the supplies.

"What are we looking for?"

"Dynamite."

Grace stepped back and put her hands on her hips. "You want to tell me now what your grand plan is?"

"If the narcos follow us here, which they will, I wanna blow the snow pack and create an avalanche to take them out."

"You mean . . . kill them?"

"Yes, Grace, kill them. It's either them or us."

"Well, when ya put it that way." She smiled and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "How's your head?"

"Hurts."

"Take it easy. You could have a concussion."

"Yeah, yeah. Don't have time for that right now. Ah, here it is."

Ryan pulled a box from the rack and set it on the floor. He removed a stick of dynamite with cord fuse attached, then checked his pocket and withdrew his lighter. "This sucker should shake something loose. Come on."

The couple moved outside and crouched at the upper edge of the snow pack, peering down-valley. They didn't have to wait long. Two figures clad in parkas and carrying guns rounded the corner and stared upslope. They followed the footprints in the snow left by Ryan and Grace.

"When?" Grace whispered.

"When they're halfway here."

Both of them shuddered in the freshening breeze. The narcos made slow progress, their guns pointing forward, stopping frequently to scan what was ahead. When they reached the halfway point Ryan lit the dynamite, stood, heaved it downslope then fell to the ground. The seconds ticked by, then an explosion that rocked them. The sound from the blast hadn't faded before, with loud cracks, the entire valley floor downslope from the couple began to move, then gathered speed, a low rumble building. The two figures turned and tried to run, but the avalanche quickly overtook them and they disappeared beneath its smothering whiteness.

Ryan and Grace stood. The quiet returned. "I'm gonna go check. You wait here," Ryan said.

"Why? What are you gonna do?"

"Make sure neither of them pops up and shoots us?"

"Can't we just wait?"

"They may still have their guns. I'm not taking any chances."

"You're . . . you're becoming just as bad as them."

He moved downslope, struggling across mounds of broken snowpack, stopping to listen. From behind one mound he heard groans. He crept forward. At a nondescript patch of snow, the surface moved and the stubby barrel of a Mac-10 poked through. A hole formed and widened until an arm holding the gun protruded. Ryan rushed forward and snatched the gun from the hand. He stared downward. A bearded face stared back, lips trembling. Ryan checked the gun then pointed it down into the hole.

The narco's eyes widened. "No, please, I wasn't gonna—"

Ryan closed his eyes and gave the trigger a quick squeeze. Not looking down, he pushed snow with his boot into the hole and tamped it. He stared upslope at Grace. She stood open-mouthed, looking like she'd just witnessed a violent scene from a Tarantino movie. Ryan moved across the field of jumbled snow looking for the second narco, but neither saw nor heard anything. He stared at his watch, waited twenty minutes, then rejoined Grace.

"Did you really have to—" Grace started, her whole body trembling.

"Yes. Now come on. Let's grab our stuff and get the hell outta here."

"Yeah, this . . . this was supposed to be easy."

Ryan went inside and collected an avalanche shovel from the rack. Outside, the couple moved to the rear of the shed. Ryan dug into the snow and the hardened ground beneath and uncovered a backpack. Inside the pack they stared at $20,000 neatly wrapped in plastic that they

had left there six months before. The bank job had gone smoothly. No one had gotten hurt. No one had identified them as the culprits. But the take had been small since the real money had been in the vault that was on a time lock and couldn't be opened. Ryan and Grace had fled and decided to wait it out until the heat died. Then they would retrieve the 20K, combine it with the rest of their nest egg, and escape to the South Pacific where they'd never see snow again and the only ice would be in their cocktails.

"We still have a problem," Ryan said. "There's one more bad guy back at the parking lot."

"You really think he'll stick around after hearing that explosion?"

"I hope so." Ryan grinned. He shouldered the backpack, grabbed the Mac-10 and they headed downslope where they picked up the trail and descended the mountain. As they rounded the last shoulder, they caught a glimpse of the Ford Bronco, sitting obediently in its space, its tailpipe smoking. The last narco sat in its driver's seat, his machine pistol resting on the dashboard, country music blaring from its sound system. Crouching low, the couple left the trail and hotfooted down the slope and into the trees.

Ryan removed the backpack and told Grace to wait there. He circled around the parking lot and came up to the Bronco on its blind side. Crouching low, he crept to the passenger-side front door, sucked in a deep breath, then stood.

The narco stared at him for a moment, open-mouthed, before reaching for his pistol. With eyes wide Ryan squeezed the trigger until the magazine emptied. Opening the Bronco's door, he laid the Mac-10 on the front seat after wiping it down with a gun rag he found there. He reached for the briefcase and opened it. Inside were neat bundles of bills, mostly fifties and hundreds.

Ryan yelled to Grace, "Bring the backpack and come here."

She joined him, trying not to stare at the narco's bloodied body, a hand over her mouth in case she barfed.

"Check this out," Ryan said, grinning.

"Jesus peaches, how much is there?"

"I haven't counted it. But it looks like about a half million, probably more."

"Holy crap."

"Yeah, and it's old stuff with non-sequential serial numbers. It's clean money and nobody's going to call the cops and report it missing."

"Hey darlin', Tahiti, here we come!"

"Just one more thing," Ryan said. "Give me the twenty grand from the backpack."

"Why?" Grace asked and took a step backward.

"We'll leave it here in the briefcase. When the Rangers finally find this guy, they'll think he's involved somehow in our bank job."

"But Ryan, it's twenty grand for Christ sake."

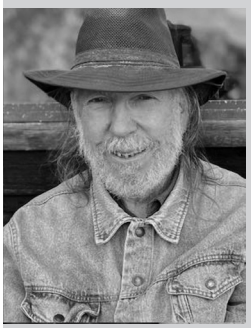
"Yeah, I know but we probably could never spend it anyway. The

feds keep track of the serial numbers of new bills. Sooner or later they'd trace it to us."

"It's just . . . we worked so hard for that cash."

"And now we have a whole lot more."

Snow began to fall, whipped by a stinging wind out of the west. The couple crossed the parking lot to their Subaru and motored away, the cold whiteness erasing any trace of them ever being there.



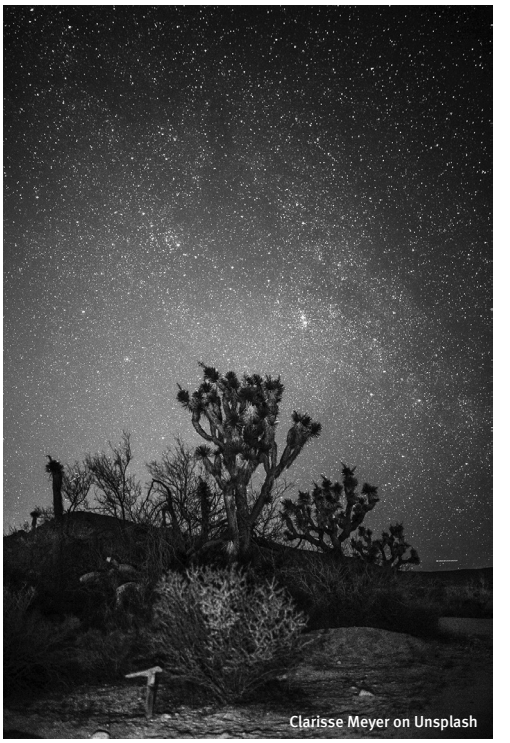
Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California, with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and two plump cats (his in-house critics). His work has been published in numerous journals, magazines, and anthologies including *The American Writers Review*, *The Bryant Literary Review,* and *Shenandoah*. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

AN UNLIKELY LYRICISM

MICHAEL MCGUIRE

The coyotes never gather more than once or twice a night, maybe three or four of their kind, maybe more, to raise their voices, if not quite hoot and howl.

More than a cackle or a snicker, not quite uncontrollable laughter, and markedly variable, though what tickles them so in a time of declining populations and shrinking habitats, when there could not be so much as half a smile upon the face of the land, remains a mystery. The second laughtime comes, if at all, from a different location and, at times, on a different frequency, one on which they might even venture a little harmony.



Clarisse Meyer on Unsplash

Awake in the warmth of his bed, if taunted by his own mental processes, the man had the impression the far-off animals could read his thoughts, for it was undeniable that the darker they were, the more the creatures seemed to revel in them, the nearer their ululations came to genuine merriment.

The second laughtime would not seem, from the voices, to be a different group, gathering to answer the first, an hour later, but the same ones, possibly in the same formation and, in spite of their evident situation, on the scale of elation and despair, considerably closer to the former. This might be absurd, for when the woods are gone, survival might only be possible on the fringes of the urbanized world, and then only for lone individuals who might be tolerated where a grouping, however small, would be targeted by the authorities.

Eyes wide in the dark, the man could picture the creatures on their hind legs, holding their bellies and exchanging looks, white teeth flashing even on a moonless night, of knowing delight. He was, he had to admit, irritated by their pleasure, perhaps even angered, for their choral attempts, more devilish than angelic, seemed to fling a kind of challenge on the air. What was it, he wondered, maybe: do we exist or has your mind, with the years, just turned in upon itself?

Some birds, it was said, would rush a soul at the moment of its detachment from the body; that when the frustrated birds failed to snatch a rising soul, they screamed

a horrible high-pitched shriek, perhaps not unrelated to the cry of the coyotes.

But could these earthbound carnivores in absolute darkness and at a distance of several kilometers know his thoughts well enough to find them so deeply amusing or, as unlikely as it might be, to suspect his own soul, assuming he had one, of increasing restlessness?

Upon this thought, and in the knowledge there would be no more sleep that night, the man thought perhaps the time might have come to know somewhat more about his distant, or not so distant, neighbors; but where to start? In the end, the beasts go here and there, covering vast distances, as opportunities for survival rise or fade, and they had only entered the remains of his beloved forest, *el monte alto*, about a year ago. He hadn't considered an investigation of the cagey creatures until he realized they were, in some way, reaching deeper and deeper within him, that, on the darkest nights, as their cackle struck further into. . . well, into his soul. . . he would find himself lying awake, waiting for them to wail again.

Suddenly, he was determined to know what could be known. Suddenly, as they yipped and yapped, doubtless delighted by the certainty that they had his full attention, he was pulling on his boots. He had a flashlight in one pocket, not that he could use it without giving himself away, and a .380 automatic in the other, not that he intended to shoot anyone or anything. Live and let live was his philosophy. What, then, did he have in mind? He wasn't really sure. Maybe just to see if the creatures simply yowled at the stars or first conferred, discussed various strategies for the remainder of the night, if not the year; to see if, as they raised their voices, they stood still, sculpted by the intensity of their concentration, or ran round in mindless circles. And then? What?

Would he, nearer to one end of his years than the other, join them?

It was a cold night and the moon had set. The man knew better than to make his way to where he had first heard them, about an hour ago, but to guess where they might next gather for a yelp and a yowl, certainly a kilometer or two one way or the other, as they delighted in their elusiveness, their unpredictability.

Their existence.

This night he guessed to the west and proceeded, deliberately—he knew *el monte* was rough, a broken leg and a man might never be found, even if he threw back his own head and howled—and without hurry, placing his feet as carefully as if he were walking on a perilous crust of snow and ice, not a rotting shroud of stumps and discarded limbs. He was naturally quiet; his friends had considered him a soft-spoken man, but he knew no caution on his part would keep the coyotes from hearing him a hundred meters off and doing whatever they do when they hear someone coming.

He was well into the shrub when they howled again, not that far away, and he knew from experience that two concerts were all they ever gave, the original and the encore, usually consisting of variations on the first. He hurried, he picked up speed, careless of sound for he was sure they were

already well underway, soundless themselves, putting more hundreds of meters between themselves and him as he struggled. The way was steep, rugged, and so dark that he made his way forward with a hand in front of his face against the clawing of what seemed like so many outstretched hands, ghosts of trees long gone perhaps, and his other on the .380, in case, unlikely as it was, they lay in wait for him, perhaps well spaced, in a kind of arc, silent on their bellies, tongues out.

He was further into *el monte* than he had ever been at night when, pausing to take in what sounds he could, he thought he heard the familiar hilarity far behind him. Turning slowly, getting what bearings he could from a bit of night sky visible through crowding new growth, he realized their laughter must be, taking into account his ragged trajectory, back where he had started out. He waited, recovering his breath, for his heart to return to its normal rhythms, then began, if not exactly to retrace his footsteps in the dark, to go home.

In the morning, he would learn he had been correct in his suppositions of the night. The animals had, in unknown numbers, infiltrated his pueblo, convened in the deserted plaza, circled the empty bandstand and ventured several variations on their familiar themes until some of the more macho types, incensed by their shrill challenge, came out with their rifles to kill one or two, individuals who found themselves on display in the morning, stretched against the railings of the bandstand as if their pathetic pelts had already been harvested, staked out to dry.

It was the first time in living memory coyotes had entered Pueblo Viejo, and they seemed larger than those who had been spotted, on rare occasions, deep in *el monte*, by men who found what work was left now that the best trees had been chained and hauled out years ago. They weren't large enough to be wolves but, to those who had never seen a wolf, the dead coyotes, both males, seemed large enough. Women and children stood around the stretched remains, even as *el presidente* himself, mayor of Pueblo Viejo, came out to assure them that men with rifles would be posted at the entrances to the pueblo the next night, that the incursion of the wilderness upon their hopefully urban existence would not recur.

There was general disagreement as to just how many coyotes had circled the plaza, as there was to just what they had in mind, what the animals might know the people didn't, and what their amusement might be in taunting them, for they had not scattered until several doors banged open and men with rifles charged out.

The man, standing there, invisible as a man who has outlived his friends so often is, realized that, for him, the animals' existence had been proven. They were alive, real, not merely the product of an imagination that had never quite known opportunity. It was enough to make him, perhaps taking the phenomenon more personally than he ought, wonder if he had lived into an age he wasn't really prepared for; if he, like the big trees, had overstayed his welcome; if, in the end, the coyotes, like the watching, waiting birds of the story, might be right: his soul, as to be expected, was getting a little loose on its hinges. His time had come.

Upon the thought, after an insubstantial breakfast, he made his way to the pool hall of an earlier life, now well behind him, and, one after the other, unlocked the three padlocks that secured it.

A decade, perhaps more, had passed since he had managed the one business of which his long-gone family had deemed him capable. He had never been healthy, and maybe that was why his patient wife had predeceased him, worn out with his care. Back then, sitting in his nearly empty *billar*, hearing the occasional click of a ball, accepting a few pesos now and then, was, it was generally agreed, sufficient. It was all he could do. He had never been meant to coax corn out of a miserable *milpa*, manhandle cows and calves, even listen to the cry of infants; nor, on the other hand, had he ever had whatever it took to leave.

He'd sat there for years, as the youth of Pueblo Viejo found new distractions. . . even work, somewhere, however humble. . . and the population declined. Some men—his *billar* was an all-male environment—had had, he supposed, nowhere to go and had hung on to the end. And he, the childless widower, had hung on even longer, sitting in the dark like a madman, the handgun he'd aquired to guard his meager returns at his side.

Now the pool room of youth and middle age was covered in dust, the tables looking as if they had never had the still, intent men bent over them, the green felt in need of the most thorough and careful cleaning. He wiped a chair, one he had spent days of his life tipped against the wall, and sat down with his remaining ghosts. It seemed an historical fact that the widow who was to become his wife had visited him there, after hours, that they had turned off the lights and locked the door.

He had, he remembered, refusing to fool her, spelled it out.

"This is it. I'm not going anywhere from here."

He had felt the flash of her eyes and seen just a hint of her teeth, the smile of an older woman in the dark.

"But you were meant to. You were meant for something else."

As if that should be enough.

Careful as he had been, he had raised a cloud of dust just by entering this cemetery of his own relatively successful attempt at survival. Now, in dimmed daylight, he inhaled his share. In spite of everything, he had outlived them all, for not only had his tireless wife gone on ahead, so had his *clientes*. He could see them, lean overworked men he'd known since they were children, and now they were, like her, *fantasmas*, less real than his coyotes.

He remembered a year or two after his wife's death as his business, if you could call it that, had gradually failed, how he had unlocked his beloved *billar* simply to sit in it, or put on one of his favorite operas—for this was one of his not-so-secret passions, one not as easily concealed as a moment of love on a dark night—from beginning to end. It was a taste he'd picked up near the end of an uneventful life, but it spoke, or sang, to his soul as, he reflected, an unlikely lyricism somehow achieved in the

face of loss. At times, he rumbled along a little deep in his throat, until the scratches of his records overcame even the most determined of soloists and he knew it was time to go.

He sat as the day within the pool hall of his past faded, and he knew in his bones that tonight, boots on—ones he preferred, like the *vaquero* he had never been, to die in?—and his .380 cleaned and ready, he would once again trace the yowls of his coyote friends for, he reminded himself, as the carcasses in the plaza had proven, they were hardly ghosts. And, he thought, if, against all reasonable conjecture, they had been looking for him, why not beat them to it and go looking for them?

If possible, this night was even darker than the last and the animals had not yet ventured a chuckle. He was well into *el monte* before he heard them, closer than they had ever been, practically at hand. He paused, held his breath, and calculated their movements. Yes, no doubt of it, they were, incredibly, coming toward him. He got his back against a tree that had somehow been missed and waited, flashlight in one hand, .380 in the other. True, he had never killed anyone or anything, but he had practiced, drawing his prettily blued *tres ochenta* across the targeted row of brown bottles, never attempting an unnatural stillness, but drawing it slowly, determinedly, one way and the other, back and forth, exploding bottle after bottle.

Now, it would seem, they were almost upon him but, at the last moment, close, not close enough to be half seen, only close enough to be clearly heard, they were circling, circling him, more rapidly than seemed possible, yet without so much as a snicker. Round and round they went, while he held both flashlight, not yet on—he would surprise them with that—and automatic at the ready. Round and round for, perhaps, a minute, a minute and a half. Then, as if by general agreement, they were gone, retiring, in good order he supposed, and without a sound.

Undeniably alone, if somewhat rattled, he wondered if they were just waiting for him to move, decided they weren't, and made his jagged way downhill, using his flashlight to avoid that potentially crippling fall.

The next night, they didn't laugh at all, and he—as if both parties had agreed on a day off—puttered around the house, fed himself, and intoned, hardly aware of it, one of his favorite arias. He took his nap, not neglecting to clean and reload his .380, even placing an extra clip in his pocket, as if he might be called upon to fell, at least wound, coyote after coyote.

The night after that he was well up in *el monte* without having heard the slightest variation on one of their familiar choruses when, stopping to catch his breath, he knew they were there; that, without a sound, they had surrounded him. There was not a tree near, not a rock to cover his back. He turned slowly where he stood. On the thought that he was not going to surprise them with anything, he switched on his flashlight and continued to turn.

Nothing imaginary here. Innumerable pairs of yellow eyes, dimly visible through the undergrowth, looked back. What if, he wondered, co-

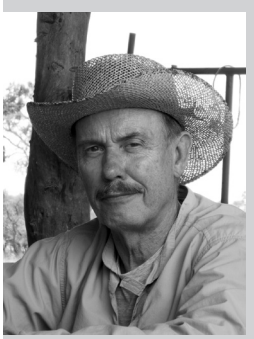
ordinating their assault, they all came at once? He could hardly, spinning like a top, fire in all directions. After a moment's thought, he did what every thinking man does, he sat and thought. Crossing his legs on the cold ground, he switched his flashlight off.

It was hardly a moment of surrender. This morning he had decided, as he did every day now, that this was not the day to give up the ghost. It was just a moment of the pure silence he knew *el monte* was capable of, when it seemed the last of God's creatures had taken his last breath, that it really was all over, and—the animals, perhaps waiting to see what he would do next, hadn't stirred—he was simply adding his silence to theirs, to the greater silence beyond.

And at that moment, perhaps for lack of any other thought in his head, he became aware of the fact that he was humming, humming, yes, one of the tenor's more meaningful moments—when, for an instant, perhaps two, his loss equalled that of the soprano who was, most likely, already dead—from one of his favorite operas. Then, though his voice had never been large, it was, in its way, pure, he began to sing. It was, he knew, a ridiculous response in a possibly deadly situation, but on he sang, hoping the muses would forgive his Italian, and he could tell, from the baited breaths around him, that he had his audience and they heard him out, to the last plaintive note to be followed, in the opera, by its own absolute silence, if not the inappropriate and untimely applause that ought to be waiting, somewhere, even for the man who had passed his life in a pool hall.

Suddenly, without listening for a snapped twig or lighting up a pair of yellow eyes cast over a shoulder, he knew the animals were, as undefeated as he, gone. Just as suddenly he knew what it was the coyotes had come to say, to him, to the people of Pueblo Viejo, what, exactly, the coyote laugh meant in a world of shrinking habitats and, on the other hand, new growth.

He also knew, in the greater silence he was, once again, adding his own, that the time had come. . . deliberately, carefully, after all this. . . to make his way home.



Michael McGuire was born and raised and has lived in or near much of his life. His horse is nondescript, his dog is dead. Naturally, McGuire regrets not having passed his life in academia, for the alternative has proven somewhat varied, even unpredictable.

Lex Runciman

Westmoreland Geese



Gary Bendig on Unsplash

Stars pure and the soul invisible,
the will to gratitude is not saleable,
neither the nameless nor the named,
is as light that touches but cannot be held.

One afternoon a sudden and noisy
confusion of geese startled and rose
from wide grass as from water, pair after pair
after pair of webbed feet, beaks,

and muscular, dun, uncolored wings,
a thousand calling, urgent voices.
So noisy thanks becomes.
Also first light's chorus and hush,

those crystal wet webs, and grass
marked only where early robins walked.

Animal Elegies

Bears, somber blurs, raking a far hill for berries.
Raccoons, their odd waddle.
A skunk family's gait and scent.

Once walking that trail cut into a cliff,
I saw a deer, below, on a ledge no larger than a desk.
Rain had stopped. Clouds like fleece.

That one-eyed cat had likely fought another cat
or a coyote pup, likely not a mountain lion—
lithe body and tail of silent passage

I saw once in disbelief and awe.
Stark white, that tom could never hide:
through a window it stopped us in its feral stare—

the less resolute among us gave it milk.
Squirrels gnaw deck rails. Flickers hammer the gutters.
For the harbor seal pup, we circle a low-tide avoidance.

Once beached, the gray whale never moved.
In San Diego, I watched an elderly female gorilla doze
on a wide log, two others younger combing each other,

while a great broad silverback met my gaze
with unblinking, unsayable rage.
About that deer—I walked to it, twenty feet above.

On three unbroken legs, it leaned against rock,
swung its head up, looked, leaned the other way,
and fell. I watched it—all I could do.

White Sky

Important Photographs
says the marking pen's scrawl
on a half-caved-in cardboard box
at the bottom of a stack. . .

which recalls a smaller, older,
red leather, hinge-top box of unsorted
black and whites, some with scalloped edges—
and no one alive can name the people there,

faces the size of dimes—who *are* they?
Old country,
your grandmother's people, maybe,
years dead before you were born.

Where? Scotland, likely. Edinburgh.
Portobello. High-neck dresses. Flat caps.
A hand shading the eyes
as someone says, stand here before

you come in. It's a camera, yes, a box
on three legs. Hold still and be done.
Then through a black iron gate
to mutton, gravy, boiled potatoes and peas,

windows open—that white sky actually blue.

How It Matters Now

This old garage, one window, four-paned glass,
sway-back roof, saggy, swing-wide doors,
and on one side a lean-to shed—

and so was kept there a small gig with a lone hinny,
together with a mouser
a woman gave milk in a cracked saucer.

Then, hinny gone and small gig gone,
shelves were rigged, a pot belly stove,
a bare wire strung for light—so,
a workshop, walnut and rough-cut cherry
seasoning in layers on the open overhead joists.

And three years before any unbreathing car,
a sister and her little brother
dug a hole in one corner, trowel and hammer,

a hole straight down—and found at the bottom
an arrowhead, black obsidian rippled thin,
sharp-edged, the base snapped off.

And wherever it went to later,
they never forgot it—
they never forgot that amazement.

Days and Nights

Wide canyon,
snow melt tumbling oxygen blue,

how have the two of us found ourselves
here—we're not as good as fox, martin, bobcat,

coyote, red-tail, trout or crow.

Morning coffee brews.
Filled mugs steam. We talk, look out, listen, stare.

Work then, each of us, we go where we go
returning, little improved.

Creek water fills the gaps of sentences.

Some nights fog, thunder, some nights snow.

Warm nights clear, we know where we dream
and wake—how do we know?

Clear nights, lucky as we are, stars,
all light's distance in.



Lex Runciman is the author of seven books of poems, including his most recent one, *Unlooked For* (2023), from Salmon Poetry. He is a graduate of the writing programs at the University of Montana and the University of Utah. An Oregon Book Award winner in poetry, he has retired from a long teaching career and now lives with his wife of fifty years in Portland, Oregon, traditional home of the Multnomah and Clackamas peoples.

Doug Barrett

Under the Patriarch



Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, Photo credit: Laura Barrett

After three wet years, he is very much alive, maybe a hundred years old. He's a bitterbrush, *Purshia tridentata*, a quarter mile south of town, genius of this part of the desert. Easily seven feet tall, he's one unkempt spiky beard of a plant, an explosion of branches bristling with little gray-green three-lobed leaves. Out of this mass poke a few dead boughs, rich mahogany-colored after a rain, each one girdled with a few tattered flags of gray bark. Now, in June, the rest of the branches, the living ones, each bulge with hundreds of tiny nuts resembling miniature chocolate kisses, the entire crop of up to 500 pounds per acre destined to be collected and consumed by rodents, birds, and ants.

At the Patriarch's feet is a skirt of saplings, some of them three feet high, poking from among the drooping lower branches. It's hard to tell where sire ends and offspring begin, for the Patriarch's low branches have taken root where they've touched the ground. Other offspring stand farther away in a circle fifty yards around, which is about as far as birds or rodents can carry those chocolate-kiss achenes. These progeny are themselves very respectable bitterbrushes. The Patriarch watches over his seed, but nurture gives he none. It's thought (says Hugh Mozingo in *Shrubs of the Great Basin*, my source for bitterbrush info) that bitterbrush litter contains a growth inhibitor that renders a plant's immediate vicinity infertile

for its seedlings. Once a plant is established, it doesn't want competition, especially from its own kind. Bitterbrush roots go deep: fifteen to twenty feet below the surface, maybe more. They can out-delve sagebrush, but not each other.

What's bitterbrush good for? Native peoples used it for a multitude of ailments. Deer love it (it's often called deerbrush) and if necessary can live for quite a while on nothing else. It's also browsed by pronghorns, bighorns, elk, and even moose. Rabbits—jacks and cottontails—nibble bitterbrush foliage and hide in it. On the north side of the Patriarch is a cavity in the foliage big enough to hide a person from unobservant eyes. Sit down at the feet of this old ancestor, pull on your elven cloak, drop out of sight. There's a jeep track a few yards away where people walk their dogs, and if you sit under the Patriarch for a morning, one or two of these folks will pass by. You'll hear them huffing, coughing, calling to their dogs long before you see them. And since you're below eye level, peripheral to their tunnel vision, and up to your nose in bitterbrush, they never see you. Even if for some reason they look right at you.

The overhanging foliage is so thick that if you squeezed far enough under you might stay dry for a while in a thunderstorm, though you'd get a bit scratched up. But the Patriarch is more meditation companion than shelter. If you sit with him long enough maybe a transmission—osmosis, seepage, migration, conduction—will occur between his dark prehensive attention and yours, a bit like how some trees communicate with each other through their root fungi (which bitterbrush also have). Maybe you can to some degree tap a little into how a bitterbrush's primordial non-thinking registers the desert—or even alters it, for he seems a being of sufficient force to bend the local gravity.

If you sit under a bitterbrush, take off your shirt, breathe, and think non-thinking, something might happen.

If not, look around and take your bearings. You should do this every day, regardless. Look east to the Pine Nuts, still in morning shadow. This is the forgotten range, higher than the Sierras directly across the valley, yet mostly unvisited except by hunters. Then look north toward the trees marking the Gardnerville Ranchos, and northwest toward the ranches that may hold on for another decade. West lies the wall of the Sierras, running from Mt. Rose overlooking Reno, south to Snow Valley Peak over Carson City, then Genoa Peak, Monument Peak, Freel Peak, and Job's Peak, all towering over the Carson Valley, and Hawkins Peak farther southwest. Due south is Silver Peak, skirted by a series of lower ridges. Behind one of those ridges are Bodie Flat and Vulture's Roost. Another one conceals China Springs Youth Camp, a "correctional facility" with a long winding rutted dirt road into it, which I drove down once, out exploring, to just within sight of the camp.

Following the curve of the Sierras like this may allow something to happen. It may be a bird—a sage sparrow flying into the branches overhead, awkward to observe, tempting you to move your head just a hair, knowing that if you do the bird will be gone, knowing that if you don't it will be gone. Or maybe just a sudden flutter of wings behind, startling you into turning around and, finding nothing, reconstructing the event: something flew in, saw something strange (you) there, and backstroked furiously, pulling up and out.

Maybe it will be the "whink" of a shrike, causing you to scan the sky for a nighthawk before realizing your mistake. Or the rattle of a towhee, whose head then appears poking around a neighbor bush. Or a thrasher that flies into the branches above you so quietly that you notice it only when it flies out. How long was it there?

You don't want to be too busy writing things down or you may miss one of these apparitional half-lives.

There may be a whistle, too full for a little bird, accompanied by a small-bird-sized rustling on the other side of the tree. Is it . . . ? Yes, a chipmunk, the first I've ever seen in this desert.

Perhaps just a few clouds slowly whirling over Job's Peak, blending with the last dust of snow from two nights ago. Or the fog rising from Genoa, drifting up in little puffs. Perhaps a long train of cumulus over the Sierra wall, or thunderhead anvils over the Pine Nuts, or a mackerel sky drifting down from the north, hinting for you to put your shirt back on. Or, in spring and fall, the lenticular clouds—"flying saucer clouds"—stacked five or six high like ghostly bowls over half of the sky, then tugged by the jet stream into leaping lions, horses with flowing manes, giants with clubs.

In spring and fall, there appears a huge black cloud column running north and south the entire length of the Carson Valley—"this Nazi valley," as Max Jones, the Mormon patriarch, reportedly called it during World War Two. People like to watch for it, the malevolent spirit of the place. The artsy folk have tried to give it names—"the Tahoe Wave" was one—but none ever caught on.

In spring come flowers. Long-stemmed purple monkey flower. Paintbrush rainbow running from lemon yellow to flame orange to pink to scarlet. White prickly poppies with their crepe-paper petals. And more: strange little flowers that don't appear in any book. Lastly, birdcage evening primrose, *Oenothera deltoides*, named for its nighttime blooms that grace the desert dawn and often persist past noon—and for the way its stems, radiating from a basal rosette, curl up when dry to form a skeletal birdcage-looking structure. Before this macabre culmination of its life-cycle, birdcage evening primrose is the jewel of the desert: creamy white petals with a pale yellow center inviting you to stick your nose into its slender filaments, where you meet the loveliest scent imaginable, one that makes lilac or rose scent seem vulgar. Were I to meet a woman capable of wearing that fragrance I might fear for my marriage, but no such woman exists.

There are no birdcage evening primroses this year, and hardly any last year, despite the rain. They scorn nature's over-solicitousness. Two years ago, a wet year after several dry ones, they filled the sandy desert for yards around. It's enough now to sit where they last grew and think fondly of them.

Out here beauty doesn't come without astringency, even a touch of monstrosity. There's something vaguely Egyptian about that duality; the Egyptians were desert people after all. The life-giving Nile, the rich black land of Kemet, a ribbon through the desolate red land of Deshert, abode of the dead. No Nefertiti without the deformed and fanatical Akhenaten. Set versus Horus: who will triumph in the end? Always the opposition. The Patriarch is but a stroll from the quarry, our local

Mordor: gray disemboweled earth, rasp of motorbikes, staccato of target practice—and, on weekdays, growl of loaders and gravel trucks, real big rigs, sometimes three trailers apiece. The jeep track that runs by the Patriarch connects up with the main road to the quarry, bringing more people this way than one desires. On the other hand, all this human activity means you're not likely to meet a rattler. I've heard of only one such encounter here over the years—though once, only a few yards into the desert, I met a big gopher snake that hissed like a steam engine and struck out violently when approached.

One Sunday morning as it was getting light, I came out and sat under the Patriarch. It was very quiet and I went far away into what was before my eyes. As I arose to go, at sunup, a pickup came out of the quarry, heading back to town. I sat back down. The pickup stopped, and the guy got out. There was a dog in the back, a mottled border collie. If there's a chance you've been seen, no point in trying to hide, so I got up, but why bother to talk to the guy? Usually they don't mind not talking to you. No one really comes out here to socialize.

"Morning," he said.

"Morning."

"Where are you from?"

Pause. Long pause.

"I live in town."

"And where are you coming from?"

"Where am I coming from?"

"Yes. And what are you doing today?"

Eh? I stepped a little closer to see just who this was. Square jaw, squinty eyes under a baseball cap. Maybe twenty years older than me. The dog in the back shimmied and barked.

"What am I doing here?"

"Yes, what are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk in the desert."

"And where did you say you're coming from?"

"Like I said, I live in town."

"Do you now. Whereabouts in town?"

Named a street in the Ranchos. "Say, what is this?"

"And how long have you lived here?"

"In Gardnerville? About nine years."

A practiced interrogator, and I'm caught with my guard down. I wasn't expecting to have my heart cut out and weighed up this morning. If you're not prepared for it, being interrogated makes you feel a little watery inside, like it did when you were a kid. Your mind jumps in and joins the investigation: "I haven't done anything wrong . . . have I?" But the standard of innocence is no longer in your hands. New criteria have suddenly appeared. You were out here hiding—is that what a decent person would do? What your parents would do? Are you proud that it's not? That's the judgment against you. He doesn't know that, though. What *does* he know, and what's he up to? And what do you say to get out of this?

Would I say something I couldn't substantiate, contradict my story, break down and hiss back at him, try to run for it? Or desperately reveal some intimate detail he could check out? Was that the game?

"Who are you, and what's all this about?"

"Well, see, I'm an off-duty cop and I keep my eye out for things. For all I know you could be coming over the hill from China Springs."

In my blue work shirt, yes, I see. So just how many grown men have they reported missing from China Springs this morning? And what's your badge number, Mr. Off-Duty-Cop, because my friend Captain Al B. might like to know it.

Didn't think to say any of that.

He let me go. I wonder how things would have gone if I'd been Washoe. Or female. I saw no gun on him or in his truck. If he'd wanted me taken, he'd probably have had to call it in. The whole thing could have gone a lot worse. Nevertheless it was a long time before I came back to sit under the Patriarch. Not that I was afraid to meet the guy again. I just didn't want to be thinking about him. I wanted to think non-thinking. But sometimes the only way to think non-thinking is by thinking. So here I am today, shirt off in the sun, flipping back and forth between thinking and non-thinking, writing everything down, simmering in amused defiance.

You take what you get in the desert. It never was a Garden of Eden, and even there you had a snake. As for that, I'd rather have met a rattler than that off-duty-cop, operating from the old reptilian brain stem, that dark primordial consciousness that drove him to protect his territory. Unauthorized activity is suspicious, hiding is suspect, being in the desert for no apparent reason is subversive. And, generalizing from that: unauthorized beauty is suspicious, anything unknown is suspect, loneliness is subversive. How deeply do these responses underlie the American mind—the human mind universally?

Okay, so that off-duty-cop was just protecting his turf, which happened to coincide with what I'd thought was mine. Who had the better claim? If I did, it was by no recognized law. Does the desert belong to whoever most belongs to it? How do you measure that belonging? Maybe, looking for crime instead of beauty, he was better equipped for the desert, more a creature of the desert than I was. For him the desert was just the desert. I was starting to dream it into something else, something rather different from how the desert seems to understand itself, from how the Patriarch probably understands the desert. Something inauthentic, fantastical? Maybe. Maybe not. And as for dreams, who dreamed up the birdcage evening primrose? That's what I want to know.

The Voice of the Desert



Near Black Rock Desert, Photo credit: Ken Lund

Sagebrush sea, distant hand-axe mesa.
Brigham tea "leaves evolved almost to the vanishing point."
Distant dust clouds over Honey Lake indistinguishable from rain.
Distant skull-teeth surround dry park-like tongue. Unnatural nature
swallowing all in magnificent arbitrary divine plan.
"Not a wasteland." Pinyons grayed out in distance.

Paiute Bedouin "a mysterious probing energy"
but for those on the edge
only a holy whole hole.

Three-mile ridgeline cloud feather abolishes so many things.
Tiny cluster of ranch buildings unnoticed how many times?
The road at the edge of the frame—you missed that too.
It missed itself, disappearing for no reason.
Two years gazing into this valley, seeing nothing.
Altostratus stroked by winds cools the sun.

Look. Don't dream through your time. I don't know how
to communicate it. You won't know how to communicate it:
Schönberg, Berg, Webern, Krenek, Carter?

Who's queen of the high desert? "The deeper we immerse
ourselves into the desert, the more everything seems like a dream."
Inhabitants: mice and rabbits mostly. Whatever is contrary to the desert
soon perishes. Here young bighorns reflect on a purple-gray valley
lone pronghorn stares out over the geostratus
and dusty-backed mustangs run.

"What attracts you?" "It's their freedom. Their dignity.
Their poetry of life." On a dirt road, base of the Pine Nuts
plywood sign: "Next Stop The Twilight Zone."

Find a water source, listen for underground streams.
Sleep standing up like horses. Cloud-formed crater on salt flat.
Everyone comes to hunt something: snakes, lizards, Ruby Mountain goats.
Let goats dream with their heads up, alert on your lap
only a spot of red on white to reveal the real situation.
And thus we see that life is endless.

"My heart belongs to no one but the desert." Nocturnal voices
in wilderness coyotesaints, jackrabbitsaints, rattlesaints
dissolved in the emptiness of deity

flash floods of filthy water to wipe out the wickedness
discontent warring on itself, on luxury, on dream, on frivolous eternity.
Yet sparks of sympathy escape the sunset coals of Moab
to bind sentient beings in the ancient mythic manner
dragging them into the desert where they find their life inverted
by the gravity of dead stars

and the scientific music of those who have nothing to say.
Have you been long enough in the desert to find it thinking your thoughts?
The performing self is dead. The desert killed it. It's buried at Yucca Mountain.

Check your dosage at this brothel or that, antelope-hearted people
waving trouble away with a hat, empty as the sky
blank pages in pink dust to show what comes down
when the Five-legged Lamb and the Smoky Dog meet
at the Atomic Cafe on Amargosa Street.
"One of the most beautiful sights ever seen by man."

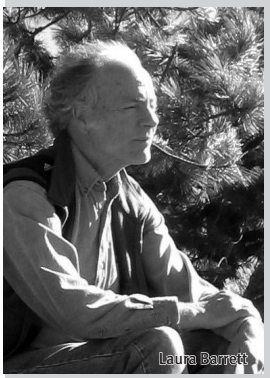
To see the nakedness of the land we are come
tilted strata, opus in shadow and fawn
pointillist brush camouflaged as rock but you weren't fooled, were you?

Poison drains to the low places. To suck it up the chittering minions come:
dowitchers, stilts, avocets, yellowlegs, grebes, pelicans, herons, egrets, ibis,
bitterns pumping like foghorns. To Walker Lake and Mono Lake they come
and to Deep Springs; to Carson Sink, fishing Lahontan's mercury-laden stock;
and Stillwater lake mosaic dead marshes black with waterfowl;
Death Valley, Badwater, acid spilled on alkali

Furnace Creek grackles, Scotty's Castle roadrunners
and low over Cowhorn Valley F-4s.
The desert is a bird and rises up

over a thousand unpaved roads. Just try going as the raven.
It's not quite a straight shot though—desert is crisscrossed by fences
keeping moo cows in and out. Gates, barbed wire strands on posts,
nick you with their rusty razors. Deer can jump, for them no barriers.
Pronghorns, Pliocene survivors—they can't jump to save their lives.
Have you gazed out with their eyes yet on striations, blue and purple?

They say poetry is finer than philosophy but that's philosophy, not poetry.
Not that old melodically empty poetic voice: sympathy for all, laughter at all
and with all, the beauty and the horror of it all, the music and the dream.
Dream on, says the desert, *but don't forget the music.*


Laura Barrett

Doug Barrett lived in the high desert region of western Nevada for thirty-five years before recently relocating to Maine. He has a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Washington and has taught at Sierra Nevada College, Deep Springs College, and Western Nevada College. In addition, he's served time as a camp counselor, wrangler, bank courier, census taker, mail carrier, and health news writer. Favorite activities include hiking, canoeing, birding, and playing blues and Celtic music. Barrett's poetry has most recently appeared in *Avocet* and *Canary*. More of his work may be viewed at www.natureofpoetry.com.

William Snyder

A Breeze Blows Blossom

After *The Sower (Sower at Sunset)*
Vincent Van Gogh, 1888



A fine breeze this evening, and with it, a dusting
of seed—its wheaty smell—and the darker smells
of earth and loam, poppy, onion, phlox.
And painter's oil, the sharp smell of turpentine,
a hint of burnished cedar—his easel and box,
and there, the faint smell of brass—buckles, hinges,
locks—gathered, all of them, warmed and simmered
in sun smell—this long, bright, late day.

I sit beside his work, smell those smells, and I
love them, but I confess, I'm long lost
in desire, in longing—for the smells
of dinner soon. Very soon. Salty butter, baguette,
Gruyere, leek and cream, small, ripe tomatoes,
a bottle I'll buy. We'll set and spread
and cut and chew and savor. But—

in the corner of my eye, a subtle shift—
his backside—an upward lift, and he holds it there,
aloft, and a little twist of his torso, a deep breath—
back and sides expanding, body tensing—
a downward flex of legs and knees, buttocks
conspicuous beneath his corduroy, then—

Pwee – Fff – Pfrwritt – Pprrpffrrppfff – Uupupupp –

Ducks? he asks—no beat missed, brush still
brushing. Yes, I say, maybe that flock, look there,
blotting the sun, those ducks you're painting—
a duck penumbra, millions of ducks, and with
their apocalyptical quacks. A duck upon you.

I thought so, he says. *They are loud, indeed*. Then—

Phweeiii – Thuuthuuthuu – Ssssgsuuuyththpththp –

and the breeze, obligingly, doing its duty—the sour
smell of death, of maggot, of the poop deck privy on
a pirate ship. Whew, I say. Jesusgodthechristchild,
do ducks smell so foul?

I have never, he says, smelled a duck. Except
pâté, or roast, or two large blue eggs of a morning.
But as one duck said to another: 'the fox
is the finder, the stink lays behind her.'

Whoa, I say. I'm sorry, but no, categorically,
it was not me. I am innocent. Clean. Silent. Pure.
Uncontaminated. Unlike y. . .

A gift, he says. *My offering, my largesse. And for*
you, for your generosity. What I have to give to. . .

Jesusgod, I say. If the breeze should shift, our farmer
would succumb, toss his pouch and boots, swoon,
flop right over, die in his field. Dead. For good.
And all the farmers like him. Then famine.
The end of us. And worse—of wine and dessert.
What did you eat this morning? Last night?
On your seventh birthday? Brussels sprouts—
a patch of them? Garlic quiche? Vieux Boulogne?

No, he says. *I dined on violets. Mimosa. Jasmine.*
And little nips of rose—the hips. Nasturtium too.
And bits of lavender, saffron, borage, wild
zucchini flower—all so sweet, glacé, aromatique.
But wait, he says. *Stop. Shush. Another gift*
on the way. . . Coming. . . And take your hanky
from your nose. Coming. . . Now. . . And his posture
shifts again, his backside rises, flexes, then—

jonquil, carnation, orange blossom, peach. *Ah. . .*

Reverence

After *The Sermon on the Mount*, Carl Bloch, 1877, and,
And So It Goes, Billy Joel (Official Video), 1989

You've seen the Billy Joel, black and white—
keyboard, hands, fingers. He's singing,

and with him, voices, female voices, soft,
like the breathing of children in sleep,

like laughter at play—you feel a joyousness
behind your ears, above your head—

the arrival of tears. Of joy. Then a longer
view—a seagrass swirling of arms

and silhouette, lighters flickering, swaying
like corona points of stars—the camera

in the midst of waves of dark and light,
voices singing, soft, present, heart-like, like

the tracings of skinwebs, tender and sheer,
between a lover's fingers. And you're above,

beside the piano, ebony black in its black
and white, Joel singing, people standing, close,

young people, teens—t-shirt, work shirt,
beard—and four young girls, immersed,

and one, arms crossed on the lip of the stage,
rests her cheek on her upper wrist, listening.

Giving. And there—a boy in the bright
shadowed light, spotlights crossed behind

illuminating this boy's shoulders and face—
like a painting. This boy—short hair,

white shirt alive, forearms and hands
on the stage, knuckles, fingers together,

and all at once he wrinkles, creases
his forehead—it is not a grimace, or frown,

or pain—it is something inside of him,
something awakened, recognized, something

lost, and he bows his head, quickly, but in steps,
two, three—the first and second insufficient

for what, for how he feels. He extends
a hand toward the piano, palm down, toward

Joel, toward the music, the other hand beside
the elbow's camber—as if to bless, to be

a witness to the strings and hammers and felts—
the mechanical things, and to the fingers

upon them, around them, of them, and to
the voices—to live this song, this singing, this

sway he feels, this side to side of listeners there
like moontide, like sex, a gentleness. The boy

raises his head—he hears the words, his arm
and hand and nod his offering. His suffering.

A Sustenance of Loam

After *The Gardener*
Vincent Van Gogh, 1889



I hold his arm above the elbow—he lets me—
no argument—he had his difficulties yesterday,
some days before. Now his walk around
the asylum yard—beside the porch, beneath
the balcony lounge, along the star-spoke paths

to the fountain and shallow pool, its big orange fish,
its lilies. To refresh himself, to breathe. To touch
an iris leaf, a thorny stem, a cypress limb.
To pull a pine cone from a branch, dab the sap,
finger the scales. A gardener works beside

a hedge, on his knees, spading dirt into little rows.
For irises, he says, more of them, and he thumbs
toward an iris patch. He stands then, stretches,
rubs his knees, massages his thighs—and a wonder
of color he is, and pattern, angle, shade, curve—

his floppy green hat, blue band to hold it
tight on his head, and his shirt—vertiginous stripes
of green, red, yellow, blue, and beneath, a cotton
singlet of dashes, yellows and blues—well,
he would not win for fashion on the Champs,

I'm afraid. A short black beard, a mustache
that refuses, it seems, to sprout above his upper lip,
or, thinking once in spade, he scraped it away.
And now he prays, I think, for those truant hairs
every morning. But oh, his skin—olive and butter

and flax and daisy, and his ears and lips
a darkish pink, living and loud. But his eyes—
it has not been easy, they say. He is not here
by choice, he says, though he loves the soil, loves
to plant and grow. I lean to shake his hand. but

he says, no, look, this dirt, this sweat. *No matter*,
I say, and I shake it. Vincent shakes it too, then takes
the gardener's hand in both of his, rubs it, kneads it—
wrist and fingers, tendons, beveled veins. He cups
the gardener's palm in his own, opens the fingers,

rakes the palm with his nails, light, narrow lines
appearing behind the strokes. And the gardener,
alarmed—and who would not be alarmed—looks
toward the porch and balustrades—for the Sisters—
are they watching? But I nod, as if to say, please

don't worry, and, please let him, and the gardener
does—a certain generosity for the patients here.
He takes both of the gardener's hands, lifts them
to his face, breathes in, a long, deep breath, closes
his eyes, and then, as if to bow, or to genuflect,

places them back at the gardener's side. He rubs
his own hands then, both of them, through his hair,
up his neck, along and around his forehead
and cheeks and chin and lips, and he licks them—
tongue to skin—callus, cuticle, fingertip.

The gardener looks at him, at me. *Your name, sir*?
I ask. Jean, he says, *Thank you, Jean*, I say,
the deepest thank you from both of us.
For this patient, it will have been the loveliest
of days. And, I say, *someday I'll try to explain.*

A Backlight To the Most of Delicate

There are a thousand thousand reasons to
live this life, every one of them sufficient.
—*Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson

The Christmas cactuses are almost done—
those lovely, feathery, prehensile blooms.
Four white ones, a pink one—China, congo,
coral—from a cutting, blooming there
in pots my brother made, little ones
with glazy flutters of gray on gray—blooming
proudly for weeks, it seemed—November
this year—a little off-kilter-calendar-wise,
but that was fine. They bloomed, and they
warmed us as we passed them in the kitchen—
our trips to the counter for the coffee pot
or peanut butter, or out again to my
study and screen, to your keys and staves.
Sometimes we stood at the window,
in the western sun of an afternoon,
and nodded, wondered at their loveliness—
they're just too fine to exist, we agreed. Yes,
too lovely, too delicate to touch, though I
could imagine, I said, drawing a fresh one
across my cheek—though I'd have to
pinch it from the stem, do damage to what
we admire—the stamens, tepals, petals—
a criminal offense in some jurisdictions,
and to Jainist priests, an umbrage, a slight
to all in this house, but fun indeed, in
the saying. I might draw it across
my lips though, where touch, where true
sensation resides—to calibrate a quotient
for delicate, the most in the world.
Or across an eyelid, to see if the lid
would flutter, or even know. Or the eye itself—
could I feel those petals? Are they just like
air or cloud? Or like the feathery way
you sketch your notes—like petals themselves,
and the muscles and twists of your
fingers and wrist, the skin of your palms,
and delicate too, that piece you scored for
flutes and fifes—the highest registers only,
at the margins of the human ear. Like Schlumbergera,

positioned at the distant margin of elegance
and light. I looked it up, I said, our succulent.
From Brazil, the southeast corner, growing there
on trees and rocks in the deepest shade
and humidity. Schlumbergera. What if we
could know it, learn it, drink its juices, teach
its being to others, to ourselves, and as we
watched and waited and dreamed for blooms
each year, that knowledge might
soothe our yearnings for soft and tremble.



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

Jim Tilley

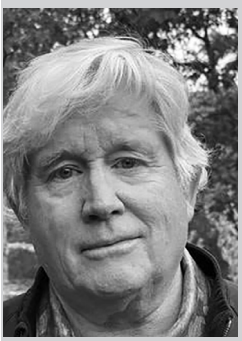
White Pond

There remain some things I can always
count on. Sure, the news continues to carry
horrid stories whose content envelops me
more and more tightly in its strait jacket,
harder and harder to wriggle free from, but it's
a walk along water that I'm talking about,
an ocean beachfront with its softly lapping
ripples or its crashing waves licking at my feet,
the sound alone washing away unwanted
thoughts as well as sand, depositing shells,
cockles and mussels no longer alive, a rarer
broken nautilus with its echo of the sea
when held to the ear. Standing on one
of the boulders forming a jetty and letting
the salty onshore breeze. . . well, you know,
you've likely done that, too—I don't need
to show you. But you probably don't know
about the large, deep freshwater kettle pond
I am drawn to, an isolated spot, seldom
another person present. The public beach
there is tiny, with evidence that others do
occasionally arrive—paddleboards, rowboats,
and a sunfish pulled up onto shore. I sit on
an overturned skiff tied to an oak tree
that bombards me with acorns in the fall,
but provides wanted shade in the hot summer.
This year, the ongoing drought deepened
and the water line receded further than
ever before, until early autumn when heavy
rains raised the pond high enough that
one day I saw fit to haul the watercraft
onto what little was left of the beach,
an unasked-for favor to their absent owners.
Seagulls enjoy White Pond as much as I do—



Matt Hardy on Unsplash

every day of every season, they circle in
narrowing spirals before touching down gently
whether the surface is still or tossed into
whitecaps. (In winter it's solid ice. Even then,
the birds come.) They congregate on the far side
from where I sit, one after the other gliding
inches above the pond to settle in a long line
as if posing for a family photo. First one gull,
then its neighbor, then another and another,
begins to flap its wings, stirring up the water,
cooling itself off and playfully splashing the gulls
nearby. They're getting along with one another.
That racket is assuring. Everything will be okay



Jim Tilley has published three full-length collections of poetry (*In Confidence*, *Cruising at Sixty to Seventy*, *Lessons from Summer Camp*) and a novel (*Against the Wind*) with Red Hen Press. His short memoir, *The Elegant Solution*, was published as a *Ploughshares* Solo. He has won *Sycamore Review*'s Wabash Prize for Poetry. Four of his poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

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.

PHRAGS

One of the most invasive plant species in Utah is *Phragmites australis*. It has taken over much of the wetlands along the Wasatch Front. *Phragmites* was introduced from Europe over a century ago and is now found in all fifty states and on every continent except Antarctica.

Particularly troublesome is their takeover of the Bear River Bird Refuge. They produce millions of seeds, but these seeds really aren't a source of food for a vast majority of the estimated ten million migratory birds. And the species doesn't attract the types of bugs that the birds feast on in the spring.

The saltwater flooding of the 1980s at the Refuge killed numerous freshwater plant species and left open, disturbed ground. New, more invasive *phragmites* began to take hold. A control plan was issued in 2007 which allowed herbicide application and prescribed burning.

By 2014, officials estimated *phragmites* had taken over ten percent of the 77,000-acre bird refuge. By then, cattle grazing had been added as a treatment strategy. Cattle are now placed within infested units during prime growing season to reduce plant growth, reduce seed head formation and trample the rhizomes (shallow, horizontal underground roots). The refuge has grazed approximately 10,000 acres annually, split among three operators.



Phragmites australis. **Hitchcock, A.S.** ***Manual of the grasses of the United States*****. USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 200, 1950.**

Source: Olson, Bridget E. *Phragmites Control Plan*. Interior Department, Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-I49-PURL-LPS108270/pdf/GOVPUB-I49-PURL-LPS108270.pdf.

Source: Gurrister, Tim. "DWR. Migratory Bird Refuge to Take Flight in Fight Against Phragmites." *GephardtDaily*, 1 Aug. 2022, https://gephardtdaily.com/uncategorized/brmbr-takes-to-the-air-in-phragmite-fight/.

Source: "Grazing Opportunities at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge."*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, 2022, https://www.fws.gov/service/grazing-opportunities-bear-river-migratory-bird-refuge.

Source: Williams, Carter. "'It's a battle': Why There's a Growing Fight to Stop Phragmites around the Great Salt Lake." *KSL.com*, 20 Sept. 2022, https://www.ksl.com/article/50478913/its-a-battle-why-theres-a-growing-fight-to-stop-phragmites-around-the-great-salt-lake.

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *Phragmites Management for Improving Bear River Delta and Associated Wetland*, Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative, 2023. https://wri.utah.gov/wri/reports/ProjectSummaryReport.html?id=6089

INVASIVE GRASS IN MAUI

According to a recent report in *Smithsonian Magazine*, one factor which made the August 2023 fires in Maui so deadly were invasive grasses. As sugar cane and pineapple agriculture declined, vast swaths of farming acreage were abandoned. Nonnative plants such as guinea grass, molasses grass, and buffelgrass moved in.

These species are native to Africa and were introduced to Hawaii in the late 18th century by European ranchers who wanted a steady supply of drought-resistant livestock forage. Today, almost a quarter of Hawaii's land cover consists of these invasive shrubs. They run amok on the tens of thousands of acres of plantations on which sugar cane and pineapple plants once flourished. Hardy, voracious and opportunistic, they invade roadside shoulders and encroach on urban housing areas.

"Those fire-prone invasive species fill in any gaps anywhere else—roadsides, in between communities, in between people's homes, all over the place," [said] Elizabeth Pickett, co-executive director of the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization….

. . . [A] good first step for fire mitigation is to reduce the fuel for future blazes. That means reverting the overrun plantations back into tended agricultural lands. Grazing animals can also be valuable allies to tamp down these invasive grasses. This method is as simple as letting sheep, cattle or goats do what they do best on grass-dominated spaces, so they can trim the unruly kindling.

Source: Kim, Shi En. "How Swaths of Invasive Grass Made Maui's Fires so Devastating." *Smithsonian Magazine*, 15 Aug. 2023, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-swaths-of-invasive-grass-made-mauis-fires-so-devastating-180982729/.

WIREGRASS AND FORESTS

Ventenata dubia or wiregrass is native to countries surrounding the Mediterranean. It is now invading northwestern forests. It is one of several grasses reshaping ecosystems and wildfire around the world. Buffelgrass feeds fires in the Sonoran Desert that torch saguaro cacti. In the Great Basin, fire-tolerant cheatgrass is crowding out sagebrush.

In a report for *Science*, Warren Cornwall notes that even in scablands—rocky patches of open terrain—wiregrass is spreading. Compared with cheatgrass, wiregrass can colonize cooler, higher elevation locations and take root in thinner soils. Researchers say that,

. . . although Ventenata *doesn't fare well in dense shade, it can encroach on forest edges, where it fuels fires that clear parts of the overstory, letting in more sunlight. Computer simulations suggest that cycle could gradually shrink forests, [Becky] Kerns [ecologist at USFS'S Pacific Northwest Research Station] says, like waves eroding a beach.*

That scenario was a revelation, and not a welcome one. Historically, Kerns says, land managers in the western United States have thought of invasive grasses as a problem for wide-open rangelands. But modeling suggests wiregrass could creep into many forests in eastern Oregon, as well as those in dry, higher mountains as far south as Arizona and New Mexico. "Ventenata *has really challenged a lot of our notions about invasive grasses in the West," she says.*

Source: Cornwall, Warren."Fiery Invasions, Around the World, Flammable Invasive Grasses are Increasing the Risk of Damaging Wildfires." *Science*, 4 Aug. 2023, https://www.science.org/content/article/flammable-invasive-grasses-increasing-risk-devastating-wildfires.

HORRIBLE HOLLY

Steven Hsieh recently reported in *High Country News* about efforts to poison *Ilex aquifolium,* or English holly, which is invading the Pacific Northwest. Much of that effort has been

stymied by holly growers lobbying the Washington State Farm Bureau to ban any commercially grown crop from being listed as a weed.

Under human control, holly can be shaped and shifted to meet our needs for beauty and privacy. Cut through a holly stem, and several new limbs will eventually emerge. Wander through a Northwest neighborhood, and you might see holly hedges meticulously shaped into sharp-edged boxes.

Some of the same qualities that make holly such a desirable landscaping plant also make it a ruthless invader. It can live for a century, withstand considerable damage and thrive in the shade. It also reproduces prolifically; many parts of one tree can make new hollies. . . .

No one has calculated how much public money has been spent controlling holly in the Northwest. Washington State Parks spent more than $30,000 removing holly at St. Edward State Park after David Stokes studied that invasion. When Sally Nickelson, the former invasive species manager for Seattle Public Utilities, discovered the holly at Lake Youngs, the agency approved around $90,000 of taxpayer dollars for control work. Those efforts – and many more tucked within local budgets and contracts – merely snip at an exponentially branching problem.

Even when holly hunters do defeat an invasion, keeping new hollies out requires constant vigilance and optimism.

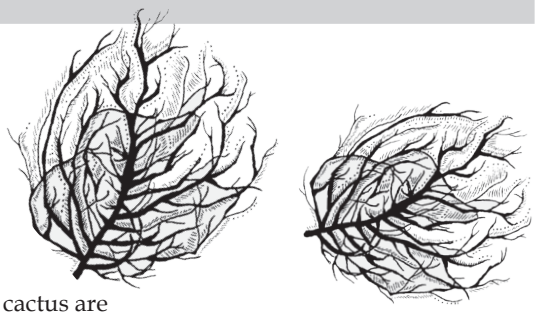


English holly, https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/25800/25821/holly_25821.htm.

Hsieh, Steven. "Horrible Holly: A Festive Plant Runs Amok." *High Country News*, 1 Dec. 2023, https://www.hcn.org/issues/55.12/plants-horrible-holly-a-festive-plant-runs-amok.

ICONIC TUMBLEWEED

See them tumbling down
Pledging their love to the ground
Lonely but free I'll be found
Drifting along with the tumblin' tumbleweeds
– Bob Nolan, 1930



Tumbleweed, wind witch, and Russian cactus are among the many common names for the Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), which became an icon of the Old West featured in movies and songs. Russian thistle is highly invasive in North America. It has followed in the wake of agriculture and other human activities since the late 1800s and its ability to spread prolifically makes it a threat to ecosystems, human health, and the economy. As the Natural History Museum in London put it:

The Russian thistle made its first known appearance in North America in the 1870s, in Bonhomme County, South Dakota. . . .

Farmers were among the first to notice its arrival. Russian thistle is an expert at exploiting loose, disturbed soil with little competing vegetation. This is exactly what it found in the ploughed land of the Great Plains. As pioneer farmers cut down prairie grasses and other native vegetation to make space for crops, they created a suitable habitat for the invasive Russian thistle.

As Russian thistle matures, it goes from a soft seedling to a stiff and spiny plant. Its defences put off grazing animals, but also inflicted wounds on farmers, their horses and livestock. In some areas,

infestations grew to the point that ploughing became impossible and there were extensive crop losses worth millions of dollars.

The plant also affected native vegetation and wildlife, preventing them from thriving in infested areas. . . .

The arrival and spread of Russian thistle is considered to be one of the fastest plant invasions in the history of the United States. Today the plant is found in all states except Alaska and Florida.

Source: Osterloff, Emily. "Tumbleweeds: the Fastest Plant Invasion in the USA's History." *Natural History Museum*, https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/tumbleweeds-fastest-plant-invasion-in-usa-history.html.

EDITORIAL MATTER

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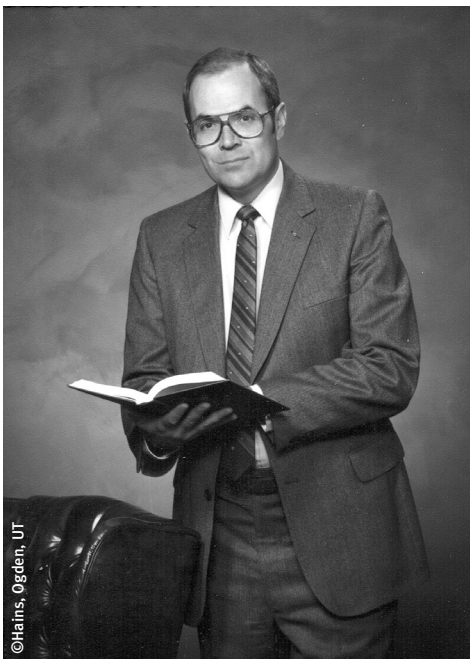
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Funding for this award is generously provided by the Howard family.

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.

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Conversation

Charlie Vasquez, Laura Stott, Sunni Brown Wilkinson & **Louise Glück**; Álvaro La Parra-Pérez & **Ran Abramitzky**; Bailey Quinn, Abraham Smith & **Sandra Simonds**; Doug Fabrizio & **Nikole Hannah-Jones**; Heather Root & **Nalini Nadkarni**; Kathryn Lindquist, **Julie Rich** & **Jeremy Farner**; Venessa Castagnoli & **Tamara Kostianovsky**

Art

William Grill

Essay

Melora Wolff, Michelle Effle, C.R. Beideman, Kevin Maier, David Tippetts

Fiction

Terry Sanville, Michael McGuire

Poetry

Lex Runciman, Doug Barrett, William Snyder, Jim Tilley

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