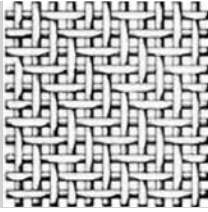




WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

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Interview Focus



Deriving from the German *weben* – to weave – *weber* translates into the literal and figurative “weaver” of textiles and texts. *Weber* (the word is the same in singular and plural) are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into ever-changing patterns. *Weber*, the journal, understands itself as a tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.

Shooting the Breeze in a Twittering Moment

In our attempts to assign retrospective meaning to the rhythms of cultural progression, everything these days is “The Age of the Age of . . .” If we are currently inhabiting the iPad or iPod moment – or the electronification of information access more generally – previous recent periods often go by such academic monikers as modernism, postmodernism or, in more contemporary parlance, the Age of Radio or the Age of Television (or, alternately, the Age of the Automobile or the Age of Space Flight).

Were one to characterize some of the important literary trends that have defined the 18th and 19th centuries, the notion of “The Age and Art of Conversation” would suggest itself almost immediately. True, Pope, Blake and Coleridge produced some of the most widely admired poetry of the English literary canon, and the Victorian Age in the U.S., England and continental Europe is often seen as the century coincident with the rise of the novel. Both centuries, however, are also intimately connected with a culture of literary oration and eloquence, of distinct locution and distinguished circumlocution. If the French savants, from Voltaire to Rousseau, exchanged their bonmots and aperçus in Le Procope – one of the most well-known literary cafés to date – Samuel Johnson and his circle engaged in witty verbal repartee in London’s famed Turk’s Head. The Viennese had a long-standing tradition of conversation in such establishments as Café Sperl (among Hitler’s favorite hangouts, alas), Café Prückel, or Café Central, and the Americans founded talk groups in most major cities and often shot the breeze in the “parlor,” whose very name derives from the French parler – to speak. It may not be a coincidence that Freud’s “talking cure” emerged out of the conversational coffee-house context of 19th-century Vienna, just as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes’ belief in the medical benefits of talk is rooted in his own fascination with the culture of conversation.

Precisely because writing and conversing are the inseparable sister arts of a verbal universe, our receptive ears have become attuned to many a well-turned phrase. Recognizable as cultural memes because of their lyrical quotability or pithy pronouncements, such phrases also testify to language’s elegant suppleness, its signifying compression, and to humans’ cognitive affinity for speech. The conversationalists readers of *Weber* will find in this issue do not have quite such ambitions to mint memorable one-liners. Rather, our writers and artists invite our readers to mull over their work in the spirit of elucidation and insight without, however, providing answers only the work itself can give. In the cryptic words of Samuel Johnson, the conversationalist extraordinaire of the Age named after him: “A transition from an author’s book to his conversation is too often like an entrance into a large city, after a distant prospect. Remotely, we see nothing but spires of temples and turrets of palaces, and imagine it the residence of splendour, grandeur, and magnificence; but when we have passed the gates, we find it perplexed with narrow passages, disgraced with despicable cottages, embarrassed with obstructions, and clouded with smoke.” Above all, what these conversations show is that the art of a good chat is alive and well, even in our own digital moment.



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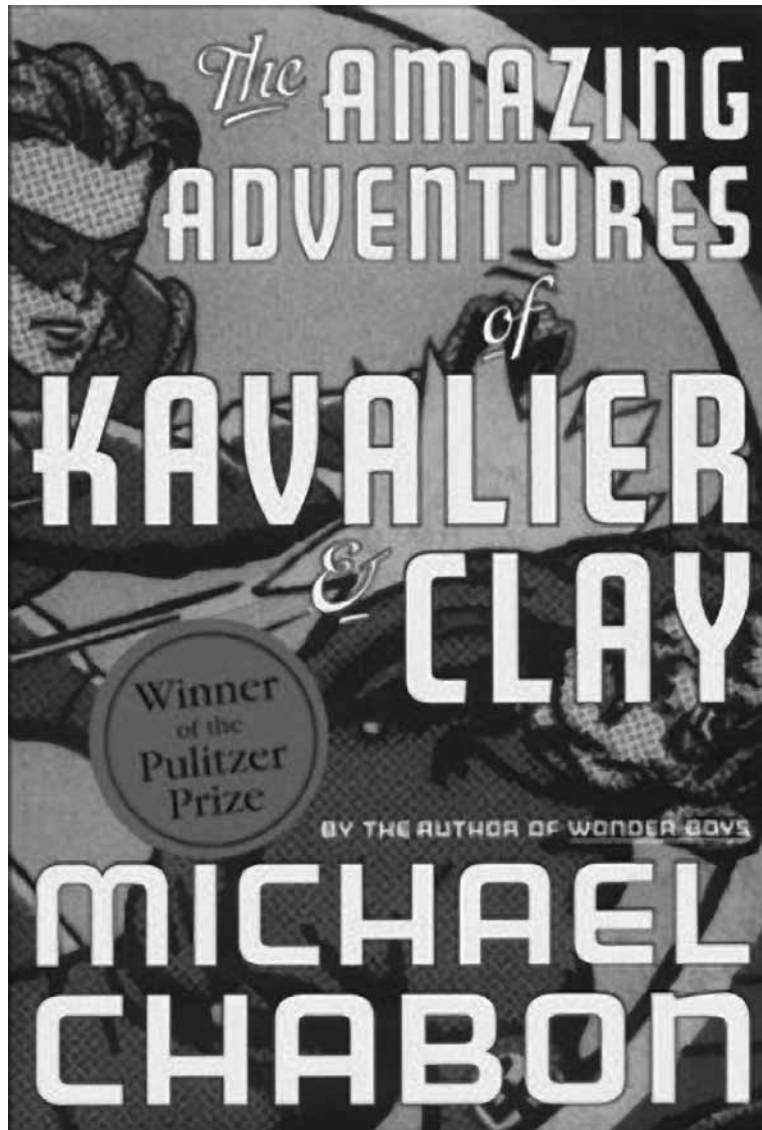


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Victoria Ramirez and Patrick Murphy

On Comics, Genres and Styles

A Conversation with Michael Chabon



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PRELUDE

*Michael Chabon is a much sought-after writer and a man with a busy schedule. Thus, when Chabon agreed to be the featured author for Weber State University's National Undergraduate Literature Conference (NULC) in April 2009, and further graciously agreed to make time to meet with me, I was delighted. I felt honored to be conducting the interview, though daunted, too, as I was only slightly familiar with Chabon's work. His novel *Wonder Boys* (1995) had been made into a feature-length movie and I'd enjoyed watching that immensely. But as for his other books . . .*

That's where Patrick Murphy enters the story. After our MA class one day, I mentioned that I would be interviewing Chabon, and Patrick almost bounced off the ceiling. He knew all about Chabon, having been at the 2004 Eisner Awards ceremony (the highest-level industry honors – it's like the Oscars, but for comics) at the San Diego Comic-Con where Chabon was to give the keynote address. Patrick is, like Chabon, an openly-admitted comic-book fan. I couldn't resist the obvious: Patrick Murphy had to be part of the interview team!

*Chabon is a writer of diverse interests and passions, though central to all these is the act of writing – and reading. His passion won him a Pulitzer Award in 2001 for his novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000), the story of two Brooklyn cousins who create a popular comic-book series in the 1940s. This is a book Patrick Murphy highly recommends, not only to anyone who has anything more than a passing interest in comic books, but also to any reader wanting to catch the hardships and frustrations of Jewish-Americans before, during, and after World War II. Not only a tour de force in itself, *Kavalier & Clay* demonstrates a truth about Chabon's opus: the author has many*

chops and can write in diverse voices, genres, styles.

*Thus, his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), is a coming-of-age tale that draws on Chabon's years in Pittsburgh, where he attended college. A favorite story about this book is that it was actually a thesis for an MFA in fiction, and was submitted, unbeknownst to Chabon, to a publisher by his thesis advisor, who landed Chabon a lucrative publication deal. His second novel, *Wonder Boys* (1995), offers readers a look into the world of literary conferences and features the trippy character, Grady Tripp. Without revealing too much of the story, let me just say everything in the book about literary conventions is pretty much true, as is all that stuff about writer's block.*

*The following interview reveals a few of the more interesting facts about Chabon as writer. He is considered a "genre" novelist, a term I suspect Chabon resists to a degree, not because there is no truth to the label, but because any narrowing of a writer's potential (that is, pigeon-holing for any sake other than the creation of stories fun to read) is of minimal concern to him. Chabon strikes me as a pragmatist of his own imaginings, confident that the best books from his mind surely are those that offer dang good stories, regardless of genre. Time and again Chabon has waxed eloquent on the truism that no one genre is inherently more valuable or literary than another. This point looms large as he has won five genre awards, and for *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) received both the prestigious Hugo and Nebula science fiction awards. Chabon's genre nimbleness further revealed itself when he published his novella, *The Final Solution* (2004), a quirky tale bound to delight any Sherlock Holmes fan. This story also reveals one of Chabon's enduring*

themes: Jewishness, which makes its way into much of his work.

As if publishing *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* in 2007 wasn't enough, that year Chabon also came out with *Gentlemen of the Road*, a swashbuckling mini-saga on which Kerouac et al. have not a thing. Again, this early medieval tale exemplifies the dictum Chabon writes by: let the spirit, and your own interests, move you, and you'll produce passionate writing that entertains others. In addition to the novels listed above, Chabon has written a young-adult book, *Summerland* (2002); he's published two short story collections, *A Model World* (1991) and *Werewolves in Their Youth* (1999); and Chabon's essay collections include *Maps and Legends* (2008) and *Manhood for Amateurs* (2009).

In his address to the gathered student scholars attending Weber State Univer-

sity's National Undergraduate Literature Conference, Chabon read a four-part essay titled "From Fandom to Legoland." His address started with his childhood aspirations to organize a comic-book club, a failure with haunting reverberations, and how his quest for acceptance ended with his family, his own fan club. All four parts have since been printed in his recent book of essays, *Manhood for Amateurs*, as "The Loser's Club," "Surefire Lines," "To the Legoland Station," and "The Amateur Family." Within his NULC address, and within the proceeding interview, one theme rings clear: Michael Chabon is not only a writer but, additionally, a husband and father. This is the secret to how Chabon continues to entertain and delight his audience: beyond his quick writing and deep wit, there is an underlying voice that is eternally speaking with a resonant understanding of the connectivity that defines us as human.



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Ramirez: Michael Chabon, I just wanted to say that Patrick is my graduate student, and one day he was talking about you, just by-the-by, and I said, "Oh that's the dude coming to the conference," and he got all excited. Patrick is a real fan of yours, and so I asked him to be in on the conversation.

Murphy: This is for me and my school.

Michael Chabon: I thought you were going to say this is for two hundred points.

Murphy: I am a high school English teacher. For my junior class The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay is on my student reading list.

Thank you.

Murphy: If one of my students were considering reading this novel, what advice would you have for her and what should she get out of the experience?

I would advise her to buy two copies and give one to a friend. I don't think I can really answer that. I would analogize it to being in the room when someone picks up one of my books, or being in a bookstore. Once or twice I've been in a store when someone was walking over to a table that had my books and picked up a copy of something I'd written. You feel an incredible sense of embarrassment and dread and anticipation mixed with the certainty that they are going to put the book down and walk away, which in fact is what's happened every time I've seen it in a bookstore. So that position of being present as someone is beginning to read your book or has been required to read your book is kind of a nauseating feeling.

Murphy: So what's the lesson that they can bring into their lives?

I don't have any idea. I'm not trying to shirk the question. More than anything else I would like someone to find the experience of reading that book, or any of my books, pleasurable and enjoyable. It's hard to have that experience when you feel like it's obligatory. Obligatory pleasure is never as pleasurable. So I wouldn't want to be in there trying to say, "You know what I need you to learn from reading this, or I know what I expect you to get out of reading this." That would feel very intrusive

to me. I don't want to intrude. I am happy to be there at the other end when the reader comes out of the book and says, "I have these questions. I wonder about this, why was it like that, how does this work?" At that point I am much more comfortable being involved in the conversation,

but I don't feel comfortable being involved in the conversation before somebody has even begun the book.

Ramirez: So, you'd advise the person, the student, to buy two copies to give it to a buddy. Would that be so that they could talk about it?

No, so that I could get double the worth.

Ramirez: [Laughs] Okay.

I'm just kidding about that.

Ramirez: Because at that age they are not going to know a lot of other people who've read that book. You have no one else that you can really talk to about what's in it.

Right. It's very flattering to learn that a book you wrote is being taught in a class. It's exciting because I realize that once that has happened—once that begins to happen—it really does insure a longer life for what you

have written. And once things begin to be taught at the university level, they become part of a much longer-lasting conversation. Then it occurs at the newspaper review level. That's a conversation. Typically it doesn't last that long.

Murphy: I teach a science fiction literature class for juniors and that's where I assign

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay. And I'll probably end up putting in The Yiddish Policemen's Union because it does ask those "what if" questions. As an old "Marvel zombie," I was excited when a What If comic would come out, because it gave you ideas about possibilities. And that's what's so good about The Yiddish Policemen's Union. But you go from genre to genre and you are talking about breaking down genres in some of your essays because if it's good, it's good, and if it's bad, it's bad. Do you feel you are reinforcing genres, or do you feel you are breaking them down?

Neither. I guess I feel much more like I'm just playing with them and trying them on, in a sense. And drawing on the conventions, the traditions and the history of various genres as a source of narrative ideas in my writing. I'm not really thinking about breaking them down or anything like that. They're just useful to me.

Murphy: Are there any genres that you wanted to write in but haven't yet?

It might be fun to try writing a western some day. I love westerns, but I don't know if I'll ever get around to it. It's not like I have a

check list of genres, and I say, "Okay, I did fantasies, I did hard-boiled detective, now western is next." I wouldn't do it just to do it. I would only do it if I got an idea for a story that felt like it could be best told using the framework or the conventions of a western, and playing with them. If such a story doesn't ever occur to me, then I won't do it, even though I love westerns and it would probably

be fun to write one. For me, it's just a matter of realizing that I could write in various genres, that there is a whole crucial part of my lifelong experience as a reader, of which I was not really availing myself as a writer, and that seemed wrong. It seemed stupid and foolish. I had just drawn this sort of *cordon sanitaire* around my work and said, "Well, I can't write

science fictions, I can't write fantasies, I can't do any of those things I love to read because if I do, I'm not writing serious literature." At some point I just realized that was both foolish and hypocritical and wasn't serving me well. Furthermore, it didn't reflect my deepest motivations for wanting to become a writer in the first place. So, I lifted that barrier and said, I'm just going to write whatever I want to write, whatever kind of narrative I need to tell the stories that I'm trying to tell. If it turns out to be hard-boiled detective fiction, so be it. I love hard-boiled detective fiction. Why shouldn't I write hard-boiled detective fiction? But, again, not just to show that I can, or as a pure exercise in genre, but because that was the narrative solution to trying to tell the story that I wanted to tell about this imaginary Yiddish-speaking homeland in Alaska.

I needed to present that to the reader, and it was a totally unfamiliar world, unfamiliar

It might be fun to try writing a western some day. I love westerns, but I don't know if I'll ever get around to it. It's not like I have a check list of genres, and I say, "Okay, I did fantasies, I did hard-boiled detective, now western is next."

iar environment. The reader needed to have someone as a kind of a guide who knew the place well. Who understood its inner mechanics and the way that its social structures worked, and all the things that a detective understands. That was the perfect main character for that book, because a detective implies the city that he operates in, the way Marlow implies Los Angeles, Sam Spade implies San Francisco, and Sherlock Holmes implies London. So if I created my detective I could use him to imply the world I was trying to create. It was at that moment where the important decision that I made several years ago to let myself write whatever I felt like writing—whatever kind of books that I love to read, to allow that love to feed my writing—kicked in and said, “Okay, great, you have a detective novel.”

Murphy: As an author, you kind of identify yourself with Edgar Rice Burroughs, who wrote in just every genre, though he was only known for the Tarzan jungle stuff. But Burroughs did science fiction, he did westerns, and he was a WWII war correspondent.

Well, I think that’s different. I love Edgar Rice Burroughs. He was one of my favorite writers when I was young and I still read him now. In fact, I’m working on a rewrite for a screenplay for the *John Carter of Mars* movie that Disney is doing. So, I am very connected to Burroughs. But that’s different. He was writing for market. That is why he wrote in different genres. He wrote where he thought he could sell. There were western magazines, so he wrote westerns. There were fantasy adventure magazines, like *Argosy*, and he wrote for those markets. The same with Robert E.

Howard. He wrote not just the Conan stories he is famous for, but boxing stories, sea stories, western frontier stories, even humor. Those guys wrote in different genres because they got paid a penny a word, and they just needed to hit as many markets as they possibly could. All hail their incredible versatility that they could do that, but I think that’s very different. That’s not about freedom so much

as it is about necessity. When you are a Robert E. Howard and you’re writing a boxing story, it’s because you have to, because you need to make money and there is a boxing market. There is a fight magazine and they take stories about boxing, so you aim a story. You might even take one of your barbarian stories and recast it, and turn the sword into boxing

gloves. They did that kind of thing all the time and vice versa. That’s about tailoring your abilities to the market. In my case, it is about opening up my fiction to incorporate as many of the influences and passions that I have had in my life, and not to have that sort of invisible barrier. It keeps out the stuff that has typically been considered unliterary.

Ramirez: I look at this as coming to the awareness of what authors like Vonnegut and Pynchon and other mainstream literary writers successfully do in their work, and nobody calls them science fiction novels when, actually, they are.

Exactly. That’s something I definitely also want to resist because there is this move made by critics, and Cormac McCarthy is another example, where if a writer is generally accepted to be a genius or a literary master, and writes a work of science fiction, it’s not science fiction because it was written by the

literary master, it's literature. Even McCarthy's *The Road* is not science fiction, or Vonnegut at a certain point, though he started out writing in the pulp science-fiction magazines. At a certain point his status was altered and thereafter everything he did was simply literature and was no longer regarded as coming out of the tradition that it was so obviously coming out of. It's like we make this dispensation, instead of giving the credit to the genre itself, and saying, "Look what incredible power Thomas Pynchon or Margaret Atwood have derived from the tradition that they're working in, that they are a part of." It's the same tradition that Ursula K. Le Guin and Issac Asimov and others belong to. Instead of saying, "Look at the incredible power that they derive from the tradition they are working in," we say, "How amazing it is that such a great writer can make a great book even out of materials as worthless as those in science fiction."

Murphy: Yeah, well, you look at Philip K. Dick's The Man in High Castle. It has the same sort of "what if" situation as your book, The Yiddish Policemen's Union. I really hope your book doesn't get shoved in a science fiction closet and not taken seriously.

No. I think I was fairly safe from that happening just because I was already sort of in the box with the literary writers.

Murphy: Philip K. Dick didn't win a Pulitzer.

Exactly. He worked his way up definitely from the bottom of the literary pile, from the pulp world and the short magazine fiction world.

I'm happy to wear multiple labels. I will accept science fiction writer, gladly. Mystery writer, literary writer, Jewish-American writer, there are all kinds of labels that you can put on my work and I will take them all as long as they fit.

But I didn't want to be accorded that special dispensation. I didn't want to be viewed as a literary writer who was dabbling in science fiction. So when that book, *Policemen's Union*, won the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award, I couldn't make it to the Hugo Award ceremony unfortunately, but I went to the Nebula Award ceremony. I wanted to be there, I wanted to show that I was proud to be given

that award, that I didn't consider it to be a lesser accomplishment. With the Hugo, I couldn't make it but I sent a speech. The first words of my speech were, "I am a science fiction writer." For me what I don't want is to have one label. I'm happy to have multiple labels. I'm happy to wear multiple labels. I will accept science fiction writer, gladly. Mystery writer,

literary writer, Jewish-American writer, there are all kinds of labels that you can put on my work and I will take them all as long as they fit. But I think the death comes from when you get one label and that's the only label you are allowed to have and you get stuck with that one label. That's something I would definitely fight against and resist.

Ramirez: I am going to ask a technical question. In Wonder Boys, the first book that I read of yours, I noted what I'll call the "Chabonian pause." That is, a character speaks a line which is then followed in the same paragraph by explanation or digression from the narrator, and then ends with one more line spoken by the character. I see this technique in almost all of your books. How and when did you develop this?

I don't know if I remember anymore why I started doing it.

Ramirez: Do you remember when? Was it in your first novel?

I don't know if it's in *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* or not. I'm certainly aware of it. "It feels good" would be the only real explanation. I suppose part of the idea is that a lot can happen between the first word of dialogue and the last. It's a way of showing that your entire understanding of the world can change between the opening words of what it is you have to say and the final words of what it is you have to say. So that's part of it. Sometimes I use it as a pacing thing where, if the dialogue has been kind of flowing pretty quick and snappy, I want to slow things down and arrest the progress, just to let everyone catch up. There's also a rhythmic thing. I want to make sure the reader is with me, is paying attention still, that you're not reading so quickly that you can't even remember what was at the beginning of the paragraph that you are reading now. If I have a concluding line of dialogue at the end of a paragraph about twelve lines long, and you don't remember what that is the follow-up of, even though it was just twelve lines ago, I think you are reading too fast. I just want to make sure that you are getting ev-

erything; that you are really paying attention to everything. I think it's a way of forcing, in a sense, the reader to keep paying attention, to suspend the resolution of the dialogue long enough to make you go, "Wait, wowowowowo, what did he say? Oh, right, okay. These two pieces actually go together." I think there can be a little bit of suspense. There is also a little bit of, "Well, what is he going to say?" If he opens up by saying, "I wish I could help you but . . ." and then this elaboration follows, then how is that going to conclude? Maybe it's going to be that he says, "Okay, alright, I will come and help you." Sometimes, also, I'm using it to reflect the state of mind in the character. A sense of hesitation, or cogitation where the character doesn't really know what he or she thinks, and is thinking it over. So the character, like many of us, starts talking before he or she really knows what he or she wants to say. So we start out, and then there is actually a certain amount of hesitation or a thought process that takes place. What you end up saying might be very different than what you started saying. Sometimes I just want to show how the character gets from the initial refusal to help, to finally, at the end of it, agreeing to help. I guess there are a lot of

reasons and to be honest, I don't think about it, I just do it. I probably noticed it in Gabriel García Márquez first; it's something that he does.

Murphy: The way you described it for controlling the pacing is like paneling in comics, where the artist has the complete control to slow down time, to speed up time. It's almost taking this visual medium and putting it into a literary medium. It's interesting.

Right, there is an element of control. You're always trying to modulate. I want it to be plea-



surable. I want the reader to be able to get caught up in it and to feel like you're being moved along, buoyed along, and you want to keep turning pages and find out what happens. On the other hand, I write on the sentence level. I write each sentence one at a time. Each sentence is considered and worked over. I don't let that sentence go until I feel like it is doing just what it is supposed to be doing. I'm trying to balance the pacing and the question of narrative drive, of what is pushing the reader through. I'm trying to always balance that with the sense of, "Slow down, think about this, look at this." Have you ever actually looked at a mustache before and noticed what weird things mustaches are? Let me just get you to do that by describing this guy's mustache right here so that you stop and think about mustaches for three seconds, and then you can go on. There is always this tension between the drive of the plot and the narrative and pacing. Because you are trying to do two things: you are trying to tell a good story and you are trying to get the reader to see the world again for the first time in a different way. Those things are always in tension with each other. Sometimes you lose control over that. Sometimes things start moving too quickly and the reader is just blowing through, which can be a good thing. And sometimes you slow things down too much and the reader starts to lose that sense of drive and their energy begins to flag.

Murphy: Maps and Legends. *The essay that caught my interest in Maps and Legends was "Kids' Stuff." I was actu-*

You're always trying to modulate. I want [the narrative rhythm] to be pleasurable. I want the reader to be able to get caught up in it and to feel like you're being moved along, buoyed along, and you want to keep turning pages and find out what happens.

ally at the 2004 Eisner Award Ceremony where you delivered this essay as a keynote address.

In a slightly altered form.

Murphy: In this address you basically stood before all the top comic-book industry professionals and told them that current trends were destructive to comic books, as they were alienating a younger audi-

ence while catering to a narrowing field of aging readers. It was basically pulling a Brando, going to the Academy Awards and giving a speech on how Hollywood has decayed over the years.

But, I didn't refuse my award.

Murphy: Did you receive any backlash from that speech, and how have comics changed since 2004?

I did, definitely. I heard, maybe even read online, some people that were ticked off by what I said.

Murphy: Was it fans or professionals?

Professionals. Either because they just disagreed or because they felt attacked.

Murphy: I was behind that velvet rope with my buddies, and back there we were just cheering you on.

I feel there was more agreement than disagreement in the reaction that I did see. I go to my comic shop, Comic Relief in Berkeley, and they have a whole table now of comics for kids, all kinds of cool stuff. From super-

hero stuff that is aimed at kids to much more alternative independent kind of stuff, even self-published things that are all aimed at young readers. I feel like there is definitely more of that now. My daughter is fourteen and I used to take her into comic book stores with me when she was little. There would be this one little row at the bottom where they would have a couple of DC comics for kids, and Archie stuff or whatever, and maybe *Bone*, and that would be it. I would have to hide her eyes from seeing all this other completely wildly inappropriate stuff, or stuff she would be attracted to because it was *Wonder Woman*, or whatever. But then she would pick it up and the content was totally inappropriate for her. And now I still have young kids; I have a six-year-old son, and now, when we go into a comic shop, I say, "Go over there, there's all kinds of cool stuff over there." So I am not taking the credit for the change, but it was an irresistible argument in the sense that all I was saying was, "Hook 'em early." Don't forget that these kids are going to grow up to be people with disposable incomes, and you want to get them now. So give them stuff they'll like.

Murphy: I think there was a very tender moment at the Eisner Awards when Will Eisner himself came up right after your address and said with great verve, "Well, now I want to go out and write comics." We all cheered. That was really an amazing moment because you could see that it was something that inspired him.

It meant a lot to me, definitely. He was a great guy; he was always very kind to me.

Ramirez: Going back to Maps and Legends, one of the articles I read with focus was on The Road. I'm teaching this course on Cormac McCarthy so I'm always looking for something good to read. It made me think of this question for you. McCarthy is an author – and I'm going

to make a supposition here – like yourself, whose opus centers on relationships between males. I get the sense that a strong theme for McCarthy is, for want of a better term, masculinist in nature, meaning that his most pervasive themes concern themselves with American men and violence. Violence that is promoted through lack of kind fathering or the absence of a protective father. I invoke the carrier of fire you mentioned in your essay. Anyway, you feature men not so much violent as flawed, who often don't have fathers, or have awkward relationships with a father, such as Zeligman in Gentlemen of the Road. Would you say your representation of male characters overlaps to a degree with that of McCarthy?

When you put it that way, it sounds pretty plausible. Yeah. I mean, I've never really thought about that before.

Ramirez: Because in Gentlemen of the Road, you have two men, one of them is very difficult and the other not so bad at times. But there's great love, tenderness, and respect outside of any kind of romantic implication. So, they're men capable of loving and nurturing. That's what I see there and in other places, such as in The Final Solution. The difficult Holmes has this incredibly protective and tender side. I see that in various spots throughout your work. And you have characters whose fathers are absent or whatever, like Grady Tripp's in Wonder Boys.

I think McCarthy is a writer, especially in *Blood Meridian*, one of my favorite novels, who has a much bleaker, unsparring, less hopeful view of human behavior, than I do.

Ramirez: In that book, though, it's interesting because it is such a violently written book. It was very difficult for me to read it. One of my students urged me to do so, so I did. Of course, the writing is beautiful.

What I came away with, and that's where I arrived at my theory – because the Judge in Blood Meridian is the epitome of all the violence – is the pervasiveness of senseless violence.

I think it goes way back in American literature. I think part of what makes him so remarkable is how his work resonates with the classic themes of the American literature ideal like *Huck Finn*, and back to Cooper and captivity narratives. I mean, there is something that is just so Faulkner. There's something so unmistakably primal. I first read, I think, *All the Pretty Horses*, then I read *Blood Meridian*. You just get that charge when you pick up McCarthy's books and start reading. They've got such a charge, and that charge goes back to the earliest kinds of narratives we produced in this country. It's like baseball. When you go to a baseball game you're tapping immediately into this really central primal kind of American narrative.

Murphy: I'll go back to the geek stuff. Your character The Escapist from Kavalier and Clay was eventually turned into an actual comic book, printed by Dark Horse comics. You've had an impressive list of artists working on that comic, including comic legends like Bill Sienkiewicz, Gene Colan, and Will Eisner. Living or dead, who is the artist you would most like to see work on The Escapist and why?

Jack Kirby. I don't have to think about that one for a second. No doubt. One of my great regrets is that I didn't start working on *Kavalier and Clay* until Kirby had already been dead for maybe a year or so before I started writing the book. If he had just held on a little longer, I knew people. I knew somebody who knew Marv Wolfman, and Marv Wolfman put me in touch with Gil Kane, and I'm sure he would have been able to hook me up with Kirby, too. So I would have had the opportunity to meet him, which I never did.

Murphy: But you got Eisner.

Yes. Eisner, Lee and Kane, those were my three primary sources.

Murphy: Didn't Eisner call you a "Fan Boy"?

Yes, so I was told afterward.

Murphy: He said that in an aside to his wife, which is a compliment.

Yeah. It was funny because it was in a way not really true at that time. In a sense, yes, I had been a "Fan Boy" of comics, but I was actually kind of reconnecting, trying to get back into the world of comics. At the point I was talking to him, "Fan Boy" was an inaccurate term in the sense that I was not really; that wasn't where I was coming from when I wanted to meet and talk with him. The truth is, I really didn't care about his work per se when I was talking to him. I was really interested in his life, his memories, and knowing what kind of shoes he wore, what brand of cigarettes he smoked in 1939, what kind of music he listened to, and which bus line he rode. That's the kind of stuff I wanted to know. It really didn't have anything to do with, "How did you come up with the character of Sand Saref" or anything like that. I didn't have any questions about his work at all. It was much more like, "How did you know that a comic book was selling well? How long did it take you to find out if it was a flop? What were the sales receipts like?" That kind of stuff.

Murphy: That personal angle really shows through in Kavalier and Clay. You can see these characters are so three-dimensional that there were times reading the book that I forgot, with my steeped history in comic-book geekdom, that I was reading a novel centered around fictional characters. Every once in awhile I'd have to stop and go, "Oh, wait a minute." I got so incredibly lost in that book because it was a very,

very rich world. It wasn't just about guys creating comic books.

Thank you. That's what I was striving for.

Murphy: I met Eisner a couple of times, and I imagine he would be amazing to sit down and try to get that information from.

He was very gracious.

*Murphy: He saw all aspects of the comic industry, not just the artist or the writer but also as the editor and publisher. He was a comic-book auteur. But going back to Kavalier and Clay. In your book, *The Escapist*, the fictional comic character created by Kavalier and Clay, was additionally depicted in other media forms popular in the 1940s, including serialized films and radio programs. In reality, *The Escapist* has been turned into a comic. With the way National Public Radio loves you, have you thought about an *Escapist* radio program?*

No, I never have and it's not come up.

Ramirez: Were they to call you, would you work on something like that?

If I had time. Of course, why not, if somebody thought it was a good idea. I don't know how well escape artistry plays on the radio. It's kind of a visual thing, like, "Oh the chains, they're open."

Murphy: "Look at that guy down there?" "You mean the one with the key on his shirt?" "Yeah, that's him. He's all chained up!"

Exactly, you kind of want to see the effect.

*Murphy: Well, radio in the 1940s and 50s was so infused in popular culture. You had the *The Adventures of Superman* radio program, and it seems very natural *The Escapist* would be in there. But when I have my high school students listen to*

radio programs, it's the first time they've ever been exposed to this medium. It's like, "What? They had stories on the radio?"

Oh, I know. It's still very effective. We have an XM Sirius radio in our car and XM has an old-time radio channel they play. I'll put it on for my kids, and it depends on what show it is. Some of them go over their heads, but if it's like *The Green Hornet* or *The Lone Ranger* or *Superman*, they just eat it up. They knew how to do it back then. My kids will get sucked right in and when it ends they go, "Is there another one?" I'll say no, because now comes *Dragnet*, and they're not that into *Dragnet*. It's like, oh we want more. So it still works.

Murphy: So, if NPR called . . .

Ramirez: Which doesn't sound likely, but still . . .

*Murphy: Who would you have play *The Escapist*? I'd say Campbell, Bruce Campbell.*

Oh sure. He's got a good voice. You wouldn't be able to see his chin.

Murphy: Actually, his chin is so big it would probably manifest itself somehow.

You can hear people smiling.

*Murphy: He's got a good voice. Kind of quirky, not quite so serious – that would play well with radio. Regarding *The Final Solution* and your literary knowledge of Sherlock Holmes in terms of style, how did you want to sound compared to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and how did you tailor your novel's voice to give it a Doyle feel but not overwhelm a modern audience with a Victorian-era narrative?*

I definitely did not want to sound like Conan Doyle or consciously echo Conan Doyle or the Victorian-era prose style in which Dr. Watson narrates the stories. I didn't want to write a

pastiche like a *Seven Percent Solution* kind of thing. That's actually how I started out in this business, by writing a Sherlock Holmes pastiche when I was eleven or twelve years old. I did try to consciously imitate Conan Doyle and Dr. Watson's voice, and I was very much inspired to do so by *The Seven Percent Solution*, a great book that I loved. But with this one I wanted to write a very much more interior kind of narrative in which the characters are almost approaching a stream of consciousness in some passages. So my model was Virginia Woolf—I didn't actually go to her work and look at it to consciously, even to deliberately imitate it. I just invoked it in memory, the experience of reading certain Virginia Woolf novels, the ones where you have a combination of diction that is still clearly coming out of a late Victorian-Edwardian way of speaking or writing. So, I tried to write both that visual sensory intensity you find in Virginia Woolf along with diction that feels British, feels Edwardian, but also has a distinctly modernist quality to it. That was much more the effect I was going for.

*Ramirez: As a follow-up on that, what was the effect you were going for in *Gentlemen of the Road*, because there you had the 10th century Caucasus thing going?*

I wanted a sense of strangeness. Everything was different then. There's nothing, in terms

of technology, for example. There is no continuity between that time and this time. I was certain the way people thought and felt and looked at the world had to be different than it is now because of their contacts and their environment and their expectations and their

sense of the world—everything was so different. Of course, there are going to be constants of human nature and behavior that would be the same. But I wanted to have a defamiliarizing effect because we are in a totally unfamiliar time and totally unfamiliar places. I wanted some of that to be reflected in the senses, so I used unfamiliar words and images, and also sentences that are long and dense and remind you that you are not in Ogden, Utah, in 2009, that you are in the Caucasus Mountains. I wanted that sense of, "you are not where you think you are." I also wanted there to be a kind of rolling, rollicking—you know—horses

and elephants charging. I wanted some of that sense of forward motion of attack and sword play and sweep and things that go into telling a story like this about adventure on horseback. I wanted that to be reflected in the sentences, too. The length of the sentences is also in part the attempt to convey a sort of sense of galloping, of forward motion.

Ramirez: The humor I found was contemporaneous to a degree—the jokes. That's not something that's going to translate

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over centuries. So for the banter, it had to be more familiar?

I didn't have any sources I could go back to that far in terms of novels, but I definitely thought of Don Quixote and those guys. *Don Quixote* has plenty of gags, plenty of very modern seeming comedy, comedic interchanges. When you're reading *Don Quixote*, you have a sense that this is not our world. Things were different then. People thought it was hilarious when they got beat almost to death. Like that was funny.

Ramirez: Some people think that's funny today.

I didn't want it to feel like Danny Glover and Mel Gibson.

Murphy: Or Bob Hope and Bing Crosby.

Yeah. I wanted there to be a somewhat timeless sense of their friendship, of their

partnership, that their humor with each other is very rooted in each of them knowing the other one's failings. The things they say to each other are always coming out of this simultaneous forgiveness of and irritation with the other one's shortcomings. I felt that's probably a constant in human interaction with someone you are best friends with. There's always this teasing. I feel like teasing must be a constant. I felt safe making that bet. Fundamentally, they have a teasing relationship. No matter what they might say about the other one or how irritated or frustrated or disgusted they might get, fundamentally they have nothing but respect and admiration for the other. That's also underneath whatever they are saying.

Ramirez: That definitely came across. Thank you so much for your time – we very much appreciate it.



Victoria Ramirez teaches English literature and creative writing at Weber State University. She also teaches in the MA program for the English Department, where she met Patrick Murphy. Vicki understood the advantage of having this comic book aficionado onboard to help with Michael Chabon's interview. In addition to writing short fiction and working on her Revolutionary War novel, Vicki also teaches song writing and is herself a singer-song writer. This is the second interview she has conducted with a writer featured at Weber State's Undergraduate Literature Conference.



An Ogden native, Patrick Murphy has had a long-standing relationship with Weber State. The son of geography professor Don Murphy, Patrick was a well known figure at Weber in the mid 1990s as the counterculture-mascot The Wildman and for running the award-winning Alternative Cinema program. Patrick graduated from Weber in English and Psychology, only to return to receive his teaching certificate. Currently, Patrick teaches at Fremont high school, where he is an advocate of using comic books in the classroom. Committed to his Weber ties, Patrick is also an adjunct faculty member in the Communication Department.

Michael Chabon, in collaboration with Dark Horse Comics

The Escapist



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Cover art by Matt Wagner for *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #5*

Michael Chabon teamed with Dark Horse comics in 2004 to create a comic book series entitled Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist. Based on Chabon's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, the highly successful series harks back to the golden age of comic books and has employed the talents of many today's top writers and artists, including those of the legendary Will Eisner. The following pages are select, individual drawings from various comics in the series.



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From "Heil and Fear Well" by Marv Wolfman and Joe Staton, *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #3*



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From "Sequestered" by Kevin McCarthy and Kyle Baker, *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* #1



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From "Sequestered" by Kevin McCarthy and Kyle Baker, *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #1*



From "The Escapist & the Spirit" by Will Eisner, *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #6*

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The Escapist and all related characters are trademarks of and are © 2010 Michael Chabon. All rights reserved. Used with permission. "Lady Escapist" created by Glen David Gold.

From "The Lady or the Tiger" by Glen David Gold and Gene Colan, *Michael Chabon Presents the Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #2*

Founded in 1986 by Mike Richardson behind the concept of establishing an ideal atmosphere for creative professionals, Dark Horse Comics has grown to become the third-largest comics publisher in the United States and is the largest independent American comic book publisher. Dark Horse publishes many licensed comics, including comics based on *Star Wars*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Aliens*, *Predator* and *Who Wants to be a Superhero?* Dark Horse also publishes creator-owned comics, such as Frank Miller's *Sin City* and *300*, Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*, Stan Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo*, Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*, in addition to Michael Chabon's *The Escapist*. The company is headquartered in Milwaukie, Oregon, and its products can be found online at www.darkhorse.com.

Michael McGregor

Old Men and Fire

We were there because my father was failing. In Colorado, that is. Not the green Rocky Mountain region you usually picture but the drier western expanse where dinosaur bones have been unearthed and the dam-deadened river slides sluggishly past the sere red dirt. We had been there for days already, my wife Sylvia and I, and we were tired of playing cards, of drinking coffee, of watching the duffers out on the course hack at the pea-green turf. The golfers we saw were mostly men and mostly old and they were depressing to people still in the midst of the fight. People with jobs to perform, careers to tend, a mortgage to pay. The kitchen nook looked out across the eighteenth hole, the end of the round. We watched as they pitched arthritically to the green, putted the cup, then steered their carts to the parking lot to drive back home. Nothing seemed gained or lost for them but scores on a piece of paper.

My father would watch them, too, when he dared — when his heart was strong — through windows covered with chicken wire. Hundreds of shots had scarred the deck and dented the siding. The missiles lay like Easter eggs under the shrubs in the garden. Whenever we skipped outside to scoop them up, my father scoffed. He had buckets and buckets of them, he said. They languished inside his garage with his self-propelled cart, his signature clubs and the two-toned shoes with



Karen Wattenmaker

the dry-day spikes he'd never wear.

Golf was the reason he lived where he did along with his wife, the fourth in his eighty years, the second since my mother. For years, while my mother continued to work as a bookkeeper for Sears, he lived the active life of the early retired, playing a round a day under desert skies and doing little more. He had owned a seafood company in Seattle and sold when seafood prices peaked.

The key to being a businessman, he bragged, is knowing when to get out.

Now, though, a pair of rubber tubes snaked from his nose, and sometimes he fell just standing up, the Parkinson's keeping his brain from telling his feet to move. I felt a natural pity for him but not much more. He was never around when I was a child, and the few discussions we had did little more than expose the fault lines between us, the differences in our views, his beliefs and mine.

In the cool of the evening my wife and I walked the rim of the course. As we crossed from green to green, connecting the dots, we talked about going somewhere. We had traveled a lot in our lives and when we were out on the road we wanted to move. To see. To learn. Even walking the fairways in the dark was better than being inside. The course seemed less of an aberration then, less an imposition of human will than a natural clearing. In daylight it looked too artificial. Too obscene. A waste of water and energy. The old men seemed too satisfied with the heaven they'd made of the desert. Watching them hitch their Haggar slacks and flex their golfing gloves, I longed to go where life was more than a game. More than an endless summer vacation.

The place I really wanted to see was the wilderness up around Canyon Creek, where fourteen firefighters had died in a fire several years before, the largest loss of life in U.S. Forest Service history. A student had mentioned the fire in a class I was teaching called Writing About Tragedy — what

we call tragedy today, that is, having stretched that word so far out of shape it's all but lost its meaning. We were discussing Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire* when the student said that the 1949 Mann Gulch fire Maclean wrote about sounded an awful lot like the one near Canyon Creek a half-century later. The student had come from Colorado and was writing about his own father's death in a coal mine accident there. A father who had been a real father to him, whose death two decades earlier his son still mourned.

The book, if you don't know it — if you only know Maclean as the author of *A River Runs Through It* — might be his masterpiece. In it, he writes about being a man as old as my father risking what is left of his life on a sun-seared ridge, searching for how and why a fire killed twelve young men. Beneath it all, what he wants to know, what he tries in vain to imagine, is what it feels like to die young — to fail before you've ever succeeded.

Maclean was obsessed with failure, especially that of the young and strong who face something stronger than they are. He tried for years to write about Custer, to conjure his thoughts as he stood on that hill above the Little Bighorn. He never succeeded. In *A River Runs Through It* he tried to make sense of his own brother's death at 32. He failed there, too, although his failure deepened the story's bittersweet beauty.

Maclean never finished *Young Men and Fire*. It came out two years after his death at 87, the last bits patched

The old men seemed too satisfied with the heaven they'd made of the desert. Watching them hitch their Haggar slacks and flex their golfing gloves, I longed to go where life was more than a game.

together by an editor somewhere. Part of what makes it compelling is the sense of desperation he puts on the page, the desperation of a man who was born to be a writer and became a teacher instead. Even the success of *A River Runs Through It* (published when he was 73) couldn't convince him entirely that he hadn't failed in life. Part of his failure, he seemed to think, was growing old without doing anything heroic. Without living bravely like those young men on the ridge.

"*Young Men and Fire* is as much about growing old as it is about dying young," I told my students. "Who is the failure? Who the hero? The one who dies young and strong or the one who watches himself decay and perseveres? These are the questions Maclean is asking." My students were young, much younger than I, so it was easier for them to understand the fear of the boys who scrambled as far as they could up a ridge before being burned alive than the fear of an aging writer afraid he has wasted his life. A writer and teacher and former firefighter myself, I could understand both, especially since I had reached middle age.

It was my own past as a firefighter as much as anything else that made me want to see where those fourteen young people died. Most of them came from Oregon where I spent my college summers stationed at a U.S. Forest Service camp on Mt. Hood. I worked on enough big fires to remember the sound of trees exploding from seething pitch, the look of glowing ash where stumps had burned down into the ground, and the feel of smoke so thick your eyes were sores, your chest a hive of slashing razors. I knew what it felt like to lose your way in all that smoke and heat, to run for

your life because the wind has shifted, driving the flames straight at you.

I came close to dying just once fighting a fire, not in a forest but on a farm. A state crew of two took care of flare-ups in the valleys east of Mt. Hood but sometimes we helped them out. On this particular day, the valley winds were strong and gusting, whipping a tiny blaze on a wheat farm into a full-blown fire. When we arrived, the flames were burning the drought-dried stalks in an enormous field. From the road we could see the haloed heat in the distance, the tongues flicking up to lick the sky.

Our crew boss that day was an older man we called Chilkootee who talked as laconically as he moved, at about the speed of a possum. He had a turtle-like head and a mouth that was always leaking tobacco juice. His shirt never stayed tucked in and his belt buckle skewed to one side, but we trusted him because he had been around longer than any of us. He deployed most of the crew along the road but he sent another boy and me straight across the field. He wanted us to dig a line down to dirt, to rob the blaze of fuel as he had been taught. As you would in a forest. We were young and gung-ho and ran off to do what he asked, but before we were halfway across, the wind shifted.

We were foolish to listen to him, foolish not to think for ourselves. The first thing you learn in fire school is how different fire acts in different conditions, especially with different fuels. In duff inches thick (the ground cover found in most western forests) fire creeps along, creating mostly smoke. It isn't dangerous unless it crowns. Crowning means getting up in the branches where flames can travel fast and hot. When fire crowns, the best thing to do is run for your life. The

same is true with a fuel like grass or wheat where fire moves faster than anywhere else. Grassland fires are like acrobats, leaping ahead as much as a quarter mile. They can create their own conditions, drying out fuels in front of them and forming their own winds.

I remember the acrid smell of the smoke that day, the feel of the wheat brushing my legs. It was up to our waist and terribly dry, the ground beneath it hard and uneven. When the fire turned, Chilkoot yelled. When I looked at him, he waved frantically. The fire was heading toward us, gaining speed. The other boy was faster than I and quickly outpaced me. I ran as hard as I could and as I ran I stared at the roil of flame and smoke, scared but also fascinated. At the very last moment the fire veered and thundered past, so close I felt its breath. When I looked where I'd been a moment before, there was nothing but blackened stubble.

I never trusted anyone ever again with my life. With my father gone, I had learned growing up to stand on my own. To make my own decisions. The fire that day convinced me there was wisdom in that. Survival depended on independence.

I DIDN'T THINK MY FATHER WOULD WANT TO GO TO CANYON CREEK. He rarely left his house anymore. The sins of his youth had overtaken him. The smoking. The drinking. The stress of divorce. His hand shook every time he raised a fork and he napped away the afternoons. What little strength he had was spent in rearguard actions against emphysema, pneumonia and congestive

heart failure. He needed oxygen and used a walker. When he heard about the fire, though, he was ready to go.

What he wanted, I think, was just to be out in the open air instead of inside dying. In his younger years, he had gone around the country selling fish—a traveling salesman with all the traits that term implies. I wondered sometimes if it seemed strange to him living so far from the sea.

While his wife and I placed oxygen canisters in the trunk of his yellow Mercedes, he labored to flex his knees

He needed oxygen and used a walker. When he heard about the fire, though, he was ready to go. What he wanted, I think, was just to be out in the open air instead of inside dying.

and bend his waist, to push back the Parkinson's enough to fall into his seat. He insisted on sitting up front, not just to see but to give directions. He didn't know which road to take or where to turn—he was hopeless at that—but he knew

when his wife was driving too fast or coming too close to another car. His confidence soared when he supervised.

I DON'T REMEMBER NOW HOW FAR WE HAD TO DRIVE, but when we finally saw the sign for what was called the "Storm King Fire" it was almost time to turn around. We had a dinner date in town that evening. Two men at a Texaco had told me you could hike a trail and see the fire from the lookout at the top, but they didn't know exactly where the trail was. By the time we found it near a cluster of memorial plaques we had no more than an hour. My father and his wife stayed in the car while Sylvia and I got out and scanned the faces of the fourteen dead, all etched in bronze. All smiling. We found a map that showed the lookout 700 yards away.

"How long would it take to go that far?" she asked. She made it clear that I'd be going on my own.

"Not long," I said. "I'll run."

I was forty-three that year I saw my father that last time. Several days a week I ran a fast three miles up and down a hill. Seven hundred yards seemed nothing. I had no doubt I'd be back before we had to head for home. Before my lungs and legs were tested. Before my father even had a chance to fall asleep.

I took the first hill like a mountain goat, scrambling across the rocks. The air was cold and perfect for a run, I thought, and I was happy for the challenge, for the need to reach the top before a certain time. Passing through an open patch, I saw my father's old Mercedes far down in the parking lot and I felt fit and capable and young.

Shortly after that, however, something happened. As I covered the next patch of ground, my legs began to weaken. I forced my feet to move but then my lungs began to ache, my heart to pound. My head grew lighter and my throat began to burn. I didn't understand but I kept going, pushing through the pain on will alone. I didn't stop to think that Canyon Creek was just about as high as Denver, a mile higher than the hill I ran at home. Instead, I gasped for breath and thought about Maclean, his description of those firefighters at the end. Their lungs were stretched and seared, he wrote. "A world was coming where no organ of the body had consciousness but the lungs."

I'd never smoked or struggled just to breathe before that day. Despite my one close call, I'd never faced a moment like those firefighters faced when fire is suddenly upon you, burning off your clothes and choking off your breath, cauterizing flesh until it splits and bubbles. I'd never felt the fear that comes with knowing you are going to

die. But there it was, inside my chest, that consciousness. The pain came not from things I'd done while young or even from the cold. It came from something I'd been able to ignore, living as I did down by the sea: I was getting old myself. I would have to face my own decay. In a flash, I saw that there were things I couldn't do, not anymore.

Places I would never

go, not at the speed I wanted to. How many of the air sacs that once lined my lungs were gone? I wondered. How many capillaries had collapsed, no longer capable of moving oxygen?

I pushed the consciousness aside and did my best to run. To keep my feet in motion. Each time my breath ran out, I slowed until I had it back. Each time I topped a ridge and saw a higher one ahead, I kicked until I reached it. My legs seized like the pistons in an aging engine. Acid ate into my lungs. My heart felt huge and hard, forcing thickened blood through fragile veins. And yet some devil drove me on until the sun was gone, the air grown colder, snowflakes riding on the wind. When I paused, my pulse refused to slow. I could feel the contours of

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the pistons in an aging engine.
Acid ate into my lungs.*

my throat, my trachea, the bronchial tubes that strained to channel oxygen. I had always taken pride in pushing harder; this time, though, I feared I'd pushed too much. Yet I kept going. I kept climbing. Suffering each jagged slice of breath until I saw the final rise. Above it there was only sky.

The last few feet I stumbled on the rocks. My body now was only pain.

My thought was: let the ache inside my lungs consume me; let my heart do what it will, beat its way right through my chest or stop, exhausted. When I looked across that barren ground where those young firefighters died, Maclean came back to me, this time as a jinn that whispered in the blast of wind, the roil of sky. The air around me swirled as

he had said it would above a gulch, atop a ridge, the sudden shifts that make the fire down below impossible to forecast.

There was nothing certain there, that's what I felt. Nothing I could do to stop whatever happened. Nothing I had ever done or thought or knew, nothing I had ever owned, could help me. I had never felt so all alone. There was nothing living on the hills in front of me, and I wondered if there was anything inside me either. Anything I'd gained or lost that mattered. Eight years after those young firefighters died, the land was still as black as ever, the soil as grayed with ash. Far down, almost out of sight, I saw a sterile slash of river, its surface hard as steel. The only trees were snags, black against the ashen clouds. The only sounds were winds and my heart's thunder.

There was nothing certain there, that's what I felt. Nothing I could do to stop whatever happened. Nothing I had ever done or thought or knew, nothing I had ever owned, could help me. I had never felt so all alone.

The only God there on that hill, if there was any God at all, was one who predates time. One who brooded over chaos and the void before the earth was made. It was an angry God, a jealous God, a God who waved his hand and scorched the land, killing trees and deer and people. It was not a God I knew, or wanted to, but one, I understood, that everyone encounters: the

God before whom everybody fails.

I didn't want to look, not anymore. I wanted just to turn and run. But my heart beat its fist against my chest and there was glass inside my lungs and so I forced myself to stay and take in everything I saw. To stand alone with God and nature and their awful wonder.

ON THE WAY BACK DOWN, I WALKED and hoped the ache inside my chest and in my head would stop. Instead, I started wheezing. My lungs felt like an old and plugged-up garden hose — hard and brittle, stretched too far. I tried to jog a little but I couldn't get my breath. When I reached an opening I saw the valleys to the west, a shaft of sunlight slipping through the clouds, and down below an idling Mercedes. It looked so small from there, so fragile. I imagined everyone inside — my wife, my father's wife and him. I could see him sleeping there and hear the oxygen, the hiss and wheeze through plastic tunnels keeping him alive. A luxury car had seemed the height of vanity, of pride, but I looked forward to the leather seats, the quiet and the warmth that flowed out

of a well-made heater. What comfort it would be to lean against the headrest, knowing that the engine wouldn't fail, that the pistons and the wheels would pump and turn as they were meant to.

By the time I reached the car, it was too late for our dinner date but no one said a word. They could hear my wheezing, I suppose, or see the dead exhaustion in my face. As we headed home, the air began to darken. A few stray snowflakes floated by. The women carried on a conversation but my father sat as still as I. From time to time I looked up at his tired face and listened to the air rush through his nose. He'd fought fires, too, when he was young. A year ago, he'd still played golf. I didn't know it then but two weeks later he'd be in a wheelchair for good. One more year and he'd be dead.

Outside, the snow began to fall in earnest, a last defiant shout of winter on the cusp of May. The windshield filled with white and then my father spoke. He had to stop, he said. I knew what he meant because I'd gone to see my doctor just the month before

and he had told me that my prostate was enlarged. It happens to all men, he said, as we begin to age.

I had never loved my father. Never felt a kinship with him. That afternoon, however, as it snowed, I felt a love for him in failure. A kinship in embarrassment. By the time we found a restroom off the road, the flurries had become a blizzard. He pulled the tubes out of his nose and slowly pushed the car door open. He barely had the strength to stand. I got out and walked behind him but I let him navigate the storm alone. He leaned his head into the wind and moved his feet as if he walked a tightrope. I watched him shuffle, try to trust his legs, as he had never done with me. I felt compassion for him then, and pride. It took him ages just to gain the sidewalk. Then the building. He gained them, though, on his own legs. He paused a moment underneath the overhang and through the blizzard I could see him as he was. A man. Embarrassed and a failure maybe, but a man. That's how I see him still and always will.



Sylvia McGregor

Michael McGregor's nonfiction, fiction and poetry have appeared in *The Seattle Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *The South Dakota Review*, *The Crab Orchard Review*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Poets & Writers* and many other publications. He holds an MFA from Columbia University and is a former editor-in-chief of *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*. His writing awards include the Daniel Curley Award for Short Fiction and an Illinois Arts Council literary grant. He teaches at Portland State University.

Kyle Churney

Albuquerque

I have always fixated on the great waste of electricity
that fires the flashing orange bulbs, spinning cherries &
crazed bells of the slot machine, when I could have cupped

the horde of coins, pursed my lips to drink from them –

or simply shoved them in my pocket like a good idea.
For every pleasure, always, something is wasted.

Are you surprised that I was miserable in Albuquerque?



The sun shined – not through a coat of whitewash as when

it shined in Illinois. It rubbed my arms to tell me that it shined.
My arms were jubilant. They cried, tears catching on my armhair.

Raised with a cornfield for a yard & dirt, dirt, dirt in the distance,

weren't the copper mountains that sliced open the sky
interesting? Were chollas not
preferable to milkweed, Kentucky bluegrass?

In Albuquerque, I could see like a gnat in a soapbubble
the curve of the horizon.

In a month I didn't look. I watched from the window

cars that weren't on the street,
people who didn't walk down the sidewalk.

How close those mountains came to pushing me back to Chicago
(where I flew several times to fly back again,

defeated, to the gloom of perpetual sunshine).



What, Past-tense Kyle, oracle of all decisions good,
did you expect to happen?
Chaise lounges & orgies & so much carne adovada
the table's legs threatened to buckle?
Could anything ever be that good — or bad?
Listen. As the locals say, at least it's not Amarillo.



Letter from the Women I've Slighted, Partially Disguised as Mette Gauguin to Paul

What matters if I alienate others; for the multitude I shall be an enigma, for a few I shall be a poet, and sooner or later, merit will have its way.

– P.G.

1.

*You, Paul, husband and defaulter, you,
begrudging as the August sun
that broils my milk-pale skin for no reason*

*other than I live. You, do you consider I
– Denmark, December – should need to buy
my own coat – you, unwilling to afford*

*something costless as your living body
on a frostbit night? Go, laugh. Plead
your greatness: All are of my opinion: art's my*

*business, my capital, future of my children,
honor of the name I've given them.
A famous father may prove a valuable asset.*

*Forgive my ignorance in taking your
constant rejection as a sign of rejection.
That you, the harlot-monger wearing*

*five-years-ragged canvas pants and laughable
goatee will hang under heaven-high ceilings
keeping Courbets and Caravaggios company.*

2.

You have more hubris, Kyle, than we knew:
more than in the silent nanosecond when
you slammed your cell-phone shut & traffic

disappeared from Sheffield Avenue –
I'm the best, you said. You're fucking up.
Remember when you broke that kiss & we

could sense the whole of your fidelity crack
like stained-glass?
Well, Kyle, you torch abandoned churches now.

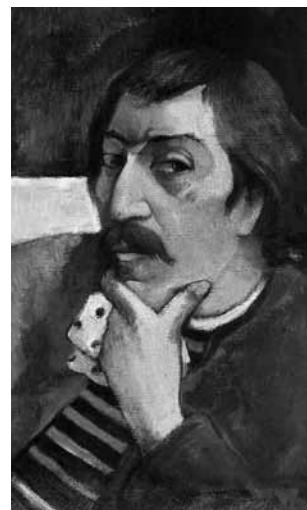
Look at you, sulking in paradise – Why?
For fashion? Stylistics? Hunched below
the gnawed walls of a particleboard desk,

watching your sullen reflection in the lens
of your folded sunglasses – watching
for the sake of languor, of wasting something,

minutes counting up the hours on your phone.
And your comparison with Gauguin?
As forced & rigid as your handshake. You like

appropriating voices? Then say this for us:
*Waving the gun at yourself only makes you
less the martyr, only shows your reductive,*

spoiled worldview: the other people, & you.



Moving West

A foreign flag: the wheaten strands of a man's mullet
snap in the wind.

A few hundred miles, a few hours, forty bucks of
regular octane. An apple & water bottle

I call friends. Sorghum. Caliche—Wow.
A highlighter tracing of the

route (I-70 West) has trapped me (page 41) in an atlas.

The barbwire dividers of my life:
half-fallen fence posts that once pulled taut

against every blade of needle grass.
My dirty windshield stains everywhere, here,

Burlington, Colorado,
O Unfortunate Arbiter of Budget Motels.

Yesterday in Illinois, home, hunched at the helm
in flannel, loam engulfed a sullen farmer,
plowing—
the black cloud roiling like conspiracy.

Should I have heeded that?
All I know is this: I've driven this far.

August 2006



Kyle Churney has poems forthcoming in *Whiskey Island* and *Zone 3*. The former poetry editor of *Blue Mesa Review* and a graduate of the University of New Mexico's MFA program, he lives in Chicago.

Richard Dokey

Big Two-Hearted River: Part III

There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp.



Sandra Cunningham

When we were boys, the stream was not crowded. My brother and I walked the stream with our father. We watched him cast. We watched him work the tandem rig of flies across the white riffles. We watched him catch trout. We watched him put the trout into the wicker basket he carried under his arm, sprinkling the trout with wet grass and sweet fern. We carried wicker baskets. Sometimes we dipped the baskets into the stream to keep the trout cool and fresh. We sat by the water's edge. We watched our father clean the trout, slitting them from the vent hole up through the center of the jaw, taking everything out with one pull. He threw the guts onto the bank for the animals and birds. He washed the trout, swishing them back and forth in the current, pushing the stubborn, blood-black grit along the spine free with his thumb. We went back to camp. Our father fried the trout with the heads on for dinner. In the morning he used the grease for pancakes. The pancakes were crisp and shiny at the edges. Deer came down to drink or to cross the stream. There were bears.

One day, when we were still boys, our father no longer hiked the stream. He was fat. He smoked a pack a day. He drank. So he fished from a pram in the pond above the stream. My brother fished with him, for reasons that are complicated and have to do with our mother.

I fished alone.

Our father died forty years ago and recently our mother died. My brother has been divorced. I have been divorced. We go to Chile to catch trout. We go to New Zealand and Alaska. We go to the trout streams of the Rockies. If he fishes up, I fish down. If he fishes down, I fish up. If we fish the same way, one of us goes on around and fishes ahead out of sight.

Alone, I squint into the sun, waiting for a rise.

We no longer carry baskets. It is one of our few shared moralities. As the years passed, and the magazines appeared—all with the same cover—and the movie *A River Runs Through It*, the stream became crowded. Adorned by equipment worth thousands, scores of people were guided by men who wanted \$500 to say, use this fly, stand over here, cast over there; who provided deli sandwiches with the crusts removed, pink champagne, quiche, tossed green salad, brownies made by the guide's wife or mother, and cloth napkins. The deer hide. The bears are in Alaska.

My brother and I fish now mostly in Montana on a freestone river that comes out of the mountains and empties into the Yellowstone below Livingston. The land along the river from the mouth to the state preserve is privately owned. We know the ranchers. We fish in solitude. My brother fishes up. Or I fish up. He goes around. Or I go around.

I squint alone into the hot Montana sun.

I tie my own flies. Something is fine about hooking a trout with a fly you have made, fighting the trout until it wins or you win, and if you win, releasing the trout into the river, to watch it—blue and red and silver—sink to a dark lair behind a stone that has been there thousands of years.

My brother is old now. I am older. We fish from morning until one or two. We go to the motel, have a drink, smoke a cigar, take a nap or walk around town. It's a small town. We know the people. They are friendly people. After the divorces we began coming here. We stay in the room together for two weeks, just the way we stayed together when we were boys. We don't talk about politics or religion. We don't talk about his kids or my kids. We talk about trout, how many, how big, how hard they fought, how many were lost that were bigger than any we caught. We talk about the people who own the ranches or live in the town.

When we first came here, everybody we knew was alive the following year. For quite awhile they were alive. Ten years ago Virgil Hardin died, then his wife Anna, who was in a wheelchair. A lawyer

from Chicago bought Virgil's ranch. The lawyer posted no trespassing signs along the river. He said it was his piece of paradise. He wants to buy Clarence Baltzer's ranch just below. Ruth, Clarence's wife, died a few years back. We visited Ruth in the nursing home. Orville Henderson, who was once a state senator, died at his ranch. And Virgil Heath (there are two Virgils), who owns the dry goods store in town, just lost his wife. We ate dinner with Virgil and Anna at the Country Pride and with Clarence and Ruth at Prospector Pizza. Orville played his banjo for us the year he died. Virgil Heath was in the Navy in the Second War and had a ship blown out from under him. We buy Virgil coffee at the drug store while we sip the best malteds this side of the Missouri. I subscribe to the town weekly so I can have the people with me in California. Sometimes there are obituaries.

When I am on the stream, ahead of my brother or he ahead of me—having whistled and gone around—I think these things. I miss strikes.

My brother's knee goes out. He limps and wears a brace. Like a scarecrow, he stands in one place. Last year there was something about his stomach. He spent a night in the bathtub for relief, turning the hot water handle with his toes. The doctor talked about stomach lining and weak pockets. Old age, the doctor said. Drink fluids. Eat yogurt.

I had an operation and take pills.

It's hard now sometimes for me to sleep. I try to fish my way there, but remembering the places and the trout keeps me interested, and I stay awake. My brother snores on the other bed. I fish in darkness. The water is above my waist. I can't see the fly. I can't see the rise. Something Cretaceous lifts the stream.

I met a fisherman. He was a lawyer too, but from Portland. I met him at Point of Rocks access to Silver Creek, east of Ketchum, Idaho. He had a red pickup and a fifth wheel. He parked at the access during the brown drake hatch, which comes off around Memorial Weekend and lasts eight or ten days. I chase the hatch too. I did not talk to him. He sat smiling alone sometimes in a canvas chair out front of the trailer. I was all the way from California for the brown drake hatch. My brother was not with me. My brother does not like fishing spring creeks. I was with Elaine. She paints landscapes while I fish. Silver Creek is the best spring creek.

One day the fishing was slow. The lawyer sat in the canvas chair drinking a beer. I put my rod against the fence.

He said his name was Hugh Anton. He fished the brown drake hatch.

"I've seen your rig," I said.

"I had a different rig before," he said. "I've been coming eight years."

"I've made it the last few myself," I said.

"Like a beer?"

He was a divorced lawyer from Portland. He wasn't lawyering anymore, he said. He was on permanent disability. He could not stand for more than thirty minutes. His legs hurt so much. His spine hurt so much. It was a childhood affliction. It was getting worse, he said. He had had operations. He had almost died.

Silver Creek was perfect, smooth for miles, slick and clear and clean. You could skip a stone across it underhand.

He fished in a tube harness. I saw him in the tube, floating, casting down and across, a hunched, sun-baked yellow piece of flotsam beneath the blue Idaho sky.

"I have time," he said. He laughed. "So I'm a trout bum. I sold the house. I sold the car. I sold it all. When the hatch is done here, I'm driving to the Henry's Fork. The hatch will be there too. Give me your e-mail address. I'm writing my fishing chronicles. It feels good to write. My friends want me to write."

A bed was at the rear of the trailer, together with a chemical toilet, a shower, a small sofa and table, a tiny stove and refrigerator. The nose of the trailer was customized for fly tying. He had had two windows cut in, one on either side, and when he sat tying, he could see the stream. He could see birds and animals. At night he could see moonlight on the water, a trout rise and the ring of the rise disappear into the shadows along the bank. Young guys sleep in cars or a pup tent. They sleep on the ground. Hugh Anton was getting old. He had afflictions. He set himself up, in a lawyerly way. It was organized. He couldn't stand in a courtroom. He couldn't stand in the creek. He took a half dozen Vicodin to stop the pain. But he could float. I watched him from the road, floating alone, his graphite rod a bright sting against the blue Idaho sky.

One evening he baked Cornish game hens for us. The hens were stuffed with wild rice. We had red wine. We had asparagus. We had white sweet corn and sourdough French bread from a market in Bellevue, where Elaine and I stayed. For dessert we had chocolate lava cake. We sat at the table in the trailer. A stereo was built into a cabinet. He played Eric Satie and Claude Debussy. He played Poulenc. Outside, the creek moved silently. In the half-light it was silver gray. The moon was a platter upon the surface. The tying vice at the mahogany counter in the nose of the trailer was silver too. It was a quiet silver. He was a trout bum from Portland. He had no wife. He had no house or job. It was a trout bum's life, in a glorious, lawyerly way. We traded flies. I gave him my e-mail address.

I liked listening to him. He talked about himself or about trout. The vocabulary of his failed marriage, his illness and travels rolled from him as easily as the blue smoke of the cigars he lit, one after the other. He never lost a case in court, he said. He said he loved his kids and forgave his wife. He talked about how many pills he took to stop the pain. There was time, he said. It was time enough.

He talked about leasing the red cabin a half-mile up the creek from the access. He had a dream about friends coming to fish that part of the creek. No one fished it. It was on private land. He talked about what he got from disability and how he spent the money. He hid nothing. We were invited for dinner the following year. He was a lawyer from Portland. There are different lawyers. Hugh Anton had no precedent.

One day I went early to the access to have a cup of heavy, dark coffee according to Anton. The trailer was gone.

At the end of the month, the first issue of the Chronicles appeared in my e-mail box. A quote from William Blake was at the top of the first page: The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

A litany of notable birds and mammals he had seen followed: Bullock's Oriole, Cinnamon Teal, Common Merganser, Golden Eagle, Western Tanager, Coyote, Muskrat, Antelope, Otter, Elk. The list went on. The recipe for June was included. It was stuffed Cornish game hens. He wrote how to prepare them. Each day of the month was there, where fished, what used, how fished, how many caught, how many lost. If he met anyone or talked to anyone, he wrote what was talked about. At the end of the day he wrote what he ate, what CD he listened to. He wrote about what he read before sleep. He read stories about fishing. On June 10th he had a discussion at the Henry's Fork. Another fisherman said that a real fly fisherman only casts a dry fly to rising fish. Hugh smiled. He told the fisherman he enjoyed drifting soft hackles beneath the surface into a pod of rising trout. He said he had been known to thread (I could see him smiling through the words) a bare hook through the abdomen of a grasshopper and to float the grasshopper down, legs kicking, into the shadows beneath tall trees. There was one page for each day, thirty pages in all. On the page for June 8th, Elaine, Hugh and I sat down in the trailer to baked Cornish game hens stuffed with wild rice. Outside, the moon shone upon the creek.

"A nice couple," the Chronicles said. "They're divorced too." That night he read again the one about the young man who fished alone in the woods. He read it twice. "Then I had a Manhattan," the Chronicles said, "Then I had another Manhattan. It was one too many. I couldn't sleep."

In Montana, at the end of July, I told my brother about the disabled lawyer from Portland who was now a trout bum. I told him that when we returned home in August, I would find in my e-mail box thirty-one days of size 18 mayflies drifting, drag free, into the jaws of enormous trout. I would find Beethoven, Copeland and cabernet. I would find sparrows, hawks, eagles, white-tailed deer, beaver and squirrels. I would find the wind and the sun and braised duck steaming upon the table. I would see moonlight upon the water. Before sleep, the old man might fish the sea again or the trout stream of his youth, alone,

without father or brother. Cramped by pain, Hugh floated in that yellow tube. The water was to his waist. He could not see the fly. Ahead, in the darkness, something Cretaceous rose.

My brother yawned.

"Let's get something to eat," he said. "Aren't you starved?"

The Chronicles for July did not come. Through the long, black days of winter, I tied flies and waited for the sun. On Memorial Day we were at Silver Creek. The trailer was not there.

I took the dirt road along the creek to the general store at Picabo, where the creek meets State Highway 20. Bob Monaghan, who runs the store, stood behind the counter. Last season Bob took six-dozen of Hugh's flies to sell at the store. He wanted six dozen more.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"He's not coming," Bob said.

"What do you mean? What happened?"

"They found him in the tube," Bob said, "Up in Canada somewhere, floating along. He was full of drugs."

I looked at him.

"I don't know about that," Bob said.

Photographs of Hemingway were on the back wall. He lived here at the end. I went to the wall. In one of the photographs Gary Cooper was with Hemingway. Bud Purdy was between them holding a pair of field glasses. Bud owned the ranch on Silver Creek where I often fished. Cooper and Hemingway held shotguns.

Before we left, I went to the cemetery outside Ketchum where Hemingway is buried. I looked at the granite slab.

It's time to go on around.



This is Richard Dokey's fourth appearance in *Weber*, a fact about which he is most proud. His stories, which are published regularly in various journals, have won a number of prizes. *Pale Morning Dun*, his last collection of stories, published by University of Missouri Press, was nominated for the American Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award. *The Hollywood Cafe*, his latest novel, was released in the summer of 2009.

Mikel Vause

Beatles, Ballads, Politics and Presley

A Conversation with Roger McGuinn of The Byrds



PRELUDE

As a kid growing up, my best friend, George Reid, was from Scotland. He and I were "thick as thieves." From kindergarten through high school there was hardly a weekend that we didn't see each other. I remember distinctly after the 1963 "British Invasion" arguing endlessly about which band was the best, the Beatles or the Beach Boys. Of course he lobbied strongly for the Beatles. Just a year later we were able to put our musical differences aside when The Byrds came on the scene. I had always been a bit of a folksy, preferring acoustical music and lyrics that told a story, and George was a "dyed in the wool" rocker, but with The Byrds we arrived at a very happy middle ground. While George was in love with the strong 12-string musicality of The Byrds, I was thrilled to hear their folk-rock covers of old folk favorites like Pete Seeger's "Turn, Turn, Turn," Woody Guthrie's "Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd," and numerous Bob Dylan songs like "Mr. Tambourine Man," "All I Really Want to Do," and "It's All Over Bay Blue." While George had some excellent musical ability, picked up the electric guitar and was able to quickly learn to play many of The Byrds' songs, I had no musical ability to speak of. Nonetheless, I loved to listen to The Byrds and was able to memorize their lyrics. I also knew how the music was supposed to sound and could easily pick up any changes or variations when others tried to cover particular songs.

The Byrds were America's first "super group." They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and in 2004, Rolling Stone Magazine included The Byrds as number 45 on their list of "The 100 Greatest Artists of All Time." Formed in 1964 in Los Angeles, The Byrds' unique sound was based in the American folk

tradition but was transformed by the use of electric guitars, particularly McGuinn's Rickenbacker twelve string. Although The Byrds were most famous for their covers, they also had several hits of their own composition, like "I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better," "Eight Miles High," and "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star." The Byrds went through several incarnations moving from "Folk Rock" to "Space Rock" to "Psychedelic Rock," and in 1968 they released a "Country Rock" album entitled Sweetheart of the Rodeo. They finally disbanded in 1973. The Byrds' group members changed through the years. The group started with McGuinn, Gene Clark and David Crosby and was later joined by Chris Hillman and Michael Clarke. They were finally joined by Gram Parsons, Clarence White and Gene Parsons. Many talented musicians moved in and out, but one person remained a constant – Roger McGuinn.

Well, returning to my friend George, let it be said that our lives took different paths. But while he went on to acting and modeling and I found work in the academy, one interest remained constant in our lives – The Byrds. When Bill Fruth, the Director of the Student Union at Weber State University, asked me to help bring Roger McGuinn, the front man of The Byrds and an icon in the folk music community, to the university, I was, needless to say, thrilled. It gave me the opportunity to introduce my students to a man of genius and for me to meet and interact with one of my musical heroes. I want to thank the Weber State University Student Association and Bill Fruth for affording me the opportunity to interview Roger McGuinn and to have him meet with my class.

Vause: For seventeen years at Weber State I've taught a class on the literature of the 60s. We've spent a lot of time talking about obviously all the "isms" of the 60s and the influence music had on those "isms." Actually the students' favorite parts of the class was getting to analyze and explicate the music.

When I was a kid, I had an older friend who was just really into digging out hidden meanings and metaphors in music. We would sit for hours at his house and analyze songs and try to figure out what "Yellow Submarine" really meant or what "Mister Tambourine Man" was really all about. That's what, in part, led me into a life of academia and literary criticism.



McGuinn: George [Harrison] told me it was because the band [The Beatles] was in tubes all the time. They were in aluminum tubes, airplanes, and hotel rooms. They felt like they were always in a submarine. That was the real meaning behind "Yellow Submarine."

That makes sense, particularly because it's "coming from the horse's mouth," so to speak. I read some interviews of yours online and I noticed that Gram Parsons had problems with airplanes.

Yes. Gram did not like to fly at all. Neither did Gene Clark.

Was it the fear of flying that caused them to bail on The Byrds?

The reason Gram bailed was more because he wanted to hang out with Keith Richards [of the Rolling Stones] in London. Keith and Gram bonded in London. We all went to Stonehenge— Mick [Jagger], Keith [Richards], and Chris Hillman. Carlos Vernal did not go. We went to Stonehenge and had a bottle of whiskey. We were passing it around, trying to keep warm. It was freezing and the wind was blowing horizontally, and it was rainy and cold. I was hiding behind the stones to stay out of the wind. That was my only interest in Stonehenge.

I asked Mick what it was and he said twice, "It's the product of a megalithic society." That's all he said. He sort of memorized that, he didn't go into any greater detail. Then, Mick was very generous. We all

went to a little town and he bought us all new socks because our feet were totally soaked from walking around in the mud and the sod around Stonehenge.

That's a real English thing to do, buy someone socks.

Yeah. Well, I guess they'd done that on the road. Anyway, when we got back to London, Mick, Keith and Gram Parsons all became good buddies, but mostly Keith and Gram kind of bonded, and when it came time to go down on the rest of the tour, Gram said, "Oh no, I can't go to South Africa because they have this thing call Apartheid and I'm against it." Well, I was against Apartheid too, and that was when the late Miriam Makiba, who

just passed away a few days ago [November 9, 2008], told me back in 1961 (when I was traveling with her in the American South and a car-load of boys pulled up alongside and were threatening us with insults), “It’s really worse in my country. You should go there if you ever have the chance.” And I said, “I will.” So that was when I went to South Africa and Gram didn’t. Gram was not only afraid to fly but also wanted to hang out with Keith. That was the whole story.

Let me begin with the question of how you got started in music.

When I was thirteen, I was given a transistor radio as a grammar-school graduation present. It was a new invention at the time, and I took it around on my bicycle in Chicago and listened to WJJD, which was the rock and roll station. Elvis Presley came over with “Heartbreak Hotel,” and I liked that so much I wanted to get a guitar and be like Elvis. Up to that point I had not wanted to play music, but at that intersection I did. I wanted to go get a guitar, and so I got one and learned how to play a little bit and that got me going in music. Then I got into folk music when I was fifteen. A folk singer came to my high school named Bob Gibson. He didn’t make it as big as some of the people he influenced, like the Kingston Trio and the Limelighters. (Many other of the new era’s biggest artists, from Buffalo Springfield to Crosby, Stills and Nash, from Richie Havens to The Byrds and Flying Burrito Brothers, acknowledged Gibson’s seminal influence.)

I read you went to an art high school that specialized in folk music.

No, I went to a prep school called The Latin School of Chicago, and on the side I went to the Old Town School of Folk Music. I went to both at the same time.

So that’s where you learned to play the folk guitar and got introduced to the twelve string?

Yes. I got my first twelve string in 1957.

Aside from Elvis, who were your favorite folk musicians? Who were the people who influenced you in that early period?

Well, once I got initiated into folk music, I learned about Pete Seeger and hung out with the Clancy Brothers and people playing at the Gate of Horn [a Chicago folk club]—Josh White and all the folk singers. Judy Collins was around and Peter Yarrow was a solo artist. I also met Glen Yarborough and

the Limelighters. Finally, I got a job with the Limelighters playing with them.

I read, too, that you had been associated with the Chad Mitchell Trio.

Right, after the Limelighters. I did a month with the Limelighters just to record an album, and then I went up to San Francisco hanging out at the Hungry Eye [a San Francisco folk club] and got a call from Frank Freed who was representing Chad Mitchell. Chad wanted somebody to back them up. They didn’t have a backup musician. So I flew to New York and Chad told me that he didn’t have another guy in his trio. One of the guys had gone back to college, and so we had to find somebody to

fill in. We searched around and finally came back to New York and found Joe Frasier who was a Broadway chorus singer.

Was that pre-John Denver or post-John Denver?

John Denver was probably still in high school at that time.

He came along a lot later?

He replaced Chad Mitchell. Chad left his own trio. I don't know why. Maybe he wanted to be a solo artist.

I saw John Denver in 1971 at a little Baptist college in Liberty, Missouri, called William Jewel College. He was just barely starting out as solo artist – so your involvement was much earlier?

I'm talking about 1960.

In the class I mentioned earlier, I introduce students to the idea of music as a political tool. We've just finished a section on conformity and rebellion. We read stories and poetry, and we watched a filmed theatrical performance of Arthur Miller's All My Sons, which is an anti-war kind of play. It was an attack on the previous generation's "ends justify the means" philosophy. Obviously, a lot of the music of the sixties was political, as were many of the "isms" in the sixties. Do you consider your music political, and do you consider yourself a politician?

Well, I have dabbled in the political end of music, but for the most part I'm an entertainer and like to take people's minds off of their

troubles, not remind them of them. I've gotten into some political things. My wife Camilla and I wrote an environmental song back in 1990 that was on my *Back from Real* album called "The Trees are All Gone." The thrust of it was about the rainforests and the Amazon and how they're clearing the timber there to make cattle land. It's not good for more than a year or two and then the land just goes to waste and the rainforest is destroyed and the ecological system is just destroyed. I did "He

was a Friend of Mine," which is about John F. Kennedy. It isn't really a political song, but more of a sentimental thing about having liked the feeling we had as Americans. The world liked John F. Kennedy. Whether he was a great president or not is a different question, but he made everybody feel good. Then we did "Draft Morning" and several other songs that had political value to them. But for the most part, I've

been an entertainer and that's what my desire is—to be a folk singer and go around and preserve the folk songs and sing about the stories and things that happened: cowboys, sea shanties and the sailors, the old blues, and things like that. I just love the lore of it.

I love story songs. My wife and I have a little grandson and granddaughter who live with us, and sometimes I sing to them at night before they go to bed. I'm not a very good singer but they think I am. I taught my grandson "Puff the Magic Dragon," which was a real hit with him. Then I taught him the "Greenland Whale Fisheries" song and he'll say, "Grandpa, will you sing me the whale song?"

I love that song.

When you start to talk about folk singers as storytellers, one of the things I tell my students is that in the Middle Ages they had wandering minstrels who were the voice of the people.

Yes, they spread the news that way.

Spread the news and also talked politics. You can say things in a song that you can't say over a pulpit or in print.

You can be subtle in song—to get it past; it's sugar-coated.

If you see yourself primarily as a storyteller and a folk singer, were there any politics with The Byrds? You guys chose to cover a lot of Dylan songs, and Dylan songs—contrary to what Dylan himself says—were somewhat protest songs.

If you analyzed Dylan's career—his early career when he was living with Suze Rotolo [the girl on the cover of Dylan's *The Free Wheelin' Bob Dylan* album]—he was writing songs that were kind of along her political agenda, within her political world. Once he got away from that, he changed his song writing. He became less political and gradually a rock star. He's a chameleon, he goes with whatever. I never saw him as sincerely being a political figure like Woody Guthrie was until the day he died. And Pete Seeger is still a card-carrying communist. But Dylan wasn't there; he was just experimenting with different things. We did Dylan songs. Some of them were protest songs, like "The Times They are a Changing" and "Chimes of Freedom Flashing." I like those songs. They were great songs, but we weren't coming at it from a political point of view either. We were just doing them because they were great songs. They were full of literature.

That's interesting because if you look at Dylan's early influences—his visits to see

Woody Guthrie in the hospital and his association with the political folks—the Beats that were hanging out in Greenwich Village and the Clancy Brothers clearly had a political agenda.

Right, the Alan Ginsbergs. We just missed Kerouac by about two years.

*Kerouac was here in Ogden. If you read *On the Road and Visions of Cody*, he talks about the Kokomo Club. It's a bar on 25th Street.*

I've read *On the Road*. I didn't realize that it was a bar.

Dylan has tried to disavow the label as the spokesperson for a generation. When you see him sing "Blowing in the Wind" at the Newport Folk Festival, there seems to be little question of his "new" status.

Well, he was into it. He believed it, but on the other hand it was something that came easily to him. He could do that and he did it, then he went on to something else.

How did you meet Dylan?

I first saw him in the Village at Gerde's Folk City [Dylan played his first professional gig here on April 11, 1961]. I was still there when he was doing hootenannies. Mike Porco hadn't hired him to be a headliner yet or even an opening act. He was just doing the hootenannies. [On September 26th, 1961, Dylan made his first professional appearance at Gerde's Folk City, which was reviewed in the *New York Times* by Robert Shelton, and Dylan's career took off]. We would all line up and do two or three songs and then go back down to the basement and jam. I was around for that scene and didn't know him. We just said "Hi." Then he got his Columbia Record deal and became Bob Dylan.

How did he feel about the covers that you did of his songs?

He liked them. He came to our rehearsals and gave his stamp of approval—he and Bobby Neuwirth. They listened to some of our presentations of his songs and said, “Wow, you can dance to it.” So he liked it.

How do you feel that music impacts society?

Well, music is a universal language. It's kind of a spiritual language. It impacts society in a number of ways. It soothes the savage beast, it entertains, and it sometimes provokes emotions like sadness or anger. It can do a lot of things. It's an amazing tool and medium.

Do you think there's some responsibility associated with being a musician, when you're able to play with and appeal to important emotions, feelings, and instincts in people?

You know, I really don't. I'm not the Barbra Streisand type of entertainer, where I feel I have to perform for the Democratic National Committee or whatever. We did a thing for Bobby Kennedy, and then he got shot right after that.

How do you think that you personally as well as The Byrds as a band will be received by history? How do you think history is going to treat you guys?

I have no idea. What I'm looking at now is history as it stands. It thinks The Byrds were influential in creating a combination of folk and rock, country and rock, and maybe



experimenting with jazz and rock and space music and psychedelia. That's probably how we will go down.

I spent a lot of money as a kid going to concerts. Two of the best concerts I've ever seen were in 1981, one with the Grateful Dead and one when Bob Dylan and Paul Simon were touring together. Probably one of the

most meaningful concerts I ever saw, however, I saw on television. It was on Austin City Limits, 1989, when Roger McGuinn was playing all The Byrds' songs acoustic.

They used a little too much compression. They compressed the whole track. It sounded alright, though.

I searched and searched for a videotape of that. Where could I buy a copy of that concert? As far as I know it doesn't exist.

Maybe on YouTube.

Today you are here in Ogden and you're going to be playing some of your songs acoustic. I feel like I'm moving back to the 1980s to see this concert once again, and for me that kind of history is exciting because you don't get to go backwards very often.

I wanted you to say a couple of more things, particularly because of what I've been doing with my class. Which musicians, do you think, have had the most impact on American society in the last 30 or 40 years?

Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Jimmy Hendrix, and Eric Clapton. That would be my guess.

Are you being modest, because The Byrds were the first “American Super Group?”

Well, you can throw that in there if you want to. We’ve had some influence.

When you were just starting to make music with The Byrds, you tell the story of Gene Clark coming backstage after you performed for Roger Miller.

When I introduce you tonight, I’m going to tell a little story about the Disney version of Robin Hood because the voice of the Troubadour, the rooster that tells the story and sings the songs, is that of Roger Miller. It was really cool what he and Floyd Axton were doing. A lot of people don’t realize what an impact Floyd Axton had.

He was a big guy—at least in LA. His mother wrote “Heartbreak Hotel” with Elvis and somebody named Tommy Durden. When I was a kid I studied the single of “Heartbreak Hotel” and thought her name was pronounced Oxton. I thought Oxton and Presley wrote it, but it was Axton. May Axton wrote “Heartbreak Hotel” with Tommy Durden.

It’s interesting how these musicians have a family legacy. No one can fail to recognize the influence Peter Seeger has had on American folk music for the past fifty years and continues to have today even at ninety years old. But he seems to come by it naturally as his father, Austin Charles Seeger, and step-mother, Ruth Porter Crawford Seeger, are two of America’s most recog-

nized composers. Ruth was a specialist in folk music and was responsible for putting to music many of Carl Sandburg’s poems under the title, Parades and Panoramas: 25 Songs Collected by Carl Sandburg for the American Songbag.

Did you and your associates in The Byrds have any idea of the impact and the power of your music?

During the ‘60s we were just trying to keep a beat, trying to be a rock band. We were influenced by the Beatles. We wanted to be a Beatles-like band, and we kind of got there.

The Byrds were their favorite band for a while.

John and George said that. John was my favorite Beatle. I think he was really the brains of the outfit. It was his sense of humor.

This is kind of a nostalgic question for me, but I saw Odetta open for Neil Young in about 1969 or 1970 in Salt Lake. I was so taken with her. What was it like for you to get an opportunity to sing with people like Odetta, Pete Seeger, Bob Gibson, and all those others? You’ve played with the legends.

It was wonderful. It was great. I think especially Pete, because he was such a big influence on me once I got into folk music. Of course I loved Odetta and used to see her at the Gate of Horn, and it was wonderful seeing her again in New York and working with her and Josh White, Jr., Tommy Makem, and the Clancy Brothers—just everybody including Gene Ritchey. It was a wonderful experience. We went from home to home and recorded in

their living rooms with a computer, which was a new thing to do at that time. Now, everybody is doing it.

What's happened to all the folk clubs? I was at Gerde's Folk City before it was gone and my sense is that a lot of those places are all jazz clubs now. There's not much folk anymore.

Well, folk enjoyed a rise and a fall like many different art forms do. Right now hip hop is in and folk isn't. Once folk music was as big as hip hop is now.

I wish it still were.

Me too, but you can't force these things on people.

Are there still folk clubs in Chicago?

I don't know, I haven't seen one. The Old Time School of Folk Music has a venue—it has a theater that has folk shows in it.

As far as folk clubs, I don't think they exist anymore. Like the Hungry Eye and the Gate of Horn, they're all gone. The Hungry Eye is still in San Francisco, but it's a jazz club now.

You've said that "Turn, Turn, Turn" is one of your favorite songs. Aside from that song, what would be your top-five favorite recordings?

Well, "Chestnut Mare" would be one of them. "King of the Hill"—I like that a lot. Maybe "Eight Miles High" and "Five Deep" are others just off the top of my head.

I remember hearing "Eight Miles High" for the first time. A friend of mine was a guitar player from Scotland, but he lived in Utah. He played in local bands and used to listen to your stuff a lot. Then he bought Sweet-

heart of the Rodeo. He just couldn't go for the country stuff.

That happened to a lot of people. I've heard it described as the "Heartbreak of Sweetheart of the Rodeo." People felt betrayed because of the political stigma of country music being far right-wing politically, whereas rock and roll was cool and hip. The rock fans felt we had gone over to the other side, and the country people felt they were being infiltrated by a bunch of hippies. So, we lost on both counts, let it slip through the cracks, but forty years

later it is probably one of the most revered albums The Bryds ever did.

Certainly out of all The Byrd albums, I'm one of those who think it's right at the pinnacle. I love the way you did "Christian Life" and "You Ain't Going Nowhere," and certainly "Pretty Boy Floyd."

We were very sincere. We really got into the music.

It was not a spoof—we loved it. We went down to Nashville with a completely sincere attitude, but it was not perceived that way.

We were very sincere. We really got into the music. It was not a spoof—we loved it. We went down to Nashville with a completely sincere attitude, but it was not perceived that way.

Dylan took a little heat for Nashville Skyline too, because that had a little country bent to it.

Yeah, just like he'd taken heat for going electric at Newport.

The greatest rock and roll song I've ever heard in my life—my number one all-time best—came from the 30th anniversary Dylan Concert at Madison Square Gardens. Here you are with Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Neil Young, Tom Petty, and Dylan playing "My Back Pages." How



Sarah Vause Snow

in the world did that ever come together? That's like all the planets lined up at one time.

Well, it just happened. I don't know. I don't think they were going to invite me at one point, but then I just kind of got in on it. We were in the rehearsal room and I taught George how to phrase his verse. He didn't know how to phrase that verse and I showed it to him. Then Dylan wanted to use my arrangement of it, so there you go, it just happened. It happened the way The Byrds just happened. Things fell together.

I want to get you to talk just a little bit about your Folk Den Project. I think what you're doing is very important.

Thank you. It all started back in November 1995, thirteen years ago this month. When I was listening to a Woody Guthrie compilation—other artists doing Woody Guthrie songs on Smithsonian Folkways—it struck me that I wasn't hearing these old songs anymore. I was hearing the new singer-songwriters, the would-be Joni Mitchells and Bob Dylans, who were writing songs in the folk vein but they were not traditional songs. It made me worry

about the health and longevity of traditional music. I thought, "Wow, the music business is so far away from this with hip hop and what's going on with commercial music." Even the folk clubs had disappeared and the folk singers were like singer-songwriters. What's going to happen? The Internet had just opened up in the early nineties and I was into it. I knew how to record songs on the computer and put them on the Internet, and I thought, "What a great way to publish these around the world for free." People could download them, learn the chords and lyrics, and keep them alive and spread them around. So, I started putting up one a month, and I've done that every month since November 1995. I haven't missed a month. It's been tremendously successful. I get college professors, and even school systems of old states of the former Soviet Union are adopting them for their curriculum. Isn't that great?

It is something! In class we were talking about how badly hit folk music was during the McCarthy years of the fifties. I find it terribly ironic that somebody like Woody Guthrie could write "This Land is Your Land" and then be accused of being anti-American. He epitomized what it was to really be an American.

That's right, the same with Pete.

Yes, the same with Pete Seeger. Pete somehow dodged some of the battles a little. Maybe it was because of his family. The Weavers, with which Seeger played until the group disbanded, were one of the great tragedies—how they were blackballed and their careers really hurt.

Well, Pete was blackballed. He couldn't play in clubs. He lost his cabaret license. That's where folk happened at that time. He kind of invented the college concert. I don't think that was happening before Pete got blackballed. He found that he could go from school

to school and get audiences and plant seeds with the kids. That was neat. He did very well at that.

I've seen you on a couple of PBS specials with some of the old folkies. Do you end up doing any concerts with Peter, Paul and Mary, or any other of those folk musicians?

I've done work with Peter, Paul and Mary and Tom Paxton within the last 20 years. We're all kind of running around. We're on the road most of the time – Camilla and I. You don't have time to go and hang out with other people, unless somebody puts together a concert with those people, like I did the Wildflower Tour with Judy Collins in 2000, and Richie Havens and Janis, Ian and Judy. That was fun. I did a Bob Gibson concert in Chicago just before he died, and Peter, Paul and Mary were on that. Josh White, Jr., and Hamilton Camp were there also. I've toured with Joan Baez recently. These things do coincide, but we're all just running around, you know. We're like ships and sometimes we get together.

If you could, just by magic, have the opportunity to record with anyone, who would be the one person or the one group that you would want to record with?

Living or dead?

Everything is open.

I would love to record with Elvis Presley. Maybe get like the Traveling Wilburys (a band made up of Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty, Roy Orbison, and Jeff Lynne) together with him and some other people.

I saw Elvis Presley in November 1971 in the lobby of the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City. He was doing a concert at the Salt Palace. He was dressed in an all-white suit. He still looked very healthy then and fit. It was like a Greek God walked past. He was absolutely remarkable.

He was a great artist.

Did you ever meet him?

No, I didn't. I missed him by seconds. I was at the Beatles' house in LA in 1965 and Elvis invited the Beatles over to his house. I asked George if I could tag along, but he didn't think it was proper, so I had to stay at the Beatles' house until they went over and came back. I asked, "How was it?," and I got this firsthand account from George about meeting Elvis. He's sitting on the couch playing a bass guitar hooked up through a stereo, and then John approached him and said, "So, Elvis, you used to make some pretty good rock and roll records. What happened to you?" That was John. He could be quite cutting at times. Elvis said, "Well, I got into movies now." I missed meeting Elvis, just like that. Then Clarence White, who was friends with James Burton, used to go to Las Vegas when Burton was playing behind Elvis, and he met Elvis a number of times.

A musician friend here in Ogden, Matt Proudfit, said I should ask you about Clarence White, if you knew him.

Clarence was an incredible friend and one of the best guitar pickers I've ever worked with. He was up there with Clapton and Hendrix. He was totally amazing and wonderful. He was killed when he was twenty-nine, hit by a drunk driver.

You've had a remarkable career. I think it's so cool that you're not just sitting back on your laurels, but that you're on the road doing gigs like this one at Weber State.

Yeah, we've been doing that for years and years. The reason is, I have four instruments and it's hard to ship them on a plane, and flying is such a nightmare anymore. It used to be kind of fun.

Driving allows you some freedom to see and do things.

You can see like the Charles Kuralt series “On the Road.” We see the backwoods of America and get to experience the wonderful country and meet folks.

On this particular tour, where did you start?

We started in Golden, Colorado. This is a fairly new tour. We go to Texas after this, and then we’ll stop in Arizona for Thanksgiving and see my ninety-eight-year-old mother. Then we go to California for a couple of shows and back home to Florida.

Good for you. You deserve all this – you’ve earned it.



Mikel Vause holds a Ph.D. from Bowling Green University and is a Professor of English at Weber State University. He is author of numerous articles, poems and short stories that have appeared in books, magazines and journals. He is also the author of a collection of essays entitled *On Mountains and Mountaineers* and is the editor of *Rock and Roses* vols. I and II, *Wilderness Tapestry*, *Peering over the Edge*, and *The Peregrine Reader*. He has two collections of poems, *I Knew It Would Come to This* and *At the Edge of Things*, and is currently completing a new book of poems entitled *Looking for the Old Crown and Other Poems*, in which his poems on pages 115-116 of this issue will appear.

N. Colwell Snell

On Matters Confessional and Professional

A Conversation with William De Witt (W.D.) Snodgrass



Trevor Snell

PRELUDE

W.D. Snodgrass, was born in Wilkesburg, PA, on January 5, 1926, attended Geneva College, and then served in the U.S. Navy until 1946. He later attended the State University of Iowa where he earned his M.F.A. in 1953. His early work was compared to the work of two of his teachers, Robert Lowell and Randall Jarrell.

His first collection of poetry, *Heart's Needle*, was published in 1959 and received the Pulitzer Prize in 1960. He later published numerous books of poetry, including *Not for Specialists: New and Selected Poems* (BOA Editions, 2006); *The Führer Bunker: The Complete Cycle* (1995); *Each in His Season* (1993); *Selected Poems, 1957-1987* (1991); *The Führer Bunker: A Cycle of Poems in Progress* (1977), which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry; and *After Experience* (1968).

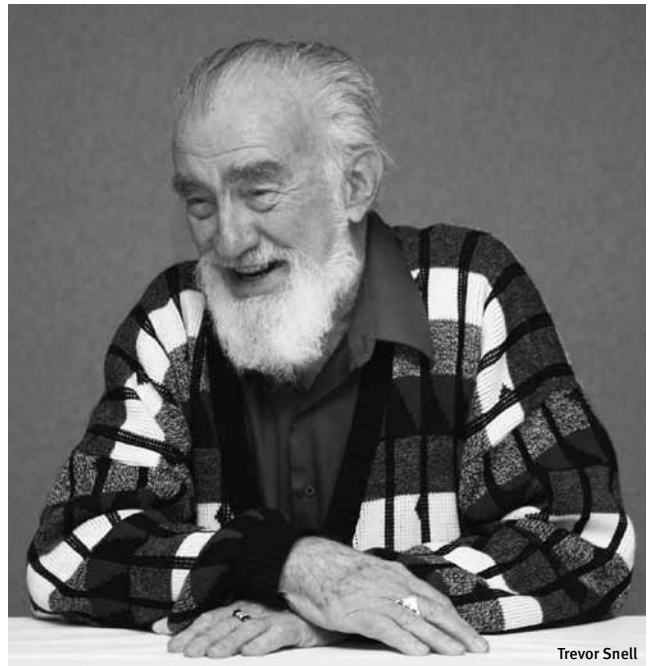
He has often been credited as being one of the founding members of the "confessional" movement, though he did not consider his poetry as fitting in that school. About his own work Snodgrass has said, "I first became known for poems of a very personal nature, especially those about losing a daughter in a divorce. Many of those early poems were formal meters and had an 'open' surface. All through my career, however, I have written both free verse and formal meters."

Snodgrass has also written two books of literary criticism and six volumes of translation, including *Selected Translations* (BOA Editions, 1998), which won the Harold Morton Landon Translation Award.

It has been said of him that when he entered a room, you sensed a presence. He

had an almost-legendary dogged devotion to sound in poetry, even at the age of 82, when his rendition of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" was flawless in both delivery and interpretation.

His honors include an Ingram Merrill Foundation award and a special citation from the Poetry Society of America, and



Trevor Snell

fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He and his wife Kathy lived in upstate New York until his death in January of 2009.

This interview was his last published conversation. It took place in Salt Lake City on the occasion of the Utah State Poetry Society's annual poetry festival in April of 2008.

Snell: I want to start out with the Pulitzer Prize. Your very first book wins the Pulitzer Prize – that’s amazing all by itself. After almost 50 years, does it still define your poetry?

Snodgrass: Oh no, I don’t think so at all. It has had an enormous effect, much of it deleterious. It makes it very hard for you to do your next book. I think it wrecked my second marriage. In any case, it made a lot of things difficult, it made a lot of things change, made a lot of things better. For instance, universities that the week before wouldn’t even take me as a student were offering me a very reasonable amount of money to give a lecture and meet a class.

I was a terrible reader. I was absolutely awful. So I had to start getting lessons right away. Fortunately, that is one of the things you can learn, and you can also learn to listen, to listen to yourself for instance, to record yourself and say, do I want to sound like that? The person who was my first teacher was a woman who had been a student of mine. She gave me many exercises to do and we worked out the introductions to the poems. I changed the poems more often than I changed the introductions, frankly. Of course, I have written a lot of poems since, and I have moved away and have no contact with her. But she was a great help that way and toward figuring out what information you have to give the audience ahead of time and also what you have to do in order to give listeners permission to feel, to laugh, to cry, whatever. And also she would listen. She would argue with you about things, and I remember she found that I was doing what a lot of women poets do now: they work one phrase, one music into every line they speak.

I can’t imagine you doing something like that when you read Walt Whitman the way you did.

No, she was wonderful and I was just astonished. I didn’t expect her to be any good since she taught at a beauty school. I thought in order not to insult her, I would take a lesson or two and then forget it. No, she was probably the most valuable teacher I had. The next teacher I had was a singing teacher. He was a neighbor, also in Detroit.

This was all a result of the Pulitzer Prize, of having these offers to do readings and so forth, and the readings became more and more important to me. There was also the influence of the Beatles. That, above all, the spoken poem is the one that counts. That you learn the sound of language long before you learn to read. That’s much more basic to you.

Anyway, when I went to him, he was a very interesting man. At that time, he had already had eight students at the Met. He was a man whose mother was an opera singer who told him he didn’t have it and to give it up. And that just infuriated him. So he went to doctors and teachers all over the world. He knew your musculature so beautifully that he would say to me, “Now did you do those exercises I taught you?” Yeah, yeah, sure. “Now, that should hurt right down in here.” What do you mean, that it should hurt my shins? “Oh, that means you’re not breaking your knees. You’re locking your knees up.” And I thought, what a blessing to have a guy that knows the musculature that thoroughly.

My next teacher, John, was our music teacher, and Kathy [my second wife] and I would take a lesson every week. We were going to take a music lesson with a man who lived 60 miles away, who was a wonderful teacher. Kathy would take a harpsichord lesson, and at first she was scared to death. Her early teachers were nuns and they would beat her. One woman beat her head on the piano, I mean, literally.

That’s not a part of the catechism is it?

Well, they seemed to think it was, and she would get scared to death of going to take a music lesson. I had to convince her that John was a lovable man and was not going to hit her head on the piano. First she would take her harpsichord lesson (and she's a much better musician than I), and then I would take a singing lesson. And I would sing about three measures and he would say, "your ex-wife called this week, didn't she?"

So, he was very much in tune with you.

Absolutely. It wasn't just the musculature, it was the whole emotional thing as well. He knew that these muscles were tightening up, and that was doing certain things to the voice. I found that I was doing several things to the voice yesterday and the day before that I shouldn't have done. And I wasn't quite able to let go. Anyway, that's the sort of thing that you learn, and you learn how to let

go of those muscles and just let it happen and let the voice flow out. And that was one result.

Then too, I got sent all over Europe by the State Department, got in a fight with one of the State Department people and would never be sent anywhere again. This was in Africa. The first trip they were going to send me on was Russia, but the Russians had to pretend that they were mad at us about the war in Vietnam. Of course, we couldn't have done anything that would have pleased them more. They had to pretend they were mad about it, so they cancelled the arts program for the rest of that year. They cancelled me and *Hello Dolly*.

That's funny. That's pretty good company to keep.

But then to take the place of that they said, "How would you like to go to some of the eastern European countries?" I didn't even know the names of the capitals, the money, the language, but I started out in Bulgaria. That was very interesting. Then I went to Romania, and that was more interesting, and from there to Hungary. I have done a lot of work in both Hungary and Romania, but especially in Romania, of translating folk songs. I had a notion that I might become a singer, and I was taking singing lessons. It

was Christmas time, and all the poets were away on vacation. I said, well, that's fine. I met a lot of poets, and some of them I liked and some of them I didn't like at all, and since we don't speak the same language, we are not going to have much to say to each other. I would much rather meet some of the folk music people. So they cleverly showed me how to get into the folk music

institute there, and I came away loaded with records, books and stuff that I've worked on for years since and really loved it. I have found masterpieces of ballads there that nobody in this country had ever heard of, and then in Hungary and Russia the same thing. I worked with a guy that had taken over Béla Bartók's folk music collection archive. I used to have to go through the funniest song and dance with him. I said, "What is the greatest Hungarian folk ballad?," and he said, "Every one is a complete masterpiece." I thought, all right, how do I get around him? I said, "let's suppose the building was burning down and you could only save one manuscript, what would you save?" He said, "Oh, that's this one." Then I said, "What's the best version of the text?" He said, "It's an immeasur-

I worked with a guy that had taken over Béla Bartók's folk music collection archive. I used to have to go through the funniest song and dance with him. I said, "What is the greatest Hungarian folk ballad?" and he said, "Every one is a complete masterpiece."

able masterpiece.” “All right, if you were on a sinking ship?” And we did this with each aspect. “Where is the best melody?” And he said, “Now the very best melody is this one. However, people in the West will have trouble handling that because it has so much eastern influence. They might be more accepting of this version, etc.” Then he said, “My goodness, that is Béla Bartók’s handwriting. I could have destroyed this thing. I’ve got to get a cup of coffee. I could have destroyed this thing; I can’t let you have this.”

But for Arlo Guthrie, who knows what you might have become?

Anyway, this all came about through the Pulitzer Prize, until I got to Africa and said something that insulted the CIA type about American politics, and he insulted me directly, and we got into a quarrel. I have had no relations with them since. That spoiled it with the USIS [United States Information Service] and me. I’m not sure the USIS is still in operation and still sends poets around as they once did. But it took me places I never would have gone. And after Hungary I went to Paris, Berlin, Portugal, and several other large, famous cities, but was less interested in them than in those little eastern European countries.

And did you read in those countries?

Yes.

And was your work translated?

Yes, I had a wonderful translator in Bulgaria. He had beautiful English. First they asked me what has happened in American poetry in the last 50 years. So, I made a summary of this, and I noticed that he translated each sentence with great ease and completeness, and people would ask me questions about it, and I realized that he had got the whole sense of that across to them. Then they had me read a poem. I picked the simplest poem I could read. It was one of the *Heart’s Needle* poems.

I never read those in public now because I break up on them. It’s the one you read in the back about putting the kid on a swing. And if you’re any good as a parent, you spend your life pushing the kid away from you.

I love that poem, by the way.

Thank you. I felt good about it. So I thought, yes, I like this poem. It’s simple and ought to be easy to translate. But oh no, all of a sudden, practically every other sentence he would ask one of the other people sitting there, “How would you do this? How would you translate this?”

You can’t translate the feeling.

Exactly. He would try to get the feeling, and he would ask for help from other Bulgarians who knew English. It really showed me something. As good as he was, he could tell that translating a poem was a different level of translating.

That’s a great story. Now, I’m almost apologetic about this next question because you have probably fielded it so many times that you’re tired of it. Still, it’s a bit of a mystery to me. The “confessional poet” reference – have you shunned it because of the terminology more than the group itself? Because, there you were in the turbulence of the sixties among poets held in very high regard today – Lowell, Plath, Sexton, Bishop, Berryman, Roethke – yet you distanced yourself from them, and I wonder why?

Well, my first marriage was breaking up and I was losing contact with my daughter. I mean, my ex-wife wouldn’t let me see her. This really broke me up, and I went into sort of a low-level therapy with the psychiatric department of the university. I expected that what the doctor was going to say was, “get out of this foolish business of writing poems and do something that will make some money.” Like my father, the accountant, would have said.

That's what they all say.

Of course! And they're probably right most of the time. But instead, he said, "Well, what are you writing about?" I said I have been writing poems about the things my teachers had told me you should write about. Things like the loss of myth in our time. Big abstract things like that. Frankly, I didn't care about that. I don't mean to insult you or anybody else by saying that, but I was glad to be rid of all those myths. After coming through the war, I didn't believe in any of that. It took me a while to realize that I was an atheist. Anybody who would accuse a God of running an operation like that and doing the kinds of things they were doing and that we were doing, and that I was doing. . . . Well, when the scene came where the guy told us about how you blind a man with your bare hand and go on to kill him, I realized I had no business being here.

This was from your military assignments?

Yes. In the first place, I'm not very good at that kind of thing. I never have been. But aside from that, I might try to do it, but I feel any man deserves a better death than that. And so I've either got to claim I'm a conscientious objector, and that's not going to work because I don't have any kind of religious group behind me, and so I'm going to go to prison. I don't think I can go to prison because I have a wife and child. So I went, and what did I end up becoming? A prison guard, and I ended up doing some absolutely disgraceful things. When I got out of there, it took me a while to decide what to do. I was a Quaker for a while. There was a particularly wonderful Quaker group in Iowa City. Later Quaker groups didn't seem to me to match up to that at all. And I'm think-

ing I'm an agnostic, and then finally I just realized, cut it out, don't be ridiculous, you just don't believe any of that. And of course I didn't. So I was glad to be rid of the myths, but I was still writing poems about them. And I hadn't written a poem for two years, and that was why. Because I was writing about things I didn't care about at all. That's what my doctor said to me and I was very grateful to him. There is a poem in there that has a Greek title—μη τις.....ού τις—it's addressed to him, and he told me the right thing. Write the stuff that you care about. So that's what I've

Write the stuff that you care about. So that's what I've got to do. Robert Lowell at first disliked those poems quite a lot. He said, "Snodgrass, you've got a brain. You can't write this kind of tear-jerking stuff."

got to do. Robert Lowell at first disliked those poems quite a lot. He said, "Snodgrass, you've got a brain. You can't write this kind of tear-jerking stuff." I thought he's probably right, but that is what I've got to do, and so I went ahead and did it. And, to my surprise, John Berryman rather liked the poems, but on the whole they were disliked, and I was censored

from reading them at places here and there. That's hard to believe now when Sharon Olds wants to tell you about her father's semen—stuff I don't want to know about!

The person who coined the term "confessional" was Mike Rosenthal, who was brilliant, a friend and a well-known critic then. He also wrote poems, and he spoke of his poems as "confessional." Well, that's a good enough term for journalism, maybe, but it suggests that I'm in some way religious, and I'm not. Now my wife is a dedicated Catholic, and oddly enough that's never caused us the least bit of trouble. But I wouldn't think of going to a confessional. And as a matter of fact, in the poems I have confessed to next to nothing. Like the poem about the break-up with my third wife. I know I did some things that might have offended her, but I don't know

whether they did, she wouldn't tell me. I'm just confused. So, I can't confess to all those things. Maybe I corrected her grammar about some things. She was from a Polish-American family, and they use rather strange pronunciations sometimes and locutions and what not. On the other hand, I think I did a lot for her. She got to go on these trips to Europe and we would go to diplomatic dinners and she would always sit next to the Polish ambassador. She was always the youngest and best looking woman in the room, which gave her center stage more often than not.

She was the trophy wife.

She was a very good wife, I must say. For that long 12 years, I had no real complaints against her. She didn't want to perform as I would have liked to. She played harpsichord for a while, then gave that up and took up sort of a lap harp that the Arabs used and which troubadours also had used, and I was translating troubadours then. Once we even performed together for a class, but she didn't like doing that. So maybe this kind of thing bothered her. I know, and this perhaps was the bigger matter, I felt I couldn't have another child. I had two children, and both of them had been yanked away from me. I had to fight and go to court and battle furiously and, of course, since they were living with their mother, they were told all kinds of terrible things about me. Some of them true, no doubt. That may have been very important to her. There were a couple of other things. We had a dog we both particularly loved. It was a Russian wolf hound, a Borzoi, a beautiful creature. They're such good dogs, so obedient. I stepped outside the door one

morning with that dog and there was a pair of deer in the yard. I hadn't noticed them when I stepped out, and the dog started after them just like that. I had learned one word: Stop! He stopped right in the middle of his stride. I didn't know I had that kind of command.

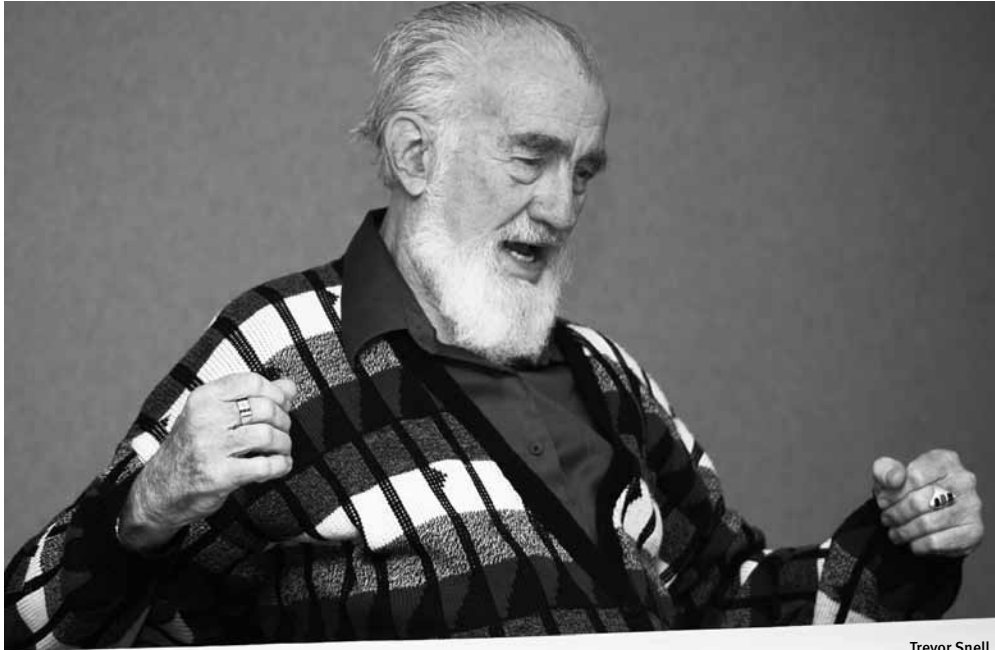
That's authority.

Well, I was responsible for that dog's death, and that grieved me. It grieved her even more. Maybe that's it, or maybe it's all these things put together, but what can I confess to there? I did a lot of things for her. I got wonderful jewelry for her, Hungarian sword belts and magnificent stuff like that, clothes that otherwise, as the daughter of a Detroit policeman, she wouldn't have seen. I thought I had given her a much more interesting life than she ever could have had otherwise. Maybe that is not what she wanted. Maybe she wanted a simpler, quieter life. I don't know.

It's funny, as long as "confessional" was thought to be a good thing, Robert Lowell was blamed for it. He hated it at first, but a couple of years later, someone brought the same poems to his attention and he fell in love with them. I never would have gotten that book [Heart's Needle] published if he hadn't gone to bat for it.

You said that a poet needs to find his own voice, which is often said, and perhaps you were reluctant to be placed into a group that tagged you as a certain type of poet, when really you were wanting your own voice to get out there.

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Trevor Snell

I thought our voices were quite different from each other, certainly when you consider our backgrounds. I worshipped him. I loved those early poems with his very dense rhetoric, fierce. In fact, Randall Jarrell, the critic, probably the second best teacher, maybe the best teacher I ever had, said, “Snodgrass, do you know you’re writing the very best second-rate Lowell in the whole country?”

Was that a compliment?

Not at all. I finally had to stop reading Lowell altogether to get away from his voice and to get one of my own. And I think you will probably notice that in the critical piece I read about Whitman yesterday, I avoided critical language just as carefully as I could and brought it down to simple conversational language. For instance, I knew that I was going to have to use the word “prosody” and I know a lot of these people aren’t going to know what that means. So, I was careful the first time I used that word to link it together with classical metrics and a suggestion of what that

involved. I tried to avoid any kind of very technical language and high-flung critical jargon.

I’m going to move in a different direction with this next question. Your series of Bunker Poems caused a bit of a fire storm and accusations that you were a Nazi sympathizer. It seems that the “politics” of poetry caught you back then and, you were saying, for years you were black-balled, basically. Would you comment on that? Do you think there are “politics” in poetry today?

To accuse me of being a Nazi sympathizer is just absurd. I’ve said worse things about the Nazis than any responsible historian has said, and I have them saying it out of their own mouths. That’s tapered off now, and I find young people often come to me now and say, “I really like your Nazi cycle.” That delights me, of course. I’m glad to have that sense of being black-balled well done with. Well, not done with—it’s still out there particularly among Jewish intellectuals. And

I was particularly sorry for that because I thought I was on their side. Furthermore, frankly at that time, if we hadn't had the Jewish intellectual circles, we wouldn't have had intellectual circles. The important intellectuals were nearly all Jewish. Mike Rosenthal, for instance, and then one person after another. Milton Kessler said something to me about that. He was Jewish, of course. He's dead now, but we were very good friends.

I complained about these misunderstandings and said, what are they giving me this bad time about? First of all, they don't read the poems or they would see that I am certainly not sympathetic. He said, "Well, this is an area where you can't really expect Jews to be very reasonable." I thought, that summed it up just perfectly. Well, I expected there to be a good deal of trouble, but I didn't realize how long it would last, I must say. And it lasted maybe 25 years. I was kept out of anthologies, out of the cradle of discussions and readings and so forth. But it occurred to me, finally, from something that happened at one reading, what the real basis of this is. The real crime against the Jews was that the Nazis declared that they were not human. Naturally, being not reasonable on the subject, Jews would like to turn that accusation back against them because I had treated them as humans, terrible humans, and horrifying humans. That's the whole horror of this situation. That this was the most intelligent country in the world right then, and in some ways could have been the most humane, was the most inhumane. Also, part of the reason I worked the poems was that I was getting sick and tired of all the Allied Forces being so self-congratulatory and convinced of their own piety because they had won. In the first place, you don't win a war by doing pious things. You win a war by becoming more and more like your enemy. If people don't believe that, look what we've turned into in the 50 years since we defeated Germany. We did certain things during that war, and I did some of them, which were equally inhumane. You

could scarcely distinguish a difference. I think of the fire bombings of German cities, etc.

The war could have ended at least 6 months earlier, perhaps a year earlier, if they had gone on bombing the factories, but they turned and bombed the civilian population. Well, Hitler had done the same thing, and it didn't work for him either. It doesn't work. The streets of Dresden completely filled with innocent helpless people. They were refugees from all over eastern Europe who had no place to go and were only allowed to stay in Dresden for something like 2 days before they were forced to go someplace else. I had no idea how many were killed, how many were burned alive, how many died from lack of oxygen. The bodies turned black. Goebbels himself went there to survey the carnage and walked down the rows of the dead weeping. And to make Josef Goebbels weep, I mean you've got to go some distance. The ultimate nihilist if there ever was one.

Then there was Nagasaki. We didn't need to do that but wanted to scare Russia. It's true that we lost fewer troops because we didn't have to invade, but there were a lot of innocent Japanese who were lost. In Hamburg, one night's bombing killed fifty thousand people.

Changing direction: you taught at Syracuse for years. You had a reputation for an excellent program there. When I talked with Stephen Dunn, he said he had planned to attend a certain university but was told to enroll at Syracuse instead, so that he could be under your tutelage as well as that of some of the other faculty there. I'm interested to know if you saw a spark of genius in Stephen Dunn and other students while they were there in their early years.

Oh, they looked very promising indeed, but you never knew which one of them was going to take off. There were so many of them, so gifted, it was quite wonderful. There were four of us, four poets on staff. We had a provost who was in love with poets, so he kept four

of us there. We all admired each others' work and each others' teachings. This was a terrific staff, and I was sure we had the best program in the country until I went to Arkansas. Don Justice, who was also teaching at Syracuse, happened to visit Arkansas that year, and we both came away not quite so sure about our rank. The head of the program there was wonderful, and there were several others not quite as good as he was. They had a great group of students. Some of them went on to notable careers. Perhaps we were better than they were, but both Don and I came away with reservations.

Who would you say has had the biggest influence on your own writing?

Oh, I don't know. The first person I wrote like was William Empson. You can't get much more intellectual than that. And second was Lowell. First I was writing like Empson. I was writing villanelles, and they were probably the second-best Empson in the country, and then I was writing the second-best Lowell in the country. Jarrell had a big influence on me. I worked with him for three weeks at a conference in Boulder. Oh, he was a cruel teacher, but he was so brilliant and absolutely dead right all the time.

That can be annoying.

Oh yes. I came to dislike Jarrell quite a lot. But I had to feel terribly grateful to him because he moved me away from Lowell and in the same direction that my doctor had moved me toward—writing about what you're interested in and what you care about so much that you've just got to write about it. And there were other influences, mostly musical. One of

them was the voice of a singer now probably forgotten named Hugues Cuénod, pronounced Hugue. He was French-Swiss and had the most amazing career. I wrote a poem for him on his 100th birthday. He had his debut at the Met at the age of 85, which was astounding, absolutely unheard of. It was completely unlike the voice you normally associate with opera. I had, in fact, come to dislike opera for that reason, that Italian voice, that over-driven voice with its high vibrato. It's like they're

trying to start a truck on a cold morning. I dislike this exaggerated emotion. I came to hate that kind of voice and that kind of singing. But music was a huge influence on me. Cuénod had an album that stood my hair on end, 16th- and 17th-century Spanish and Italian songs that I thought were out of this world. And I realized, this is what my poems have got to have, this kind of clarity and passion. That is what is missing, forget about all

this other stuff. Well, you never really forget it, the desire for formal excellence I mean, but that comes secondary to direct passion and clarity.

There were other songs also, Gustav Mahler's Kindertotenlieder, songs for the death of children, which moved me very much, especially because I was mourning for my child. I suddenly realized, you know, that we are not like them. They lost 3 out of 5 children before the age of five, and they were concerned about the death of children. With us, we lose them to divorce. So that is part of the reason I moved to the "confessional" kind of poem. Those were great influences on me, and my background as a musician. I thought I would be a musician when I was

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in high school. I've been a terrible violinist, and almost as bad of a pianist. Then I sort of fell in love with a guy, nothing sexual about it. He was going with twins, one of them beautiful, the other one passionate.

So, he had to go with both of them.

He was admired by everybody. He was known as Flash Hamilton. He was a timpanist, and oh, he was so good, and he was also a student conductor. So I started taking timpani lessons and conducting lessons, and I thought I would be a musician. It's a good thing I got out of it; I wasn't good enough. When I think of how good the young musicians are now! I know I could not have matched them, even though I was pretty good. I did some conducting; in particular, I once conducted a rehearsal of Beethoven's Third.

I'm impressed. That was quite an achievement.

Yes, you really think you're a god. I was unbearable for months, I'm sure.

Obviously, the crossover with music and poetry is almost a natural.

Yes, sure. Then I went into the Navy, and after two years, I had been pretty dilatory all along. I hadn't worked as hard or started as early as I should have, and after two years in Saipan, I was way too far behind and had to go into something else. I went to the University of Iowa thinking I would go into playwriting. I had fallen in love with certain dramas, but my plays were terrible. The only way they could have turned out worse was to do what my teachers were telling me, idiot teachers in the theater at that time. They were just awful, sloppy—sentimental stuff. So I got away from the theater and wandered around to the different departments and came to the creative writing center and suddenly real-

ized, these people not only know about their subject but they care about it desperately. I was surrounded by wonderful students. The program was run by a man named Paul Engle, who at the time, they thought, was going to be a great poet. At any rate, he was terribly effective as an administrator.

Their creative writing program today is held in very high esteem.



Oh yes. I don't think it's as good now as it was then. I think it's probably too large. The last time I was there, there was a tendency to form discipleships, which hadn't been the case before. I mean, we all admired the people we studied with; also, you got as much help from your fellow students as you did from Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Karl Shapiro, and all the rest of those big names, like John Ciardi. Often, Engle would go around the country and uncannily pick out all the most promising young poets and get them to come to Iowa. He would get these people there, who were better poets than he was,

and they weren't doing any writing then, but they would sure help you with yours and it was honest help. If they hadn't thrown me out, I would still be there as a graduate student. It was great to be surrounded by such brilliant, helpful, cooperative students.

Are there any trends in language, or other things about poetry today that are troubling or unsettling to you?

Oh yes, all of them. I don't know. I shouldn't pass judgment on what's going on. I think most of the confessional poetry is just garbage, confessing things that are no enlightenment to me. They don't broaden me in any way that I can see.

There seems to be a trend toward raw language that is used more as a crutch, a potential shock factor, rather than actual creativity.

I have often been amazed at somebody like Allen Ginsberg, who could use all of that bad language and still be so dull. I was stationed with southerners who could delight you with their "local color." They were inventive, and you got the impression that they were really using language. Shakespeare used a lot of improper language, a lot of poets did, but I think it added legitimate potency to the mixture in order to achieve brilliance.

It's almost for the sake of the phrase rather than the overall beauty of the poem.

Yes, absolutely.

Let me ask you one final question, which is a statement as well. It's my opinion, but I'm sure I share it with a lot of others. I think you are a national treasure, sort of in the same vein as Stanley Kunitz.

That's very kind of you.

Are there any regrets for taking the road of a poet?

Oh no. I mean, you know it cost a lot. It cost me three marriages. You give up a lot of things. My father wanted me to take over his accounting business in Pittsburgh. But you know, you use second-hand cars and you buy old houses and try to fix them up and that gets to be kind of fun, too. I used up a lot of energy on that and maybe I shouldn't have; maybe I should have used more of it on writing. Even Paul Engle, who had his own brilliance, could teach you things about Rimbeau, for instance, that just stood your hair on end. I had no idea anybody could do a thing like that with language. But after I had been there for about two years, I began to think I could do something of this sort. And so far haven't found anything I thought I could do better. Obviously, I wasn't going to make it as a boxer.



N. Colwell Snell graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in English. He is the past president of the Utah State Poetry Society and was named Utah Poet of the Year for his manuscript, *Hand Me My Shadow*, which also won the 2007 Pearle M. Olsen book award. His poetry has appeared in several anthologies and magazines, including *ByLine Magazine*, *California Quarterly*, *Bay Area Poets' Coalition*, and *Weber Studies*.

Luciana Costea, Dona Rosu, and W.D. Snodgrass

W.D. Snodgrass was known not only for his original poems, but also for his translations. Snodgrass, with Dona Rosu and Luciana Costea, translated "Mountains" and "Footsteps" from the original Romanian by Marin Sorescu.

Mountains

I clarified my thoughts
Till you could
See in them
The mountains.

Look! they have gold and uranium
And other minerals,
More advanced,
That have costly furs and horns
And hoofs or wings
And are happy
Given the forms of life.

Look! they are cold and menacing
And full of crags
Over which the sun's wheel
All day long goes creaking,
Drawing out fresh time for us to drink
Clear from the bottom of the earth.

I didn't know, I didn't know
I had so much geology in me,
And that on top of it
My spirit stays
High and immovable
Like the Monastery made from one tree!



Marin Sorescu

Munții (Mountains)

Mi-am înseninat gândurile
Până când au început să se vadă
În ele
Munții.

Iată-i cu aur și uraniu
Și cu celelalte minerale
Mai evolute, care au blănuri scumpe și coarne
Și copite sau aripi
Și sunt fericite
Sub formă de viață.

Iată-i reci și amenințatori
Și plini de prăpăstii,
Deasupra cărora roata soarelui
Scârțâie toată ziua,
Scoțându-ne, de băut, timp proaspăt,
Tocmai din fundul pământului.

Nu știam, nu știam
Că am atâta geologie în mine,
Și că-n vârful ei
Sufletul meu șade
Măreț și de neclintit
Ca Mănăstirea dintr-un lemn!

Footsteps

I can't sleep,
The tree complained to me:
I have bad dreams.

All sorts of nights
Show up around me
And, scared, the bark on my trunk
Shrivels up.

I squirm and groan sometimes
And then the wind
Has to shake me a little
So I won't dry out
In my sleep.

But when I wake up
I see an eye that's watching me
In that stone over there,
And I hear terrible footsteps
Coming nearer.

On every leaf that's fallen
Through all the years
I hear a wicked footstep
Coming nearer.



Pașii (Footsteps)

Nu pot să dorm,
Mi s-a plâns copacul:
Visez urât.

Apar în juru-mi
Fel de fel de nopți,
Și, de spaimă, pe trunchiul meu coaja
Face riduri.

Uneori mă zvârcolesc și gem,
Și atunci trebuie să mă clatine puțin
Vântul,
Ca nu cumva să mă usuc
În somn.

Dar când mă trezesc
Văd un ochi care mă pândește
În piatra de colo,
Și aud pași de groază
Apropiindu-se.

Pe fiecare frunză care mi-a picat
De-a lungul anilor
Aud câte un pas rău
Apropiindu-se.



Marin Sorescu was a prolific Romanian poet, playwright, novelist and essayist, a nonconformist explorer of metaphysical parables behind everyday experience. His ironic voice emerged in Romanian literature in the 1960s. He became one of the most widely read and translated modern poets of his country and was also a Nobel Prize candidate. He often drew on history, mythology, and the tradition of the absurd. His existentialist themes, at the same time universal and subjective, placed his work in the wide context of the avant-garde.

Luciana Costea earned an M.S. in Occupational Therapy from Western Michigan University. She works as an occupational therapist at Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where she lives with her son Lucian and her mother Dona. Her translations of Romanian classic and contemporary poetry have been published in literary journals in the United States, Great Britain and Mexico. One of her two books of translations into Romanian is *Cardinalul* by W.D. Snodgrass. She is also a book illustrator and an artist. Her work has been exhibited in Romania and in the United States.

Dona Rosu is a Romanian-born poet, nonfiction author and translator, living in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She graduated from the University of Bucharest and, in 1989, earned an M.A. in English from Western Michigan University. She has published three collections of poetry, six nonfiction books, and four books of translations. Her poems, translated into English and into French, have appeared in *The Literary Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *Confrontation*, and others. She has written essays, conducted interviews with American and Romanian scientists and cultural figures, and has translated Romanian poetry with W.D. Snodgrass, Kathleen Snodgrass, Luciana Costea, and Antonio Costea.

William E. Smith

On Art and Aging, Series and Stereotypes

A Conversation with Duane Niatum, Northwest Poet



PRELUDE

Duane Niatum, poet, writer, and editor of two seminal poetry anthologies, Carriers of the Dream Wheel (1975) and Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry (1988), has introduced dozens of new Indian poets to American Literature and simultaneously published hundreds of poems, reviews, essays, and stories. During the past eighteen years, however, he has remained largely invisible to critics and scholars except when his last book, The Crooked Beak of Love (West End Press), appeared in 2000.

In the following interview, Niatum reflects on his forty-year writing career. He discusses his struggle with stereotypes, his life-long love of art, his aesthetics, and his current projects both within and outside his well-known literary boundaries. A prolific writer and inveterate reviser, he gives us glimpses of a committed artist whose works range from the deeply personal to nuanced social critique. Throughout his career he has balanced several literary traditions and created works of artistry which blend tribal heritage, European art, intense love of the environment, and scholarly training into a unique vision.

Although known primarily as a poet, Niatum has published a number of short stories, essays, and scholarly articles. Still a prodigious poet, he has recently com-

pleted a series of tales, primarily directed at young adults, based on Klallam myths and legends. His scholarly work continues his study of Native American artists. He has recently finished critical essays on Alfredo Arreguin, the Mexican-born Seattle artist, and Edmonia Lewis, the Chippewa/African American sculptor and painter who lived in Italy from the 1880s until her death in the early 1900s. His short story "Blackbird's Path Along the Cobblestones of Rome" about Edmonia Lewis appeared in Black Renaissance Noire in Spring 2009.

Duane Niatum is finally becoming visible to the larger public as he enters his 70s. In September 2007, Thom Narini directed and produced Words for the Wind, Volume 2, a literary documentary with readings and commentary by Niatum, for Morning Light Films. As we learn from the conversation below, Niatum has recently completed a poetry collection, The Pull of the Green Kite, is working on his collected works, a short story collection, and flirting with the idea of an autobiography.

This interview took place at the Suzzallo-Allen Library at the University of Washington in Seattle on June 16, 2006. Previously, Duane and I met twice at the library to review his collected works, which are housed in the University's Special Collections.

Whatever art roads emerge or fail to emerge from the ruins of this century, if the artist has no sense of inner peace and order, he or she will not face or transform the chaos of everyday life and this new millenium.

Smith: *I have questions for you which are going to be different from Jean Musser's, focused primarily on your canoe journey to Puyallup, and Gaetano Prampolini's, whose interview centered on Native American imagery and allusions in your work.*

You wrote in "Traveling the Road that Once Was You" (North Dakota Review, 1991), "So whatever art roads emerge or fail to emerge from the ruins of this century, if the artist has no sense of inner peace and order, he or she will not face or transform the chaos of everyday life and this new millennium." How do you still see this sentiment shaping you as a writer?

Niatum: *I actually wrote that ages ago, probably, about 15 or 18 years ago. I've been thinking about that because of working on my collected poems, and I feel that it's more critical now than it was then. I think the artist still has to be very existential in his or her vision and struggle for the truth in that vision, but it's even more critical today because of the deluge of lies in our life and the perversion of reality and truth. This need hasn't changed, so it is still vitally necessary.*

What makes it more critical to you right now?

Because so much chaos and brutality has happened internationally. For example, our involvement in Iraq, and how our government has destabilized the world has made us even more vulnerable to uncertainty. Our persistent war mongering has multiplied the number of people who are going to hate us for decades to come. As a number of scholars have pointed out, it will require years and years for us to regain our balance in regards to what we've done, in Iraq alone,

and Afghanistan. So I feel our government is still playing the same old game.

In your new work, The Pull of the Green Kite, you praise your publisher for giving you "a long sought after elbow room, an opportunity to publish a book that does not pigeon-hole me or constrain me." How have you felt constrained in previous works?

When people say "Indian writer," for example, that term creates a stereotype, and you have to spend your life resisting that because it sets up expectations that aren't necessarily going to happen.

When people say "Indian writer," for example, that term creates a stereotype, and you have to spend your life resisting that because it sets up expectations that aren't necessarily going to happen. And, like you, with that sort of stereotype people expect certain images, symbols, and so on and so forth, which might not come up. Half of

*my work has absolutely nothing to do with my Indian ancestry, and so I think it's very misleading and it does create a false mask that I'm not interested in wearing. I think the main reason is that I've spent much of my literary life resisting that stereotype, but I don't think I've won (*laughter*). I'm not going to give up on it because in the long run people, if they know my work at all in terms of the whole, will recognize that there are other subjects and images that have nothing whatsoever to do with my Indian ancestry.*

Why, specifically, did you mention this concern with stereotyping?

Well, because of this particular manuscript. I put a lot of effort into making it non-Indian. There are maybe one or two or three, at the most, poems in it that reflect my Indian ancestry, but the vast majority

of them are absolutely unrelated to my life as a tribal artist. For example, there are all those poems on the European artists, like Cézanne, and van Gogh, and Monet, and travels abroad which have nothing to do with Klallam and Twana history or culture. Other poems center on art, and travel in other parts of Europe that have absolutely nothing to do with my American Indian origins. So the vast majority of them are unrelated to my Indian heritage. And that was deliberate.

I wanted it to be almost completely non-Indian, although there's probably two or three that are, but they fit. I felt they fit where they are in the manuscript, and so I let them stay. These are new poems that haven't been published in other books, so it's a brand new manuscript, and I wanted it to show another direction.

Have these constraints ever been productive for you?

I think any time you do have resistance, it can be fertile. Because artists and writers, some painters and sculptors as well, need to have problems that they have to resolve, and tensions that are built by paradoxes and questions that they need to resolve in their work, and so I think it's helped. It's been productive. It certainly hasn't harmed me. The only harm is that I don't like the stereotype, but I've learned to live with it. After all, I'm 68 now and it's been a stereotype that's been around since my first book was published in 1970, so I've come to terms with it. I live with this burden.

Numerous visual artists have appeared in your work over the years. Describe your relationship to painters and sculptors, and their influence on you.

I always thought of art as being a parallel aesthetic – that runs along parallel lines.

There are poems about painters and a couple about sculptors that I've written. Not many, more about painters than sculptors, but I think the reason why they are there is that I've always loved art. I always thought of art as being a parallel aesthetic—that runs along parallel lines. It's not the same path as poetry or fiction, but it's similar. And that there's a lot of cross fertilization that happens between painting and poetry. Like Cézanne... Wallace Stevens once said that—he quoted Cézanne (that's why I tripped there)—that we poets often have to turn to the painters to find which new direction we need to take. I

think there's truth in that, but of course I've talked to painters who say they go to poets for inspiration. So it's a cross fertilization, and they've always been friends. There's always been camaraderie between

poets and painters down through the ages and across cultures. They feed one another's imaginations, and I think that's the reason why they've always worked together in one capacity or another to create new art.

In your late 50s you began and completed doctoral study on John Hoover, the Aleut sculptor. What caused you at this point in your career to pursue such work?

I think the reason for that interest is that I wanted to write about art rather than literature, even though I'm a writer. A lot of people asked me, "Well, you know, you are a poet and a short story writer, why did you choose to write about a sculptor? Why didn't you write about a poet or a novelist or something?" And my answer was that I wanted to expand my literary horizons and write about a new subject. I thought it would be more challenging, and since I've always enjoyed the arts, I thought it would be easy to do and wouldn't be a big problem, although it is a different kind of writing than

writing about literature. You have to look at other things, but that's where the art history classes gave me some support. I took several art history courses for my PhD studies at Michigan. With much in-depth reading in the area, I decided to write about John Hoover's sculpture because I thought it would be more challenging. I feel that you always have to set yourself up for challenges, you know, you want to keep evolving your art.

Having published poetry for over forty years, what significant changes have you observed in your work?

That's a good question (*laughter*). I think some recent changes have been the emphasis, again. It has all to do with art and my interest in art because I ended up writing more poems about art. And then some of the poems that are even not about art end up being about art because they are about aesthetics. And I don't feel too bad about writing poems about aesthetics because, you know, Wallace Stevens' entire work was based upon the art of writing poetry, and so I've written maybe twenty or more of those. And I think that's a significant change.

There's more and more emphasis on cityscapes and travel, and there's a new thing: the art of aging (*laughter*). Yes, there are quite a few new poems that deal with this whole idea of our life changes and the aging process and how it makes us think about things differently. So those are all new—new themes and new approaches.

The other thing I've always been interested in doing is series poems, and some of that's come up in the new writing. I did a series on travel in Italy, for example, a long poem, one of the longest

poems I've written. And I've wanted to write series poems because I like the interrelationship. A lot of the art I like are paintings that are connected to one another in a series. I like that, so that's a new thing that I've tried to do. I have written a few of those in the past, but I've wanted to return to it more today, and I will continue to do so. One of the series poems I wrote—it's been quite awhile, twenty years after Roethke died—was a sonnet sequence. I thought about doing some new ones because I just revised the sequence for my collected poems. I can't remember which ones now, but it was a sonnet sequence on the 60s. It was four unrhymed sonnets that were inspired by the 50 million that Robert Lowell did. So I thought that would be a possibility, but with a new subject, a new theme. Maybe even art again, I'm not sure, because one of the painters that I'd like to write about soon is Degas. I've always wanted to write about him, and it almost happened at Western [Western Washington University] when I was teaching in Bellingham. But I had to put that project away because I was so busy with teaching, and then when



I tried to get back to it, the momentum had died. I couldn't recover it, but I can still do it; I'm going to try again this summer.

Have any of these changes surprised you? From the beginning until now forty years later, have you been surprised by anything?

Some of the language has changed—yeah, yeah, that's been surprising. I think going

over these revisions has had a lot to do with it, and it's formed new paths for me and it's also made me more sensitive to how I use language and words. I've always felt that it's important for your lines to be tight and integrated. I feel that there should be a unified tone, from the first word to the last, and there should be interrelationships between line and stanza. That's done on an unconscious level,

however; then you redo it and tighten things up. We should never apply that consciously. That's all done unconsciously. The flow has to be spontaneous, and if there are any jams, then you take care of them in revision. But there should be a melodic patterning that's set up from the first line to the last.

I've been working on the revisions for about four years. I'm almost finished; by this fall I'll be finished with the collected poems. It really amazes me. It's made me more sensitive to my aesthetics and how I create and use language and words, and their relationship to one another. That element of writing has always fascinated me. I've never spent too much time with it, but whenever I thought about it in terms of when I was working, it always amazed me how a poet plays around

with words to make the language sing. I feel that the best poetry should leave the page and enter the air. Invariably you should read it aloud. Actually, the first poetry was an oral tradition. And I feel that's a very good heritage, and we should never give that up because I think the ear is better and can experience the poem better even than the eye. There's more body to it. You get another dimension to a poem when you actually hear it instead of just reading it in silence from the page.

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In a 1992 interview with Gaetano Prampolini, you commented on your revision process by quoting Paul Valéry, "A poem is never finished, it's only abandoned." As you revise poems from your early career, how does the current artist and person confront the earlier artist and person? And what are you learning from these confrontations?

Sometimes I experience shock (*laughter*)! Mainly, because several poems of the past were so bad I've actually thrown them into the garbage. At least these poems will not see print again in my lifetime. I'm gathering the collected poems in a particular way. Thus, several poems from my first four volumes have been discarded. Only one or two poems were changed from *The Crooked Beak*, which is the most current volume, and a new manuscript, *The Pull of the Green Kite*. Since I spent seven years revising the first and five years on the second, they won't need much more cleaning up, if any. In the more recent creations, and the new section of *Drawings of the Song Animals*, there will be a number of changes. I want to try to be modest in this;

I think some of my earlier poems are some of my best work. They've needed work, but they still hold up with the changes, with revisions. The worst I tossed were hopeless. But a few earlier works I'm really pleased with, especially their development, because given a long period of time you can see how obvious it is where you've made mistakes. I know there's a different philosophy about it and some people say you're not supposed to touch your older work—just leave it as it is. Nevertheless, there are others who constantly revise, and some of the greats, like Yeats, and Thomas Hardy and Robert Lowell and Dylan Thomas wrote and rewrote their poems to the very end. Until they died they were still making changes. I'm from that school, and I don't feel bad about it because I've models from the greats that did it, and so if they can do it, I can too. (*laughter*) Roethke changed a lot, he revised a tremendous amount, and I read one time that Dylan Thomas revised some of his poems 30 to 50 times.

As you currently work on your collected poems, how do you decide what to include and what to exclude?

With the exclusion it's pretty easy because they're really bad. They're an embarrassment, so they're out. They can't be redeemed. I have tried a couple, but some of them were so bad that it was impossible. I just couldn't deal with them anymore. The difference is that with those that can be redeemed, it's often a matter of maybe a phrase or two, a tightening of the verb structure, making the verbs more active. There are poets who do not see this as a problem. For example, Elizabeth Bishop uses a lot of abstract verbs, verbs of being, but I was trained to use more active verbs because verbs that show you the concrete world will give you the picture, the action, whereas verbs of being contain no action, you can't see what's happening very well. There are a lot of poets that use verbs of being in their language—even

Seamus Heaney uses a lot of verbs of being in his work—but I was trained from Roethke and [Nelson] Bentley to use as often as possible verbs that will give you a picture and an action, and they're the strongest ones. I always try to do that. With the changes it's often a phrase or a word that's not working or the verb needs to be made more active.

So in most cases you can redeem those poems. But the ones that you can't redeem, what is it about those that makes you sit back, look at them now, and say, "No, that's for the scrap heap"?

It stems from their failing in several significant ways. You see, it needs more than a new line or a tighter verb or better compression of line and stanza, or a wrong word, perhaps a weak adjective or adverb. These are the hopeless cases, whereas poems that can be given new life often have minor problems that can be easily remedied. Another problem that might appear is, sometimes it's the sequence that is out of sync. For example, the first stanza should be the last stanza, and the last stanza the first, and in the middle sometimes, or the last stanza needs to be tossed, or the first stanza needs to be tossed, and the poem actually starts with the second stanza. You shouldn't have had the first stanza in the first place (*laughter*). It's something like that; it has to do with structure. So, there are different kinds of problems you can come up with, and sometimes I've noticed that, "Hey, it works better if that third stanza is in the second place, and the second stanza in the first place; that's the way it should have been in the first place." So it's things like that. Those are the differences, but quite often it's not a big project: it's a matter of a word or a phrase or tightening of the verbs, making them more active physically.

You've recently been working on a series of short stories on Klallam

myths and legends. What prompted you to work in this genre now?

The reason was because I was trying to do something that would help the young people in Klallam country become more interested in their stories. We are losing the children in terms of their interest in the culture, the language, and the stories. I thought that if I made the stories more contemporary and brought children, young people, into the stories as characters, then they would take a stronger interest. That was the main motivation. I was trying to do something to help the young people become more involved in the life of their community.

Also, I wanted to become closer to the stories, the myths, because these are all myths and legends, and I felt that if I actually tried to do something with them it would bring them even closer to me. And it has. It has been very effective that way, and I'm glad I did because I'm much more sensitive to what an old myth means. Actually, it's the springboard and the spine, or it was in the past, of all cultures, in that they learned how to live and act in harmony with the rest of the universe through their myths. The myths show them how to live with one another and live with the rest of the universe. This is essentially what the creation stories are all about. And the Klallam family is losing those roots. Ironically, the myths and stories offer the best means in which to understand what society is all about and individuals within the society, and how to see the rest of the universe as part of the family. That's another reason why I thought it was so critical that the young people become more aware and sensitive to what those stories represent for them.

Actually, it's the springboard and the spine, or it was in the past, of all cultures, in that they learned how to live and act in harmony with the rest of the universe through their myths.

Although you are known primarily as a poet, you've published nearly 50 fiction and critical pieces. Why do you think scholars and writers have been basically silent about your other work?

I have no idea. I was surprised when you pointed out that they said almost nothing about my short stories because I've been publishing stories for quite awhile now, and I think I published my first story in the 70s. I can't remember an exact date but it has been over 30 years ago.

"Crow's Son"?

Yeah, that was one of the first. Their silence on this remains a puzzle to me, why the scholars and critics have ignored them. I haven't written volumes of scholarly writing, but I have written quite a few essays that I had even forgotten I had written (*laughter*). Most of those were book reviews, but I've also written a number of essays, and none of those are ever mentioned. I've actually come across them maybe two or three times, but that's it, but I have no idea why they made a point of ignoring my fiction and scholarship.

Do you think maybe this goes back to the idea that we talked about earlier, in one of the earlier questions about stereotyping?

That's possible. That's very possible, and they're not interested in you being anything else, except what makes them happy and what they want you to do. There is a lot of pressure in that area, and actually I've been called on the carpet for writing about certain things. But it's paradoxical in that one critic will say, "Well, you know, I think where he really needs to go is to give up this Indian

thing, and his real new strengths are in the non-Indian poems.” And then the other will say, “I don’t know why he writes about anything other than his Indian heritage because that’s where his real soul is and where his real strengths are.” The critics themselves contradict one another in terms of that, so I’m always amused because one will say one thing and another will have a totally opposite view, completely contrary. This has happened several times over the last couple of decades where I’ve read alternate views of my work (*laughter*).

You’ve done your dissertation on John Hoover, you’ve been working for years on Edmonia Lewis, and you’ve worked on [Edward] Curtis, the photographer. How do you see your academic writing informing your artistic writing and vice versa? What’s the interplay between those two forms?

I think it all goes back to when I decided to write about art for my PhD. I’ve simply continued the interest and I’m working on an essay on the paintings of Alfredo Arreguin, which I hope to finish within the next few months. I plan to have the Edmonia Lewis essay finished very soon as well. It was actually completed quite awhile ago; I’m merely adding to it and cleaning it up, bringing it into sharper focus. It has to do with thinking and writing about art, and seeing it in terms of Hoover, and it’s just continued, and I might even write more later, probably will, because the interest is continually growing rather than diminishing. It is related to the fact that I wrote my dissertation on a sculptor, and the interest continues to blossom. It’s affected me because I’ve written more poems about art, and will write several new ones on art. I mentioned Degas, but there are others too. For thirty years or more I have wanted to write a poem on the work of Paul Klee.

How has your personal aesthetic changed since the publication of The Crooked

Beak of Love in 2000, and what do you think has accounted for that change?

That’s a hard question—how has my aesthetic changed since...

...the last four years – because you’ve written Pull of the Green Kite and now you are writing the collected works. You’ve also written a couple of myths and legends, a short story or two, so what’s happening?

I think one of the things is that I’m digressing back. The short stories about the myths have inspired me to return to a manuscript that’s never been published, although there are fifteen contemporary short stories. About ten of those have appeared in magazines around the country and abroad, but I’ve thought about redeeming that collection, bringing it back to life, seeing what needs to be changed. I spent about five or seven years on that manuscript and I don’t think there will be many new changes, but there could be a few revisions here and there.

Because of the short story and the myths manuscript, I had thought about trying to bring new life to that manuscript and then send it out to new publishers. Working on the myths inspired me to do this. They’re mostly city love stories, but still they’re stories, and I thought of adding one more that I had been wanting to write about for some time and then send the sixteen stories out and see what response I get. Before I became discouraged, I sent it out to about six or possibly seven publishers over two or three years. There were maybe one or two positive responses, but they said they decided against it in the final analysis.

This whole idea of one’s aesthetic fascinates me, although it has very little to do with the poem itself because it’s a whole ‘nother world. I guess it appeals to my scholarly side. I’ve always been curious about how the art works. But I’ve tried to avoid writing about it as much as possible because I

thought it was academic and had nothing to do with me as a poet or short story writer, but it's not that the interest hasn't been there. It's just that I've been very resistant to doing much about it. I have written a couple of essays where I discuss my aesthetics a little, but never go on and on about it, only to have some idea of what it might be. I don't even know if I'm right on that. I just try to write and say why I write and what I write about, and the reasons for doing so. And maybe that's my aesthetic statement. Recently, a friend who came to a reading of mine, asked me, "Why don't you write your autobiography?" (*laughter*) I've never thought about this kind of writing. I've always been slightly skeptical of such books, and I'm not the only one. There are several writers I admire who feel that autobiographies and memoirs are a waste of energy. But I don't know, there is a slim possibility, after I finish these other projects—the collected poems,

the essay on Edmonia Lewis, and then the one on Alfredo Arreguin. I don't have any other prose projects, except for the short story collection, but that's finished. It's just a matter of tightening things up a little, and adding one story, so that's not a major project. But I don't know, I might talk with a couple of friends and see what they think and maybe give it a whirl. I'm not sure. I'm completely in the dark regarding approach. It could prove to be a fascinating challenge. It's a big project; I'd want to have these other things done first before I would tackle it. The work would require your full concentration because it's such a big job. After all, we are talking about a book. I'd want to get these other projects out of the way first, so I wouldn't have any distractions or anything pulling me away from it. If I ever did try an autobiography, I think I'd want to put all my energy into it, give it all I can and just focus on that writing project for a year or however long it would take.



Lynn Graham

William E. Smith (PhD, University of Utah) is Professor of English and coordinator of technical writing at Western Washington University, where he teaches basic writing, technical writing, the horror film, and early English drama. He has published reviews, articles, and textbooks on composition. He recently finished "The Complete Bibliography of the Works of Duane Niatum from 1968-2008" (unpublished).

Duane Niatum

Wind Figures

Always glad to be thought sunset's cleanup artist,
the best toe-tapper on the wind shovel,
Crow hops in threes toward
the object of its lost caw,
hammers away at the vanishing speck
of a pancake caramel.

Black ants march nowhere on the street,
neither pulled forward nor backward by storm,
dream, or sweet.
Like rainbow dancers on toe tips for the thrill,
their jaws snap like castanets for meat
on the broiler.

A terrier with hair four layers of filth,
abandoned under a mite's moon,
looks at me from the slant of his eye,
swaggers by like a wind gusto.
His mouth drips ketchup,
hotdog and kiwi fruit.
His tail wags straight for the sky,
signals to world, fly, and cat—

"I leave you in the mirror of my feast—
the wind, the hunger, my paw print
the first sign of your head full of sand."

Learning to Love a Body Dreaming It's Home

His heart takes a long breath as he hears time
chew away his body, yet he goes on composing lines
to the rhythm of the rising sun and ascending moon.
This writer refuses to play a broken chord
or a half-written quatrain between the living and the dead.
He assures his love and the few remaining friends
the poem tying a bow of colors round their minds
is like a concerto of a falling body rambling
through rooms of an empty house.
His spirit embraces its ruin and leaps through a maze
of glass like a white rabbit.

Barely recognized as separate from the dark,
Trickster begins to look no more than fading toes
and flatter and fainter than a scratch
of wind across a pond.



The Portrait in the Snow

I still travel the zig-zag road
wearing my grandfather's moccasins.
I am almost the age that cedar man died.
I live and will continue to live
a shadow humbled by the wolf
in my voice, the irony of each move
and moment calling me
a winter cone in a village
ancestors sang to the spirits in the clouds.

The cycle of his stories formed
the backbone of my childhood,
the figures wandering Hadlock beach,
the forest path from his home to his parents,
the creatures watching us, my extended family.

Rainbow-maker told me one rain-in-the-face day
"the sea repeats what rhythms matter
in this life, so look and listen
as if Wind is your heart's guardian."

In thunder storm or light of orange honeysuckle,
grim or joyous, I sat on a madrona
with branches woven into the seven skins of the sea,
watched for song waves to roll
me through the changes of flesh and fire.

I was the boy who wanted to smile
as he bounced from one wall to the next
yet landed on his feet.
The only mother I care to remember,
with her shoots of green blood, seeds, and leaves,
opened her basket and left the scars
I could call my own. Blood of the earth
flowed through my teeth and nose
as I learned my first fear dance.

A fall from the cherry tree
in my grandfather's front yard shot
my wind off to the next galaxy,
but Changer, the healing woman was close—
I summersaulted to land on my back
without a neck bone cracking.

I praise the severity of my gods
and my three pennies of luck
until Death steals the laughter
from my red belly.

No slave to today's Muse
of gadget and gloss,
nor, a well-oiled machine for the avant-garde,
I throw the dice of art
with eyes closed and my shaman drum
tuned to whiz and torrent.

I won't deny as a young man
with a keg of testosterone, I imagined
myself troubadour Crow of sex and play.
Whirling down the decades I found
what the ear remembers are *words for the wind*
as Roethke and other poets painted from a phrase
or imagination's indigenous inscape iridescences.
I glimpse spinning from beauty's web,
love, songs before language.
A guest at their hermitage
one could endure the hell of one's birth
and the hell of one's own making.
Nobody's to blame except the face in the marrow.

On the last curve in the journey
the road shifts from darkness to dream
to darkness, and I understand my life
has been a top with the map missing.
I juggled the magic sticks until dawn bruised
my fingers and speckled my eyes.
A lifetime of pushing the vertigo button
the lines and I ask what passed between us
like footprints in the snow?
Maybe they transformed themselves into desire;
I, only the transient on their stage,
the white page, the temptation they sparkled
with abandonment. We are as Papa Yeats warbled
like a vanishing toad at sundown,
the dancer and the dance.

The Blue Kite

The wind shapes and shifts
it heavenward like an arrow in love,
it flips over and rolls back,
twirls sideways a tail of the sun.

Like a dancer from the Ballet Russe
or, a Degas figure drunk on blue O's,
spinning the way an air spider spins
the rapture of her Paris audience.

Circling round the sun it smiles
as a baby does thrown and caught
in the air by his father,
kinetic as a heartbeat in the glory of cut grass.

The kite balances the still point of motion,
the word heard before language breathed
itself out of bloodstone; only the genes
hear the silences accent the song.

Old Blue weaver chooses to live on dreams,
joy, sorrows that layer the sky,
the wounds digging into sand
like razor clams with purpose.

The blue kite will not break
until the spirit detours for the ground,
a bubble bouncing from a cataract of Psyche,
each passage lit with its contraries.

ART & POETRY

Melora Wolff and Charles Bremer



Materials, Memory and Meaning

Diana,
I shivered only a moment,
gazed at my dress
draped
across rocks,

a shift
bereft of form, when
a dark swarm rose,
my premonition-

Where had my body dissolved?
Who swept me from my self?

My dress
heaved once,
ribbons waving,
frantic-

I dove from the willow bank,
naked, into the grip of Alpheus.

Now I tangle and turn
with him in our chasm,
disembodied lovers,
two furies merging.

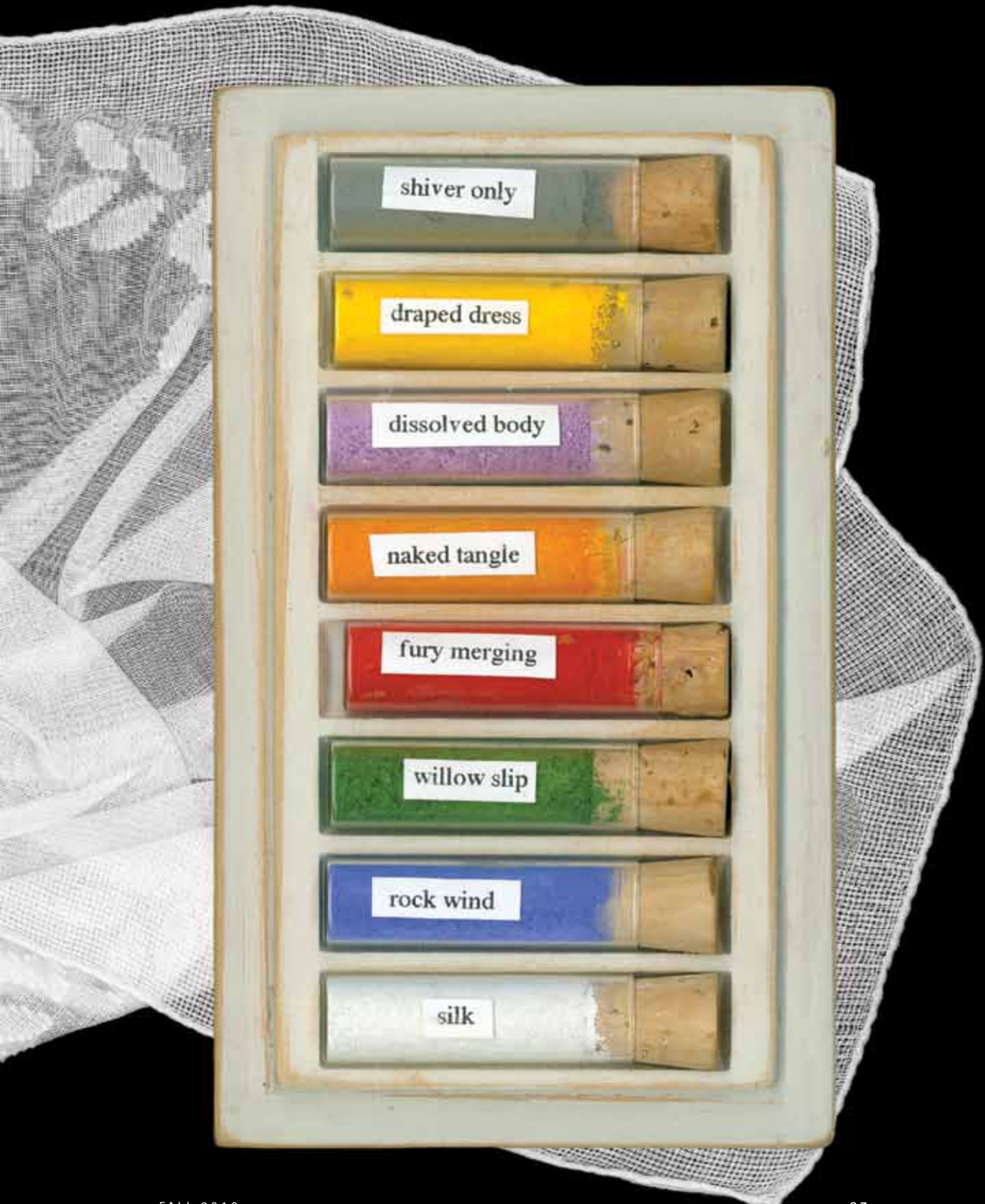
Young girls lie beneath
willows.

They toss their slips,
swim laughing, inside us.

One girl ashore
claims my dress,

lace of its sleeve torn apart
on the rocks by a wind.

Silk pours
from her hands
like water.



shiver only

draped dress

dissolved body

naked tangle

fury merging

willow slip

rock wind

silk

Walking the road
reminiscent
of walking the road,
trees
reminiscent
of trees,
stones hard as stones
beneath my feet
dark winged geese
resembling
dark winged geese
sleep
in tall grass beside a house
reminiscent
of my own house
of a house I might live in
reminiscent
of a woman
who opens her shades
sees the sun slide from
creek-water dusk
makes lists
like a woman making lists,
sips coffee,
gathers berries
that melt in her hands
reminiscent
of my hands
only older
and her laughter,
so reminiscent
of laughter,
sounds exactly like laughter,
could even be laughter—
the way love sometimes
really is love.

USA 18c



Overglaze
FOR CH

Deep Blue

LUELLA A.
SPOKANE

They warned me
not to speak to you

of armies, bloody
oceans, parting
centuries
I swallowed
tempests,
ships, whales
harpooned in nets,

they warned me
not to sing to you

many breasted
ballads from a cliff,
howl the vowels
of your name,
my snout froth-flecked,
not to

set my flesh on fire
again
or thunder toward you,
my furred thighs
gleaming
across the shifting floes.

*He's young,
they told me,
still waxing
in the tiny constellations
of Desire.*

So I entered earth
three times for you,

once as a seedling
once as a sapling
once as a sparrow
you salvaged from
your hearth.

Each time,
I came to you thirstier —
a little easier to hold,
a little harder to bury.



6. The Deluge. Genesis vii. 10

219 W. Superior St.

BIRDTREE CAFE
LOBSTER DINNERS
WINES & LIQUEURS

Warn, (verb) to warn, to caution against harm, danger, or evil, that is, to caution against anything that is harmful or injurious; to admonish against as a danger; as, to warn one against intended treachery.



He began watching them, at first, for fun;
he liked how they sped toward one another
as though they could see their two bodies
colliding with a shudder, a burst of light,
their misalignments of arms, thighs, torsos
transformed into fluent shapes that delighted
his obsessive sensibility, and held his interest.
Fantastic! They seemed almost to *know* it all-
the way the woman bought her sandwich,
while the man, hungry, leaned his bike outside;
the way the woman took her seat in a corner,
caught up again in her favorite book-a poem
about particles of dust inside a comet's wake,
while the man held open the door for a neighbor;
the way the heat of August swept inside, sultry,
a solar flare in the distance between them,
disturbing the woman's focus for an instant;
the way the woman got drunk each night,
lay down in the grass, her head in dizzy orbit,
while the man accelerated past her in a mood-
this was, after all, his road, a short-cut home-
already weary of summer, wanting a whiskey.
For years, he studied their constant patterns,
the man's refusal to feel any sort of urgency,
the woman's refusal to feel an invisible hand
pressed firmly against the small of her back.
His impatience grew subtly; also, his love.
In the end, he had to admit, he often enjoyed
the man's three children, how they softened
the familiar, perpetual despair; he admired
how in solitude the woman's heavy body slept.
Even that these two had managed, without him,
their own trajectories across the void,
gathering, despite themselves, a stellar debris,
provoked in him a flash of tenderness, and pride.
Nevertheless, he found them hard to forgive.



artists' pastels

yellow ochre

ocre jaune

A nude sits on an antique rocker. Guests admire the full breasts and oval belly, life sized. She swivels away on a stool, ashamed, her features hidden. The guests nod and whisper. Now she hangs on a suspended swing.

The painter apologizes that his model cannot attend the party. He wanders out the back door, toward the field, framed by the picture-window. A girl waits for him, dressed in shorts, a floral blouse, and canvas shoes. He walks past her.

She follows him across a creek bridged by clean stone. Abruptly, the painter heads away from her into the field. Heat shreds the cry of cicades. Bellies of hay swell round him. He lies down in the cool dirt, alone. He closes his eyes.

Through glass, guests flatter the absence of motion, the slim streaks of color defining the field of vision, that intimation maybe, of mud and splattered grass, or clouds and tiny blackbird shadows spreading across the hours heavier than oil.

cobalt blue (ultram.)

bleu de cobalt (outrem.)

kobaltblau (ultram.)

kobaltblauw (ultram.)

231,7

gold ochre

ocre d'or

goldocke

A



Remember, I raised you.

Wild beasts I tamed you,
smoothed your ruffled egos
praised you when you misbehaved
or brooded together in your fur coats.

Sometimes I wished you had never met.

In the mornings, you knit quietly,
humbled by sleep or licked clean by
love that left you chastened.

I had to stroke you back to life.

I miss you now you're older,
greying, going separate ways
resembling glamour-pusses
not yet discovered in your patchy coats
as the made up courtesans you are.

One day, I know you'll slip out
some side door into a pale dawn
and I'll barely see you leaving,
waving your tiny white handkerchiefs
goodbye.

- i. Teach me to stand, looking.
- ii. Show me safety in corners.
- iii. Footnote my disappointment.
- iv. Rally my errors for goodness.
- v. My body is stubborn ovation.
- vi. I am waiting for your promise.
- vii. Ignore my giddy abstinence.
- viii. Open my cabinet of objections.
- ix. Was the moon your last comfort?
- x. Take my lies in your thieving.
- xi. Bless my persistent childhood.
- xii. Deceive me with my indolence.
- xiii. Speak to me, or send pigeons.
- xiv. Do you know where I live?
- xv.



ARTISTS' STATEMENT

Through the dynamic between images and poetry, objects and words, these works consider transformations of the physical body through time, and the body's inconstancy as a vessel for permanent spirit. Transformations include aging and dying, of course, but also subtler indications of our gradual dis-embodiments, overseen perhaps by mythic gods, or by a divine witness, or just by one startled in a mysterious new realm. Our shared language of collaboration foregrounds the body as an artist's creative material—as brushes, pastels, delicate threads connecting form to identity. Just as a closed book, a locked box, an antique vial, a folded cloth or an ancient letter become containers for the language of our pasts, so too our bodies are vessels for fragments of memory and meaning, the materials of a re-envisioned life.

—Charles Bremer and Melora Wolff



CHARLES BREMER has renovated an old farm in Otego, New York, for his workshop, studio and gallery space where he explores the media of photography, drawing, architectural design, sculpture and experimental sound. His most personal work focuses on the subject of the human body through a highly evolved method of hand painted photographic prints and encaustic wax glazing. Recent exhibitions have included a study of old art materials, collaborative artist projects, and a series of photographs at the National Museum of Dance.

MELORA WOLFF's writing has been published in numerous anthologies and journals, among them *The Best American Fantasy* (Prime Books), *The Southern Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Fugue*, and *West Branch*. She has been a recipient of the Philip Roth Residency in Poetry at Bucknell University and of an Artist's Fellowship in Nonfiction from The New York Foundation for the Arts. She teaches at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. She is also on the editorial board of *Weber—The Contemporary West*.

LIST OF WORKS SHOWN (from 2009 collection)

Writers' Paint Box; The Dress; Nostalgia; Letter From My Last Life; Wake; Life Studies; Ode To Eyebrows; Pillow Book

D.L. Olson

On the Rocks



“Not so fast, honey,” Michael muttered, leaning out the passenger window and aiming his Pentax. “I can’t get anything in focus.”

Another squealed corner and the scenery abruptly switched from dull barren rock to glittering snowdrifts. “Snow in June?” Marianne blurted. She glanced into the rearview mirror and frowned at her flat hair — all on account of this cursed desert air. She pressed down on the accelerator, and their rental Pontiac fishtailed with a roar.

After his usual polite hesitation, her husband replied, “It’s hardly surprising at ten thousand feet.” He twisted his torso to point back at the blasted landscape they’d just escaped and clicked twice.

What a relief when he finally sat back down and refastened his seat belt. “At least we got away from those godawful rocks,” she said.

Michael’s lips remained slightly parted, like a ten-year-old expecting some wondrous gift, though the years were gradually marking their lines and incising his long face and forehead like a tombstone.

"Actually, snow's a rock too, honey," he told her.

"Water's a rock? Come on!" It irritated her how the camera around his neck dangled with the curves like a goofy pendulum.

"Honey," he began and paused. Had she ever met a man more the epitome of tact? "Remember that game, Twenty Questions?" he went on. "Animal, plant, or mineral? Those are the only choices we have."

All of a sudden, she hit the brakes and swerved onto the shoulder. Straightening out the wheels, she spun right back onto the road and sped onward.

"Water's a rock with a low melting point," he continued in his teacherly tone and glanced back at the mule deer still planted nonchalantly in their lane. He was such a little boy the way he gawked at whatever came along. Better that though, she supposed, than her first husband's sullen self-preoccupation. "Any rock will melt with enough heat."

"Too bad they don't all just melt then and boil off."

She didn't have to look to see the narrowing of his curious eyes or the hint of a smile at the corners of his mouth. His response came in a tone too low to vex anyone. "They all will eventually."

What woman could complain about such mild manners? Still, it was a shame he was so lackadaisical about his lagging career. If he missed the next vice-principal opening, he'd end up in the classroom teaching geography till the day he dropped. But then if he refused to try, why couldn't she move up into administration herself, especially now that she wouldn't be taking a leave of absence?

"I bet those yellowish rocks back there were welded tuff," Michael said. Bless him for not saying they should have stopped.

"Welded tuff?"

"You know, from a volcanic eruption."

"Volcano? Where?"

For a while the only sound was the whine of rubber gripping asphalt. "The one we've been driving on the last half hour," he said. "Don't worry — it's inactive."

Marianne pushed down on the gas so hard the Bonneville engine bellowed. This whole gigantic mountain was a volcano? Why, then the sooner they got off it, the better. And now the sun had vanished under a cloud, when a minute ago the sky had been clear.

"Are we really in this much of a hurry, hon'?" he asked. "I mean, what about taking in the scenery and all?"

She hit the brakes and, skidding onto a pullout, ground across the gravel to a halt. And there she sat, her chest heaving. Her darting eyes met Michael's eager gaze. "Go ahead," she said. "Snap your darned pictures."

His nod was ever so slight before he deliberately climbed out of the car. And that's where he was standing when the hammering began. At first, like the tiny pebbles clacking against the windshield from that Mojave dust devil. Then the sky simply opened up, battering the car

like a whole truckload of gray gravel dumped at once, bouncing every which way and splattering filthy drops.

"Michael!" she screamed, fumbling for the window control and rolling her own down instead of his. "Get out of the hail!"

But he just hunkered down and clicked away, as if capturing a luxuriant vista on the Blue Ridge Parkway. She buried her face in her hands and quietly sobbed. If only they could bag this desert vacation and head straight home. Why'd they ever come to Utah anyway? Plants that stabbed and spiders that poisoned and canyons up in the sky and deserts sprawling across mountain tops and snow in June and an ink-blue sky so clear that thunder clapped and bone-dry riverbeds suddenly rumbling with floods and hot winds humming across your ears and sucking you muddle-headed and mosquitoes days from water and lizards skittered underfoot across sand hot enough to sear flesh.

Not that dawn wouldn't bring frost. And to think back home in Ohio they had ever minded the sultry summers or clammy winters. Ha! Both were a cakewalk next to this microwaving and freeze-drying in turn. And the clouds! Who had ever seen any more grotesque? But then nothing out here was what it ought to be or made any sense. Worst of all, everything was so naked. She vowed never to take another tree for granted till the day she drew her last breath.

Something murmured in her ear like yet another species of winged vermin out for blood. I'm sorry, it hummed. She opened her eyes to see Michael's sweet face, his cheeks and forehead speckled with welts. "Did I ever get a fabulous shot of the hail stacked on the lava," he told her.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

He nodded, his narrow mouth just barely agape with the hint of a grin. As if somehow her loss wasn't his as well. Yet wasn't it his good nature that had won her heart almost two decades ago? Twenty years—a huge chunk of a person's life. At least a fourth. Or if you were unlucky, more. A long enough stretch anyway to lift them both over the crest and begin the descent. A lonely trek if the two were doomed to being alone now, even if they were inseparable.

"Why don't you let me drive for a while?" Michael offered, grabbing the door handle like a bashful boy. So she slid over. To think, she even was missing the underbrush at home so thick you had to cut it back with a machete. But then she'd take anything over this endless rocky sand so barren only prickly cactuses and scrubby bushes grew in it.

He carefully buckled his seat belt, put the car in gear, and ever so slowly started scrunching the wheels across the ice pellets blanketing the ground. "Beautiful," he muttered and shook his head.

"SCENIC VIEW" a sign soon read, followed by another pullout. Thank goodness Michael cruised on past. Marianne curled up into a ball in the bucket seat and leaned against the window, letting the sinu-

ous road rock her like a cradle. The pressure in her ears built up, so she swallowed hard and shifted her weight.

When she finally opened her eyes, there Michael sat driving in beatific silence, that maddening half-smirk so apropos of nothing still glued to his face. "There they are!" he shouted. "Look at the domes!"

She sat up and stared where he was pointing, but all she made out were pale golden behemoths of stone in the distance, jutting out of a chaos of ochre and vermilion. He let go of the wheel with one hand to unsnap his camera case. "Don't stop," she said.

"But, honey."

"Michael, see how dark the clouds are getting. If we get caught in one more storm, I'm going to lose it."

The tires squealed as he sped up.

By the time they drove off the mountain into the flatlands, the splotches on his face were almost gone. "I think this is it," Michael said, the corners of his mouth curling up as they approached a handful of buildings. She glanced at the map. Sure enough, in Utah this crossroads passed for a town. He eased off the gas.

On their left they passed crooked rows of tombstones set in red sand strewn with huge black boulders. Without signaling Michael turned right and steered under a gray, unpainted wooden gate, crowned by a sun-bleached horse's skull, and crunched across a parking lot of rocks, the noise like nothing so much as a steam roller shattering baby bottles by the hundred. Farther in, the blanket of little stones thickened, and the engine had to strain.

"You've got to be kidding," Marianne said.

Michael climbed out and, shielding his eyes from the sun with the flat of his hand, stared at the dark monstrosity of a mountain blocking the entire horizon. "Look what we just got off," he said, pointing above the quaint graveyard.

"I'll wait here while you register," she told him.

So he moseyed on by himself, sinking into the rocks to his ankles with every stride. Sure, she had wanted this vacation. Sure, she needed one as much as he did. But why couldn't they have gone to Hawaii or some other place green and lush? Another shuddering glance back at the skull atop the gate and she curled up like a fetus and closed her eyes. What do you mean — animal, plant, or mineral? Where did people fit into that scheme?

A quarter hour later, Michael still hadn't returned. So she opened the door and plunged both feet into the bed of rocks and, raising her knees high, struggled to walk. She was almost at the motel office door before she detected her husband's soft tenor along with a deeper baritone out by the road. Two elongated figures stood silhouetted under the gate — a man pointing things out and Michael patiently listening. Odd, since it wasn't like her spouse to chum up to strangers so. The instant she spotted the little boy with them, she spun around and headed for the car. The higher she stepped in her haste, the deeper

she sank. Why couldn't he comprehend she didn't feel up to meeting anyone? Not at a time like this. And especially not some kid, who was bound to be cute.

Back in the Pontiac, Marianne was dozing off to visions of grass blades so tall and sharp they kept neighbors at bay, when a rap on the window startled her awake. She sat up, wishing she could be anywhere but in this desert. She reluctantly got out and let Michael introduce her to Charlie Yates, the owner of this motel and roadhouse.

"And this here's my son, Jimmy," Charlie said, wrapping a huge, gnarled hand around the nape of the youngster's neck. The years had yellowed the father's uneven teeth. More rocks.

Jimmy shook her hand like a little gentleman, his shy smile still immaculate white, his fingers delicate as a kitten's toes. The boy's mouth was finely cut like his dad's, though his eyes were coal-black instead of Charlie's sky-blue. Probably from his mother, wherever she was. A bird hidden in the scrub fluted out a burry melody. Like the meadow-larks back east, only more wistful.

Marianne met Michael's glistening gaze and took his hand. Together they followed Charlie and Jimmy across the lot of stones, which she discovered was easier to walk on with deliberate steps. What was the hurry anyhow?

Father and son led them to a rock garden near the gate. There they all wound along the large stepping stones as Charlie pointed out every plant and rock with one hand, while the other held on to Jimmy like a lover's first carnation.

Antler and teddy-bear cholla. Pipe organ and prickly pear. Agate, jasper, quartz, and selenite. Shale, slate, and mica. Basalt, pumice, and rhyolite. And empty-socketed skulls of antelope and elk and cattle and bighorn sheep.

"Petrified wood's my favorite," Jimmy said and picked up a piece of rainbow agate and handed it to Michael.

"Mine, too," her husband replied.

"I've got a whole collection," Jimmy told them. Michael nodded and hefted the rock before carefully setting it back in place.

All of a sudden, Jimmy slipped from his father's grasp and charged for the road just as a pickup approached. Michael lunged and snatched the kid's wrist and yanked him away from the rumbling truck. When he finally let go, the boy fumbled for her husband's hand till he was holding it tight.

And so Michael and Jimmy led them all across the road into the cemetery, its unyielding firmness underfoot a welcome change. Michael poked at the fine red sand with the toe of his sneaker, so the boy did too. "Volcanic ash," Michael muttered, wiping the corner of an eye.

"And these boulders are volcanic bombs," Charlie said. Marianne looked up at the tremendous volcano she and Michael had traversed together.

They wound among the markers behind Jimmy till they reached a double-humped gravestone of burnished gray stone speckled with black flecks. Granite, she recognized. The deeply incised characters on the left side spelled out: Annabelle Yates, 1948-1992. The right inscription read: Charles Yates, 1945-.

"That's where Mommy's sleeping," the boy said with a tiny voice. His dad laid a gangly arm around his narrow shoulders and blinked, while Michael patted the little tyke's head.

Afterwards, it was Michael who suggested a rest before driving out into the nearby park. Not that they hadn't slept plenty the night before. She understood his private code. The smallness of the motel room was disappointing, but at least it had a closet and a peculiar air conditioner resting on rollers in a corner instead of fitting in a window.

She stretched her petite frame along the edge of the bed and shut her eyes and waited for Michael to nuzzle the nape of her neck and ever so gently lay an arm around her waist. Just like how many times now and counting? No sooner had the flushing in the bathroom stopped than the shower kicked on. What had gotten into him lately, showering twice a day, as if he couldn't possibly wash himself clean? And it kept taking him longer and longer.

While she waited, her limbs and torso grew heavy, and visions of black boulders and bleached horses' skulls began bobbing across her mind's eye like so many tumble-weeds caught in another dust devil—till pink hailstones pelted the plant skeletons to the ground, where they sprouted human arms and legs and heads.

Marianne awoke with a start to a loud whomp-whomp-whomp. She reached over and squeezed her husband's shoulder. "Michael," she whispered. "What's that noise?"

"What noise, honey?" he mumbled.

Whomp-whomp-whomp, it kept up, like a gigantic vacuum sucking out a person's insides.

"Michael!"

"You mean the air conditioner?"

"Make it stop!"

THE FARTHER EAST MICHAEL DROVE AWAY FROM THE BLINDING SUNSET the more unearthly the array of tilted rocks appeared. Layer upon layer of crumbling stone in garish rust and mauve and ochre. Then they came upon a heap of greenish gray powder, and he pulled up. "Bentonite," he murmured, killing the engine.

"It looks like ashes to me," she said. "From about half an eternity of hellfire."

"It is ashes, honey," he mumbled. "It must have been quite an eruption."

Soon they were moving on past a chaotic kaleidoscope splashed across pinnacles, mesas, and buttes till they reached a dull yellowish

gray-white layer of clay streaked with browns and siennas – all of it capped with flaming red sandstone. His thin lips parted to speak, but nothing came out.

“What happened?” she asked.

He cleared his throat and, assuming his classroom voice, said this whole area was once a vast forested swamp, back when dinosaurs still walked the earth. Then floods up-rooted trees and buried them with volcanic silt. Over time, the logs fossilized into rock. “That’s one way for wood to exist forever,” he told her. “Or as close to forever as anything.”

“What’s the other?” she said.

Michael blinked and gulped before uttering, “If its seeds sprout and flourish.”

She nodded thoughtfully and sighed. “Where do you want to go hiking first?” she said and cleared her throat.

He stared hard at the pallid streak of ash. “Let’s just go back to town and eat dinner,” he whispered.

“WHAT KIND OF DRESSING?” THE AGING HIPPIE WAITRESS ASKED, her gray hair tied up in a ponytail like a young girl. Marianne kept staring at the agate Jimmy had come by and given them. A lurid chunk of wood turned to stone, like a bad bruise beginning to heal.

“Honey?” Michael said.

“Blue cheese,” Marianne finally replied. Craning her neck, she glanced up at the ceiling fan and ran her fingers through her limp hair fluttering in the breeze like so much gauze. At least it wasn’t falling out.

A pianist in the next room began playing a mellow piece by Chopin. “Michael,” she began and stopped. The waitress set down her glass of burgundy and Michael’s bottle of ale.

“We can just look at the sights from the car from now on,” he told her.

“No, we’ll go hiking again tomorrow. Like we planned.”

The corners of his thin lips crinkled in a bittersweet grin. “We can try again, you know,” he muttered.

She stared out the window at the gate and the garden beyond and said nothing. Without looking she reached across the table and slipped her slender fingers into his stubby hand. Slowly she shook her head with a wistful smile. “I’m afraid it’s too late to have a child,” she said and faced Michael’s glistening gray-blue eyes.

They ate their entrées in silence, listening first to Chopin and then Liszt. Over the ice cream desserts, Michael quietly explained how wind and water had formed the natural stone bridges they would be seeing at their next stop. She stared at this curious, gentle man sitting across the table, her companion for the rest of her life no matter how long or short that might last. Could this kind, soft-featured eccentric really be her lover and spouse? Yet it no more felt like a mere accident

that their paths had crossed so far from where either had grown up than that the sun had captured the earth and held it in thrall. "Are you sure you don't want to fly straight home?" he suddenly asked.

She shook her head. "I'd enjoy a walk right now though," she said.

So he paid the bill, and they stepped out into the cooling twilight. There Charlie was pushing a creaking wheelbarrow heaped with fresh rocks along the motel walk, Jimmy perched atop the pile like a lizard catching the day's last rays of sunlight.

Michael's cool, dry fingers interlocked with hers, and they strolled together into the garden of rocks. There she stepped from a tilestone that had once been mud to another that had once been clay and knelt down and smelled the cactus blossoms redolent of day-old gladiolas. She caressed the petrified wood and the elk skull, both of which felt like nothing so much as earthly firmament. She scooped her hand into the warm sand and let the grains trickle between her fingers as if through an hour-glass. She stood up and gazed at the rising moon, the biggest rock in sight, though Venus and Mars were beginning to twinkle in the blackening skies.

"Agate, jasper, quartz, and selenite," he whispered.

"Elk, antelope, and cattle skulls," she replied.

"Shale, slate, and mica," he said.

"Antler and teddy-bear cholla."

"Pipe organ and prickly pear."

"Charlie, Annabelle, and Jimmy."

"Marianne and Michael."

With a gentle tug on her husband's hand, she turned toward the open gate, and they crunched across the rocks with a deliberate, steady stride. We reach into the dirt and fling planes and rockets into the skies. Animal, plant, or mineral? Two out of three live only to die, but what survives?



A descendant of Norwegian homesteaders, D.L. Olson grew up in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, studied literature and writing at UW-Madison earning two master's degrees, and became a professional librarian at Ohio University. The humble servant of six masterful felines, he lives in a century-old, slate-roofed house atop a ridge separating a serene Appalachian hollow from a rowdy college town and hones his fiction in his spare time.

Wendy Parciak

Lost



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What was the name of that river? I wake up at 1:00 A.M. after two hours' sleep, sweaty and disoriented. *Why can't I remember?* I can remember everything else about the place—the clear water, the pink and gray rocks, the tiny sandy beaches, the mossy sticks reaching into the water, the endless dark green conifers blanketing the hills, the mergansers *always the mergansers* just out of reach, floating on the water at the next bend, skittering across the top in their slow but graceful ascent into flight. No Harlequins.

Harlequin Duck, *Histrionicus histrionicus*, arguably the most beautiful sea duck to grace North American waters. In my opinion, the most beautiful duck, period. It is a small bird, little more than a foot long from the tip of

its bill to the tip of its tail, with a tiny dish-shaped bill. The female is downright plain, dull brown, with only three white spots on either side of her head that hint of her partner's glorious countenance. But the male. His steely blue-gray and rust-colored plumage is offset by spots and bands of white outlined in black. They appear painted, not real.

A harlequin, according to *Merriam-Webster*, is “a character in comedy and pantomime with a shaved head, masked face, variegated tights, and wooden sword,” “a buffoon.” Even the Middle French origin of the word, *helquin*, or *demon*, evokes the bird to me. The fantastical appearance of the male harlequin makes him seem like a circus bird, or one with an otherworldly origin.

Thinking about the harlequin at night calms me down. I can sleep again if I concentrate hard on an image of the first harlequin I ever saw: a female in white water, facing upstream, paddling but going nowhere. Harlequins are a “torrent duck,” unique among North American ducks in their liking for rough water. They spend their winters battling the surf along rocky coasts, then fly a short distance inland to breed on turbulent streams, churned straight out of mountain lakes and rich with aquatic insects and fish. They walk along the bottoms of these streams looking for food, or they dive, propelling themselves like fish with wings and feet. The sight of a duck in a mountain stream is incongruous and always startles me, even when I’m expecting to see one and have hiked miles along streambanks for that very reason.

But sometimes I cannot conjure up an image of the female just downstream from a standing wave. *No Harlequins*. What then? My heart starts to pound and my mouth grows dry.

The first problem with that river was that there weren’t any harlequins, so I kept going. I marched incessantly, sliding over slimy rocks, snapping branches out of my face, certain I would see one from atop the next stream-straddling log. Mergansers everywhere; I should have taken that as a clue. The stretch that I was on was too calm for harlequins.

The afternoon sun, though, was a drug. Perhaps it was its unexpected appearance on Washington’s Olympic peninsula—a finger of land between Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean that gets 100 to 200 inches of rain each year.

. . . *what river is this, anyway? Did Brian say to turn right or left after the switchback? The first pullout or the second?*

Rain in April is about as common as mosquito larvae in a mud puddle, so it was a surprise to get out of the truck and find myself bathed in strong warm light. I *was* a bit uncertain that I was in the right spot. . . . *what river is this, anyway? Did Brian say to turn right or left after the switchback? The first pullout or the second?* But the warm light on my head *come on, Brian takes risks without a second thought, the swish of water on rocks down below he drives like a maniac*

up these little roads, the ever-present mountain bike bouncing in the back, knowing only he and one assistant are responsible for all this wildlife, the sight of a large gravel bar through the trees when he got out of the truck and tossed you the keys, he didn’t even ques-

tion that you would know where to take it, the tangy scent of Douglas fir needles just do it—these things were all the allure I needed to wrap the thin wind-breaker around my waist, with a water bottle, a small notebook and a pencil tucked in the pocket, and plunge down the hill. I left the granola bars, raingear and sweater in the truck.

I can’t sleep. 1:20 A.M. My head is throbbing. I grope for the bandana, never sleep without it, pull it over my eyes. *Where is the harlequin?* I press down the edges of the bandana with all ten fingers. All I can see is a flock of mergansers, feathered crests flattening over the top of their heads as they fly away, sharp bills pointing into the bright, bright sun.

I followed the mergansers over and over again that day, squinting behind sunglasses, watching the water droplets leap off their wingtips and tail feathers as they took flight just ahead. The

walking was easy at first *just leave the truck at the pullout and hike, Brian said; it's only a mile or two down to the bridge.* I was able to make rapid progress on the gravel right next to the water. I didn't even have to step on the grasses and forbs that grew up the slope of the bank. The river was wide open, shallow and nearly straight, rippling over rocks with a sound like a saucepan bubbling on the stove. I could have walked it in my sleep, except that I didn't want to miss any harlequins *count them all, he said; we need this state land surveyed; leave the truck at the end of my stretch so I can bring it to the end of yours.* The females in particular would be hard to spot, and they were what I was most likely to

see, as males depart from the streams once incubation begins in the spring. I double-checked every bobbing stick, every small rock protruding from the water to make sure it was what it appeared to be. No harlequins. Too bad. I was good at counting and had spent a season counting ducks and seabirds from 500 feet above the waters of Puget Sound in a floatplane. *Fifty Red-breasted Mergansers, 35 Common Goldeneye, 15 White-winged scoters and five Black, 330 American Widgeon . . .*

Concentrate, dammit. 1:32 A.M. It's the middle of the night, and my thoughts are wandering from the singular place where they need to be. This is no time for reminiscences, most of which end up being unpleasant. *Harlequin isn't working.* Think about something comforting, hard as that may be in the black hole of night. Think about

your son wakes me up at 5:00 A.M.; I only have three and a half more hours — think about your husband insists I have a sleep disorder — think about your family back home psychotic sister who understands nothing; talking to her is like talking to a six-year-old — think just think.

But I can't. I am too tired to think, too awake to sleep. Even the most

I am too tired to think, too awake to sleep. Even the most comforting thoughts become dire in the middle of the night. My mind drifts back to the river. Maybe if I'd taken the trouble to know its name, I would have known where I was going.

comforting thoughts become dire in the middle of the night. My mind drifts back to the river. Maybe if I'd taken the trouble to know its name, I would have known where I was going. I walked and walked that day, as the sun descended into late afternoon and the near-horizontal bands of light and shadow took on a

magical quality. I knew I had gone a mile, then two, then three, and where was the bridge? *Should have pressed Brian for better directions before he leapt out of the truck.* I walked faster. *But he's always in such a hurry.* The stream rustled around a turn and picked up speed; five mergansers stuck their necks up in surprise at my sudden appearance and splattered away. *It's my job to be competent; how else can I live with myself?*

My foot slipped on a rock slimy with algae and I nearly fell headfirst into the water. I should slow down, I thought; the banks were getting steeper and a misstep when hiking alone in rough terrain could be life-threatening. I had worked as a wilderness ranger for three summers and was well-versed in the dangers of the woods. But how do you slow down when your pulse has quickened and you have to walk faster

to keep pace with it? *I've never been on that road before in my life; how the hell am I supposed to know where to park the truck?* My mouth was dry and I realized I hadn't had a drink since I started walking . . . two hours ago? I unscrewed the lid from the bottle and took a swig. The bottle was oddly comforting—a familiar object, a sign of humanity in a place where the only voice was my own, where no one could tell me whether to go forward or back, right or wrong. Miles and miles of dirt logging road, punctuated with junctions with other dirt roads to god knows where, nothing signed, no maps, no landmarks in a place where everything was buried in trees.

What is wrong with me? 1:50 A.M. I shift onto my back. I sigh loudly, in an attempt to wake my husband. He gives a tiny snore and rolls away from me. Usually by now the harlequin has done her job, taken me bobbing into the waves, into nowhere. Where is she? She must appear soon, as I cannot continue this line of thought. It is a place I do not want to go.

I was walking on the river; I rounded a corner, and there it was. A concrete slab across the river, weedy gravel banks rising up to meet it on either side, beautiful testament to humanity. *The bridge. Oh thank god, the bridge!* I was so relieved I broke into a run, splattered through the shallows, splashing my pants in the process, and scrambled up a dirty mound to the top. Here was the road, my savior, stretching in a smooth brown line downhill to the right, uphill to the left. Disappearing into the trees both ways. It was a skinny road with

no pullouts. *Odd.* I sank down on the concrete, which was warm from the afternoon sun, and pulled out my water bottle. *Wasn't there a pullout when we drove past here? It was where he said he'd be waiting with the truck.* I drank and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. It was trembling. *It's been hours. Brian should be here by now.* I rose and turned left up the road. The smooth dirt surface felt good to my feet after the long walk over streamside gravel and slippery rocks.

This had to be the right road—I remembered driving over the bridge and continuing several miles upstream to the place where Brian got out. After about a quarter mile, the forest deepened. Long fingers of sunlight filtered through the needles

but didn't touch the ground. I could see that the road continued through the gloom for at least half a mile as it ascended the side of the hill. *Too straight.* I stopped. Was I dreaming? Here was the bridge, the uphill road and the forest, but none of them looked quite right. The bridge was too short, the road too narrow, the hillside forest too long and dense. There had been a previously-thinned patch of woods and a switch-back. *Shit.* I turned and ran back to the bridge, knowing that somehow I had screwed up. I felt a flutter of panic deep in my gut.

Breathe. I gasp. I realize I have been holding my breath. I peer at the clock. 2:00 A.M. I should get up, eat something, read a book, anything to stave off the desperation that comes with darkness. But something holds me back. Perhaps it is the familiar feeling

I rounded a corner, and there it was. A concrete slab across the river, weedy gravel banks rising up to meet it on either side, beautiful testament to humanity. The bridge. Oh thank god, the bridge!

of helplessness, of being a pawn in a universe that has no boundaries and no purpose other than simply to exist. I have floated from one career to another, without a clear long-term plan. I have watched my sister's life deteriorate, the doctors trying drug after drug, while her mind withers and falls. Like passengers in a burning airplane, all she and I can do is lie there, strapped in, and let things happen. Life is a brief explosion in an otherwise eternal darkness, and there is nothing we can do about it. I didn't choose to be born and I don't choose to die. I have no choice.

I had no choice but to go back to the river, that day. I didn't know its name but it was more familiar to me than the road that wasn't quite right, the nightmare road. That road could loop around and around the hills for hundreds of miles; it was more likely to end in a clearcut on top of a mountain or in a berm deep in the forest than it was to provide a way out of this maze. I looked at the failing light in the evening sky and realized that one more decision was already made for me. I couldn't go back. It had taken me three hours to get here, and by the time I got that far back up the river, I wouldn't be able to see where to climb the hill to the truck. *If the truck was even there anymore.* There was no path up to the pullout where I had parked; it would be hard to find even in broad daylight. I considered waiting at the bridge, but the thought of shivering there all night was unbearable. I stood on the far side of the bridge and watched the water slide away into dusk.

Life is a brief explosion in an otherwise eternal darkness, and there is nothing we can do about it. I didn't choose to be born and I don't choose to die. I have no choice.

Maybe it was the effect of the encroaching darkness, but the river looked narrower downstream. More convoluted, with frequent twists, half-submerged logs and deep pools. Orange and blue slivers parted around the rocks, then mingled again. Harlequin-colored water. *Maybe harlequin habitat, after all.* I untied my windbreaker and put it on, as the air was cooling, and fished in the pocket for the notebook and pencil. In my effort to emulate my boss *take a risk for once, just stop worrying and do the job*, I was embarrassingly unprepared for backcountry travel. No spare food, water *single bottle half gone* or clothing, no flashlight, map or compass, no matches, first aid, knife or shelter—but at least I had a way to write a note.

I wrote: *I'M GOING DOWNSTREAM TO SEE IF THERE'S ANOTHER BRIDGE, 5:30 P.M.* and impaled the piece of paper on a bit of rebar that was sticking up from a corner of the bridge. It was the highest thing I could find, but when I glanced back at it from the downstream side, the tiny white paper looked no bigger than a moth. I swallowed *what choice did I have?* and slid down the bank.

The pools were bigger and deeper than they had looked from the bridge. The river was hemmed in by more trees than before; an enormous forest rose steeply up each side. I could feel my eyes adjusting to the dim light. The trees were too uniform to be old growth, the silence too deep. As an aspiring wildlife biologist in the Pacific Northwest, I had worked in all kinds of forest: clearcuts, re-planted forests in their second, third or fourth rotation,

recently-thinned forests with the occasional large tree amidst a skeletal stand of leftovers: skinny limbless trees that were topped by tiny clusters of needles and didn't look as though they would survive more than a single winter. But if those types of woody growth were called forest, then old growth should be called something else. Not simply big trees, but colossal trees, as can happen when one lives for 200 to 1,000 years. And not just those, but trees of all sizes and shapes: tiny seedlings and saplings in dense clusters, vine maple creeping through the understory and filling out wherever an opening in the canopy allows light to penetrate, trees growing amidst the fungus atop mossy nurse logs, ever bigger and more widely-spaced conifers culminating in the occasional massive Douglas-fir or western hemlock, and standing snags that may reveal their demise in their charred surfaces or beetle-bored tunnels. For its sheer diversity and biomass, old growth is in a class by itself; for its ability to store carbon above and below ground, old growth has a critical role in global climate change. For me, however, one of the most unique aspects of old growth is its sounds. Winter wren, varied thrush, hermit thrush, hermit-townsend's warbler, ruby-crowned kinglet . . . old growth is full of their chirps, whistles, trills and warbles. Science has yet to show that these birds are reliant on old growth in the way of the famous spotted owl, but the sheer number and

Nothing terrible could happen to me; people only died in the woods in movies or distant news stories. It's just a misunderstanding, I thought; the right bridge was a little farther downstream. Even if it wasn't, this river would eventually lead me to a larger river, a road, a town.

diversity of songs heard there relative to other forests suggests it is so.

2:53 A.M. The silence is deafening, pushing in on my ears from both sides of my head. My husband is so quiet that I put my hand on his back to make sure he's still breathing. My hands are clammy and I can feel my heart beating in my throat. I am still on my

back. If I turn on my side, I can hear the *thudthud thudthud* of my heart, which is at least a sound, but the reminder of my own mortality is excruciating. During the day I can think logically and appreciatively about the cyclic nature of life, but at night the inevitability of death becomes the focus of my terror. I attempt to wrap my mind around my eventual death and

cannot; it's like trying to understand infinity or a fifth dimension. I shake my head and try to distill the feeling of panic. I want to hear something, anything other than silence.

The farther I walked along that river, the quieter it got. Even the mergansers had vanished. I didn't mind at first because I was so relieved to be moving again. Nothing terrible could happen to *me*; people only died in the woods in movies or distant news stories. It's just a misunderstanding, I thought; the right bridge was a little farther downstream. Even if it wasn't, this river would eventually lead me to a larger river, a road, a town. I was young and fit, and not far enough up in the Olympic mountains to worry that I wouldn't eventually make it out.

The only problem was that the sun was going down and I couldn't walk the river in the dark. My assessment from the bridge had been correct—the pools *were* deeper and more frequent. Branches and logs crisscrossed the water like a game of giant jackstraws, the leftovers of a previously-logged forest. Not harlequin habitat; the stream was so clogged there was probably not enough prey for a female to feed her hungry brood, and there were no mid-stream gravel bars where she might roost for the night. I worked up a clammy sweat from the exertion of climbing up and over debris, jumping down onto the mossy rocks that protruded from the shallows, and then scrambling up again. I stopped to take a drink *single bottle ¾*

gone and began to look more critically at the chaotic route ahead. Walking was good in that it kept me from thinking too much, but I was tired. I wanted to be home; I wanted to fall into a deep, dreamless sleep. I examined the forest on each side of the stream and saw that the side I was on rose to a distinct crest, perhaps 300 feet up. Maybe up there I could see where I was going. I would be able to see roads and another bridge, assuming I got to the top before the last hint of light vanished. Without another thought, I left the river and climbed.

The ascent was easy compared to walking along the riverbed. Low-growing plants were scarce, and the scattered branches and logs were simple to avoid. The trees were too dense to allow much life beneath them.

No harlequins. Harlequins like to nest near streams in closed forests—those with mature trees with overlapping canopies—but a harlequin would feel exposed under this growth-suppressed thicket. There was little natural ground cover in which the duck might build its down-filled nest: no low-growing vegetation, no giant roots, rotting stumps or tree cavities. Female harlequins are secretive birds, relying on their incon-

spicuous nest placement and their dull plumage to hide their nests from predators. For these reasons, and also because the species has been studied less than most other North American ducks, very few harlequin nests have ever been found. And in these woods, the level of human-caused

disturbance was too high, the logging too thorough, the re-planting too dense, the subsequent prevention of fire too successful. The forest was remote, but it was no longer wild. I would find no nests here, even if I were looking for them.

The slope steepened, slippery with needles. I stopped frequently to catch my breath and make sure I still knew where the river coursed even if I couldn't see it. But I couldn't stop for long. The light was dimming by the minute. I tried to speed up, but instead slid backwards and landed on my hands and knees. I remained motionless listening to the ragged gasps of my breath. Nothing else seemed to be breathing. Perhaps the basis of my unease had less to do with taking a

Perhaps the basis of my unease had less to do with taking a wrong turn on a road, I realized, than with the unnatural silence, with the fact that the forest was in a state for which evolution had caught it unprepared.

wrong turn on a road, I realized, than with the unnatural silence, with the fact that the forest was in a state in which evolution had been caught unprepared. No evening bird calls, no last-minute foraging before dark. Not even a squirrel chattered.

"Where am I?" I said. It came out as a whimper. "WHAT AM I DOING HERE?"

The woods swallowed my words and gave nothing back.

I put my head in my hands. Night had arrived, heedless of my fear. I couldn't hear, couldn't see. The trees had become the merest shadows against the darkness of the ground and the occasional sliver of sky and stars. There were no roads, hills, river valleys, anything. The air was still, the trees so close I could feel the bark of two trunks if I stretched out my arms. I was buried alive in a Douglas fir coffin with no one to save me but myself. But how could I save myself when I had no idea what to do?

I am out of balance. 3:01 A.M. Even lying flat on my back, I can sense the world spinning. I can't tell whether I'm in the center of it, at the eye of the storm, or on the periphery, watching life go by until it's gone. I clutch the mattress to keep the bed from hurtling me into space the way the surf will dash an unlucky harlequin against the rocks. I sigh. For me this will be one more night to join all the other sleep-deprived nights I have experienced since my adolescent realization that the universe does not revolve around me. How can my sister stand not just the occasional night, but the endless days

and nights of her chaotic life, in a drug-induced lethargy that her anxieties and hallucinations still penetrate? How can a forest continue to grow when its natural structure has been altered almost beyond recognition? How can a small sea duck survive in this world of oil spills, water shortages, climate change and clearcuts?

I don't know. I don't know now and I didn't know then. Then, I didn't

think. My mind was numb with the horror of my loneliness. I slid back down the hill as low as I could go, to where I could hear the only sound remaining in the vast Olympic night: the river. The water had slowed down with the cool of evening, but it still murmured from one pool to the

next. Low, throaty gurgles like stones moving across a mountain. Forming a path. The river was a black thread lit by the million-year-old light of stars. I couldn't see well enough to keep from walking into logs and getting my feet wet, but I could tell which way the water flowed. I turned upstream toward the bridge.

3:05 A.M. My head feels like it's been stuffed with cotton. I've been squeezing my eyes shut for so long that they feel dry and gritty and they will no longer stay closed. I have been beaten by the river of my past. Never have I allowed my thoughts to take me back there so vividly and never will I again. I have proven to myself that I cannot escape the terror that comes back to haunt me in the night.

But there is a way.

My mind was numb with the horror of my loneliness. I slid back down the hill as low as I could go, to where I could hear the only sound remaining in the vast Olympic night: the river.

A way out? I almost laugh. I'm not about to kill myself.

No, a way to go on. To get past this.

That interests me. I force my thoughts to slow down so that I can listen to the ones underneath.

Think about it. The whole thing, the big picture.

Yeah, I did that, I interrupt. What have I been doing for the last two hours? It hasn't been pleasant.

The big picture includes the ending.

What about the ending? It wasn't spectacular. I scabbled my way back, slithering over rocks and logs on my belly. Not nearly as graceful as the harlequins are when they do it. I got to the road. Not five minutes later, I heard Brian shouting my name in a hoarse voice, and then I saw a wavering light through the trees and there he was on his mountain bike. He had checked that bridge earlier and didn't see my note, but fortunately he decided to check again. I don't know who was more relieved, but I wasted no time in climbing on the back of the bike and letting him pump us several miles uphill to the truck. Turns out that road was closed off to vehicles, and the next road the river would cross was sixteen miles downstream. He was almost about to call out the air rescue people, which would have been a huge embarrassment to both of us. So I was lucky. And I didn't lose my job.

But what were you thinking?

What was I thinking? I'll tell you what I was thinking: nothing. I was a zombie for that last stretch. All I

remember is the smell of dried sweat, the last of my fear, which filtered out of my windbreaker as I clutched my boss on the ride up the hill. Later, I thought what an idiot I was to get into such a mess. Later still, I tried my best not to think about it at all. The entire experience seemed unreal when taken out of context. That's worked pretty well for the last fifteen years except in the

middle of the night, when the familiar fear creeps out again, all too real.

I check the clock. 3:08 A.M. This is no help. Why am I listening to myself, when that never helped before?

It did.

The thought stills me. Relief. *That's* how I felt on the journey back up the river,

although I hadn't remembered it until now. I was relieved because I was doing something that made sense. I was listening to some gut instinct, which told me what I needed to do to get out of this mess. Relief. This was not relief as I had felt earlier in the evening when I kept moving on the river to keep from thinking. This was relief that I had finally made a decision in the matter of whether to go or stay. I chose *not* to keep going, into the unknown down the river or up the hill, but to stay. I would stay at the bridge, I would battle my fear all night long if I had to. Even more elemental to my relief was the realization that I had the power to choose.

That's it. 3:09 A.M. And I still have that power. Granted, some of my choices are not too smart, but when I think back over the major decisions I've made

in my life, every single one of them has had consequences that I would not take back. Those consequences—my schooling, my jobs, my hobbies, my family and friends—are my anchor. They give me my place in the universe.

The cotton in my head is transforming into the soft down of sleepiness. I yawn. I think about future decisions I will make. These choices will be the way I will combat the helplessness I feel when I think of the state of the world. These choices will be how I will keep from losing myself in despair, and how I will find ways to make the world a

better place. Better for people, better for forests, better for harlequins. I close my eyes.

The harlequin is back, riding a wave, facing upstream. But she is not floating aimlessly. She is diving, snatching aquatic insects and bobbing to the surface again. When she is full, she swims to shore and clambers twenty feet up the bank to a thick clump of grass under a fallen branch. She parts the grass with her bill and slides onto her nest, so quick that if you blinked you would still think she's on the river. She tucks her bill under her wing and she sleeps.



Wendy Parciak has a PhD in ecology from The University of Montana, and has worked as a wilderness ranger and biologist for numerous state and federal agencies. She also studied cello at the Julliard School of Music. She lives in Missoula, Montana, with her husband, young son, and three very active border collies. Her first novel *Requiem for Locusts* (Two Canoes Press, www.requiemforlocusts.com) was a 2008 Montana Book Award Honor Book.

Mikel Vause

Haworth

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting...

—from *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë

Between the parsonage and the doors of its church
 Is a graveyard
 Headstones of gray Yorkshire stone
 Tilt at odd angles
 And turn soft from rain and wind
 Names fade to dust
 And are carried across the moor
 By the angry wind
 Blown in-land from the sea
 That shakes the branches of aged oaks
 And rings the bell in St. Michael's grim tower
 And rattles the Black Bull's windows
 And chases dried leaves along
 Steep cobbled streets to edge of the bleak Pennine Moors.



Jerry Nelson

Saint Oswald's Church, Grasmere

All truth is safe, and nothing else is safe; and he who keeps back the truth, or withholds it from men, from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal, or both.

– Max Müller, *The Science of Religion*

In Saint Oswald's
 There's eight hundred years of dust
 Not everywhere
 But somewhere surely
 In a corner,
 Behind the organ
 Possibly atop a beam
 Dust that has filtered down through time
 Blown about at each opening
 Of the iron-banded oak doors on Sundays
 Settled in the most inconspicuous places
 Hidden from the straw brooms
 And oil-soaked rags of cleaning women
 Dust must be careful not to be seen
 Resting on ancient English hardwood benches
 Or mullioned windowsills
 As the sun pushes westward over Heron Pike
 And pours through the stained glass saints
 Exposing everything secret
 Except that which is hidden in the deepest
 And most protected recesses.



Please see page 52 for Mikel Vause's biography

Kate Kimball

Simple, Ugly Things

First, they took her daughter. And she always used that word, taken, because her daughter, even after forty-four years, was always removed from her. She had even wondered if her daughter had been switched at birth; she seemed to belong to someone else entirely, and for years, she tried to reclaim her daughter as her own. Her daughter, Domitilla Maria Consuezo Padenilla, had changed her name, which meant “little tame one,” the minute she turned eighteen to ‘Jenna Martin.’ She was forced out before she was ready. Mrs. Padenilla couldn’t be induced ... too many complications, none of which the doctors had ever fully explained to her, and so her daughter had been born weeks early, Valentine’s Day, leaving a thin white scar on her lower abdomen which had hurt her ever since. And her daughter always was the scar – thin, white, hurting; the girl who announced years later that she was pregnant and needed money, that she was in love, that she was getting married, that she was getting divorced, that she never believed in God, that she needed money for bail, money for a baby-sitter, for a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of scotch.

Every attempt Mrs. Padenilla had made to help her daughter resulted in more pain, in more wounds ... a fractured rib, a bruised arm, a swollen hip. Perhaps the swollen hip was when the pain had started. But it seemed impossible to have an exact source, an origin of pain to list in two neat lines of perfect English on the pink health history form that Mrs. Padenilla had been staring at for the past two hours. Mrs. Padenilla had been through this routine many times before, and knew



Kaneez Hassan

the emergency room doctor would invariably run some tests, concur that they were all inconclusive, refer her to a counselor, and prescribe some rudimentary medications that were never covered under Medicare Part D.

But the pain was real. It had to be. Mrs. Padenilla had awakened that morning with a sharp pain in the left side of her head. She immediately assumed it was a tumor that was running down to the stem of her brain and flowering into many lesions. And she had so much to prepare today. She had been making her sister, Adelita, who she familiarly called Alita, *gallo pinto*. She was boiling the red beans when the pain had first shot down the side of her head. Alita's favorite food had been Mrs. Padenilla's *gallo pinto*, and she even had admitted on one occasion that she even liked the brown rice instead of the white, which Mrs. Padenilla often referred to as her 'secret ingredient,' a small attempt to help Alita eat better. The doctors had advised Alita to go on a strict organic diet, to stay away from all refined sugars. Mrs. Padenilla wanted to make all of her sister's favorite foods; she wanted them to be perfect on this day.

Her kitchen sink was full of *maduros*, green bananas she needed to peel for the dessert. She had been canning the day before, trying so hard to teach her daughter the importance of saving food and of saving money. She had been boiling red chili peppers, bright peaches, green cucumbers, red cherries. She had scrubbed mason jars and arranged them in neat little rows. She had been stirring the sticky syrup, licking the sugar off of her hands in between, stirring the vinegar in another vat when the pain had shot down her leg and she had started shaking. She explained all this to the lady at the desk who had taken her identification card, gave her the pink questionnaire and had asked her to take a seat and wait for her number to be called. Mrs. Padenilla explained that she needed to hurry, that she had a funeral to attend to that evening.

"Take a seat," the girl had said, smiling.

Then Mrs. Padenilla had called her daughter from the pay phone. "This could be a tumor," she had said. Her daughter sucked in her breath. "Mom, don't be so dramatic ... if you were going to get cancer, you would have gotten it by now." Mrs. Padenilla heard her grandsons arguing in the background before she dropped another quarter into the phone. Then, the phone cut out. "Can you hold on a second?" Her daughter always did this, put her on hold for twenty-thirty minutes when another call came on her line. Mrs. Padenilla hung up...remembering the time in Puerto Cabezas when she had paid a quarter to her mother's friend, Mrs. Loren, to read her palm. Mrs. Loren had told her that she would outlive everyone she loved.

IN THE WAITING ROOM, she sat across from a woman wearing a head scarf who had three young boys. The baby was crying ... and then screaming ... and then it seemed that he would go back to crying.

The mother would try to hold him in different positions, but nothing seemed to help. The two other boys were playing with the toy cars and then began to throw them at each other. Each time they did so, the mother would look at them and take a deep breath and then say something in a language so quiet and sharp, a language that Mrs. Padenilla could not understand but found that she wanted to. She imagined wearing the head scarf and speaking in a beautifully intense manner, with the hidden sharpness that seemed lost in her own tongue. She smiled at the boys, who then ducked shyly behind the plastic chairs, and she smiled at the woman in the head scarf, who returned the gaze but neither smiled nor frowned.

Outside, it was beginning to rain. She heard the wind as it pushed against the walls of the hospital. Mrs. Padenilla thought how perfect it was that it was raining. It had rained and rained on the day her mother was buried. She had stared out her front window on that day, watching the streaks of rain, and imagining her mother's casket being carefully lowered into the ground, thousands of miles away on soil that she would never be able to afford to set foot on again. Rain was a normal, daily occurrence and was nothing special in Southern Vancouver, and yet here it was again, just as beautiful as it was when her aunt had called her with the news that her mother had died.

Ever since she had moved to the small neighborhood in Washington, she had placed her umbrella carefully in the bottom of her purse, underneath various sheets of paper, paper that contained unfinished shopping lists, parts of phone numbers and addresses, things she needed to do. Her umbrella hid underneath crumpled tissues (crumpled from allergies that she never had been able to get rid of no matter how much allergy medicine she took), a small cosmetic bag (containing one tube of almost dried-out mascara, and blush that was too pink), a rosary, and a Spanish Bible. She fished through her purse, looking for the cherry lozenges in the tin box. She touched the wood of the umbrella handle, fingered the careful carvings, remembering how Alita had sent her it as a gift from Cuba. Those people know how to make umbrellas, she had said.

Mrs. Padenilla felt anxious in the waiting room. She tried to look at the boys again, but they were sitting, playing with the toy cars. They reminded her of the boys she had helped years ago, the boys she helped cross the street as they followed her red sign. She remembered holding the sign in front of cars, their lights blinding her, as she watched the colored, plastic backpacks bob up and down in the rain. Her jacket was flimsy; the rain soaked through the fabric until she was drenched and began to freeze. Her husband had forgotten to pick her up from work that day, and, after an hour of walking home, she came down with pneumonia and had ended up waiting in a hospital just like this one. Her husband had apologized but continued complaining for months about the loss of income from the few weeks that she missed work. He had taken another hotel maintenance job shortly after and suggested that Mrs. Padenilla consider working as a school cafeteria

worker again. When she interviewed for a position, the supervisor had told her that the work might be too rigorous for her and had advised her to enjoy retirement. "Spend time with your grandkids," the supervisor had said. The boys playing with the cars in the waiting room were in another world, a more vibrant world, and she knew that unless they were asked, they would never again look at her worn face. They would never stare into her eyes which had begun to be affected by cataracts.

There was an older couple. They were arguing in whispered voices. Mrs. Padenilla was trying to decide which one was sick. There were two men reading the newspaper, a mother and a teenage son, two young women, and tables filled with tattered magazines about business and global economics, subjects that reminded Mrs. Padenilla about the worn copy of *The House on Mango Street* that lay on her coffee table next to the Bible. She had always been fond of that book. It was the first English book that she had understood and enjoyed. The pages were marked with stains from Crisco, marked with small black lines that had bled onto the pages through her checkbook. Those vignettes defined her. In another life, this is what my thoughts would sound like, she always told her daughter, who never thumbed through the worn book.

FINALLY, HER NUMBER WAS CALLED. A woman with bright blond hair, wearing pink scrubs took her vitals. She put the thermometer in her ear and recorded her temperature. She scratched a few numbers on the notepad, recorded her weight. "Looks like you've lost some weight since you were last in." She smiled. Mrs. Padenilla just stared at her, gave a small smile. She went into a small room and was asked to take everything off from the waist up and to put on a cloth gown. "Dr. Hirning will be in to see you shortly," the nurse smiled before exiting.

Mrs. Padenilla was careful with removing her clothes, folding them into neat squares, laying them gently on top of each other. She wore four layers, sometimes more. Her skin was soft, leathery, worn, and she shivered under the gown the nurse had given her to put on. She always felt more sick wearing that gown, her head spinning, the pain throbbing, her abdomen sharp with pressure and pain.

Whenever she felt pain, she thought of her mother, who had told her on numerous occasions that she had nothing to complain about when she compared her pain to the pain that the Lord Jesus Christ went through. She thought of Him now, His crown of thorns before her, her own head throbbing. Her sister whispered that the pain was good, that she should consider it an omen of something better. The doctor had thought Alita's pain helped her because it worked as a warning for the growth of the cancer, and it was only later, after the MRI which the doctor originally had told Alita she didn't need, that Mrs. Padenilla found that the cancer was everywhere, eating holes into Alita's brain.

Alita had always joked that Mrs. Padenilla would be the one to get cancer, that her worries would somehow dispose her to it, but in the end, she was the one who passed away from it. Alita was seven years younger and was always convinced that they would live to be in their nineties, laughing, arguing, and making fun of each other each time they did something like their mother. Alita had always joked that she should have been the older one. She was fearless. She was the first one to marry, the first one to learn English, the first to go to California. I'll be a movie star soon, she always joked. She sent pictures from all the places she went, California, Hawaii, Las Vegas, Prince Edward Island, Cuba. Each place seemed more exotic than the first, and each seemed to make her want to see more.

Her sister's viewing had been two nights before. Alita wanted to be buried in a bright blue dress. She had even bought the dress months before she died. It had hung in her closet, a plastic sheath protecting it from dust and dirt. It's the perfect dress ... it even makes me feel like I could dance ... *espero la muerte*, Alita had said, welcoming her death. Weeks later, as the cancer had progressed, before she became bedridden and unconscious for days, she had begged to die. *Quiero morir, quiero morir*. In that dress, under the dim lights of the funeral home, Alita looked iridescent, almost fairy-like, serene, and peaceful. The blue dress was not as bright as it had seemed when it hung in Alita's closet. It seemed darker, the sleeves folded perfectly with her arms; the folds of the jacket held together by one button seemed to flow elegantly with her body. Mrs. Padenilla had been shocked to see how thin her sister really had become, her once thick body empty of the tissue she once held. She had touched Alita's hands then, her hands which were folded together, holding the rosary beads. The hands felt so solidly cold to Mrs. Padenilla's warm hands, the cold stung her skin, and she left the viewing feeling that coldness spread throughout her body.

Alita's eyes were closed. *Acepta su destino*. Mrs. Padenilla knew her sister had accepted her fate, welcomed it even, within the beautiful thread of the blue dress. In her mind, she remembered her sister calling her over fifty years ago, *estoy enamorada*, she had whispered when she proclaimed she was in love, when she had decided she would never go home again. She had decided her fate then, exchanging a life of hardship and poverty for something that seemed so much brighter. It seemed to Mrs. Padenilla, that she was always chasing Alita, calling her to come back to something, somewhere, that seemed to be nothing, nowhere she wanted to be. As she stared at Alita's face, her closed eyes, she seemed to be entirely at home. She looked like she was sleeping, she had told her daughter, who had not been able to attend because she had to work.

Really she looked like some sort of stiff mannequin, manifested in the amount of plaster that they had applied to her face, the paint they had used to darken her lips, and they never had gotten the color quite right ... there were patches of pink, patches of white in her smooth brown skin.

"WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM TODAY?" Dr. Hirning had asked flatly when he entered the room. He smelled of coffee and reminded her of her uncle. So American, she could hear Alita saying. He opened a laptop and began typing frantically.

"My head hurts...it has a lot of pain, going down my back." Mrs. Padenilla paused, not sure if he was listening since he was typing so fast.

"It says here that you are also having abdominal trouble?" Dr. Hirning said making reference to her health history form. She nodded. He leafed through the records, typed more, and inched closer and closer to the screen.

He asked her to lie on the exam table and she did. She breathed in and out and imagined that she was far away, floating on a raft in a clean, blue ocean. His rough fingers touched her abdomen; he pressed down on different parts and asked her to rate the pain. One was not very painful and Ten was so painful that she thought she was about to burst. His palms were dry and rough. His touch was careful, almost fearful of her worn skin. He had probably been doing this all his life, she guessed. But he still doesn't know how to touch a woman, she could hear Alita whisper.

"When did this pain start?" Dr. Hirning asked, pressing again on her abdomen.

"I don't know ... maybe ... maybe a few months, a few years. The pain in my head started this morning."

He motioned for her to sit up.

"Well ... I see that you have been in several times, all similar symptoms. Headache, pain, dizziness. Your lab results are normal, though. Why don't you tell me about the pain? Mrs. Padenilla, tell me about when the pain started and how it felt." He continued to look at her chart, as if the answers would come more from the pages than from her mouth.

It seemed impossible to draw the strands of pain out in simple sentences which the doctor could understand. Alita had left her pain behind when she came to America; Mrs. Padenilla had carried her chain of misfortunes with her. *Cadena de infortunios*. She unfolded them now, counting each link. There was pain in her wrist; times she had wrestled the keys from her sixteen-year-old daughter, who had been drinking. Shards of pain through her forearms where she had shielded her face from her husband's blows. Pain from patches of skin that were removed because of questionable moles, because of sun damage. There were pains from years of cramping, from miscarriages, from her crushed hope. Those pains will never go away, her mother had always told her. You need to pray more, have more faith, then you will get a baby. The pain in her back was probably from one of two car accidents. The dark scars, the silver marks along her skin, the wrinkling, the lines that marked her seventy-eight year old body, these simple, ugly things became the stories she never told. It hurt to even try to make the words form. They were hollow sounds, empty whispers.

“When did it start? Think about the pain, when it first began.” Dr. Hirning had prompted. The pain in her arm was from the time she wrestled her husband. He had lost his job, came home drunk, wide-eyed. He had hit the side of her face with the back of his hand. Over and over, he’d hit her, until she saw the black of his mind, the impending infinite sadness, and when she lifted her arms to stop him, he fractured one. The wrist never had completely healed, always a little crooked on one side. Years later, he had touched that wrist softly. That crooked shape of her wrist is what had brought them together. In that crooked deformed flesh, they became one.

The pain in her feet came from the time she chased Alita down the street. Alita was eight and had decided to run away. She had packed all of her belongings in one simple bag and had left, leaving the screen door which hung by a thread, swinging in the wind. Her mother had told her to watch her. You are older, and she looks up to you, so watch what you do to her, her mother always said. She had run after Alita, calling her to come home. She had raced down the street, her feet becoming worn, scratched, broken, bleeding. She still had a sharp nerve pain that came from her upper hip, shooting down the side of her leg, growing in her toe.

There were more scars, more wounds, more history. The time her husband turned the opposite way onto a one-way street, that time they went looking for their daughter. During that time they still thought they could save her, and they had ended up in a head-on collision and Mrs. Padenilla had been hurled into the airbag. The accident had caused so many injuries – bruising her jaw, the thumping in the back of her neck, her swollen hip that still made walking hard. Her ribcage was broken, her husband was dead.

UNDER THE DOCTOR’S LIGHT HANDS, her mind raced. The pain had started with the c-section, that seemed to be a probable cause. She was so fragile then, protective of her weak body, even more protective of her daughter. She had called her mother long-distance, told her that she had named her daughter after her. She will always be lucky then, her mother had joked. But the story was not entirely true. Mrs. Padenilla had only given her daughter her mother’s last name as a middle name. She always wondered if her luck would have changed if she had told the true story.

Then there was the loneliness that began to define her, that pain that throbbed in her belly, the miles that separated her from her family. Her first child would never know her grandparents, her other aunts, uncles, or cousins. Alita always traveled. Call me anytime, she always said, implying that the hard plastic of the phone could keep them together. Mrs. Padenilla went to friends’ homes for holidays, watched them open gifts, eat and pray together, and it always felt like she was holding a snow-globe, pressing her face against the glass, trying to get inside of something that was never penetrable. “Send pictures” her

mother always said, and she bought disposable cameras, but the pictures always turned out too dark, the colors running together, the gloss scratching underneath the fingers that touched them.

DR. HIRNING FINALLY SAID SHE NEEDED TO SEE A PAIN SPECIALIST. He wrote a referral down for her in perfect black letters. "Give him a call. He should be able to help you," he said. People here believe everything the doctor tells them, her sister whispered. She had chosen acupuncture, meditation, herbal tea over chemotherapy and radiation. That only increases the chance of survival by a few months. If He wants me, He can take me, Alita always said, quoting a phrase her mother often said, and always ending it with the same doubt, the same disbelief, and the same subtle touch of sarcasm.

BY THE TIME MRS. PADENILLA HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM THE EMERGENCY ROOM, it was too late to go home and cook *gallo pinto* or peel the *maduros* for the dessert. Instead, she had to take the bus to stop by a supermarket and pay seven dollars for a boxed cake. Even though she had given the clerk a ten dollar bill, he only gave her two dollars change, and when she pointed out his error, he said he didn't understand her. He ran his hand through his dark hair before ringing up more groceries for another customer; the line was getting long. After checking her watch, she decided there was not enough time to argue, and she slipped her arm through the handle of the plastic bag.

The cake was too sweet, too dry, and too yellow. Mrs. Padenilla's fingerprints stuck to the surface. It was the only dessert left after the funeral. This simple, yellow cake was something that her sister would have eaten, even with cancer. Mrs. Padenilla envisioned her taking a handful of cake and eating it right over the closed casket, the crumbs falling into the flowers, mixing in with the baby's breath, staining the carnation petals which seemed to glow under the light of the cathedral.

The cathedral was dark and hollow. The priest's monotone voice recited the Spanish prayers. Mrs. Padenilla ran her fingers over the umbrella handle in her purse. In her mind, she was unable to offer her own prayer. The words of the priest seemed to echo the rain she faintly heard outside. A few neighbors and even fewer friends attended. They hugged Mrs. Padenilla, kissed her cheek, and told her that they were so sorry for her loss. They told her how they were so glad her sister wasn't suffering, that she would be able to see her again. There were a few cards, pale lavender envelopes folded into her small hands. The women stared at her, told her how beautiful Adelita had looked nights before, how she was in a much better place, how beautiful the flowers looked, how peaceful the church was, and before they left one by one, they all promised to get together on happier occasions.

Mrs. Padenilla almost heard Alita laughing then; she was never one to socialize. Mrs. Padenilla remembered all those times she begged her to come to her daughter's birthday parties, to her baby showers, to her

bridal shower. She always promised that it would be the last time she asked her to come to anything, and of course, Alita would agree. Alita always brought the best gift. Mrs. Padenilla supposed she got that ability from their mother, that delight in watching someone receive the very thing they had wished for. She still had the gifts – the baby blanket her sister had made for her first grandson, the rattle bought in the Caribbean that he had loved so much, the photo album for her daughter’s wedding, the careful pictures, the beautiful descriptions. She kept them in a box at home and had asked her daughter when she wanted to take them. “Later, later,” she always said. It seemed to grow later and later, and those gifts still stayed in that box, those gifts that her sister had so carefully picked out, waiting to be taken.

She wanted to ask her daughter about those gifts, about the box of gifts as they rode in silence, home. She stared at the dark houses through the wet window pane. It seemed as though someone had taken bricks and thrown them at the ground, and they had sprouted and grown, taking up whatever space they could. Alita always joked that she wanted to find the house with the beanstalk. Mrs. Padenilla had always felt at home in the quaint neighborhood. *Anda buscando amor*, Alita whispered. Mrs. Padenilla agreed that it was looking for love, always looking for love, thinking about how many moved in and out of the homes, complaining that the homes were too small and too worn-down for their needs. As Mrs. Padenilla began to tell her daughter what Alita had whispered, her daughter began making a call on her cell phone.

Her daughter had hugged her when she dropped her off at home. She couldn’t come in because her three kids were asleep in the car, and she was in a hurry to get home to the older two. She had been crying. The funeral was so beautiful, she had said. She promised to come over in the morning, promised to help her finish the canning, putting the chili peppers in jars, pickling the cucumbers in brine. She promised to take the box of gifts. The promises were filled with words, hollow, flat perfect letters like the letters on the card Dr. Hirning had given to her earlier that day.

MRS. PADENILLA PEELED THE *MADUROS*, the peels falling into the kitchen sink. She mashed them into a bowl, boiling them, adding milk. The pain thumped in her lower abdomen. The doctor had assured her over and over that it wasn’t appendicitis, that it wasn’t a tumor. She needed to see the pain specialist. Give him a call. The thumping seemed to come from the thin white scar where her daughter had come. It seemed to grow stronger, her weak arms shaking. She stared at the peaches, swatting flies off of the skins. She looked at the mason jars, still glistening, like diamonds. If there were no words, no way to speak, the glistening could be the words she intended to say. Her head began to throb.

Mrs. Padenilla opened the kitchen window. Perhaps the fresh air would help ease her head. She took several deep breaths, concentrating on the smell of the cinnamon, the hum of the train echoing from far away. She went back to the *maduros*, mixing in cinnamon, sugar, stirring the pan. She heated the oven, poured the dessert into a pan, and began baking. She hummed, trying to concentrate on the sugar, not the pain. The pain felt like the beautiful intense words that the woman in the head scarf had said earlier that day. Quiet words. Intense phrases.

Mrs. Padenilla sat down at the kitchen table feeling the silence and the quiet echo of the pain that she had heard earlier that day. It seemed to become louder. It's not real, her sister would say. The images of the room seemed to run together — the glistening mason jars, the hum of the oven, the quietness of her breath. She touched the scar on her abdomen lightly. She rocked back and forth, her head pulsating, deciding to call her daughter in another ten minutes ... in another five minutes. She rocked and rocked, waiting for the dessert to bake.



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Chavawn Kelley

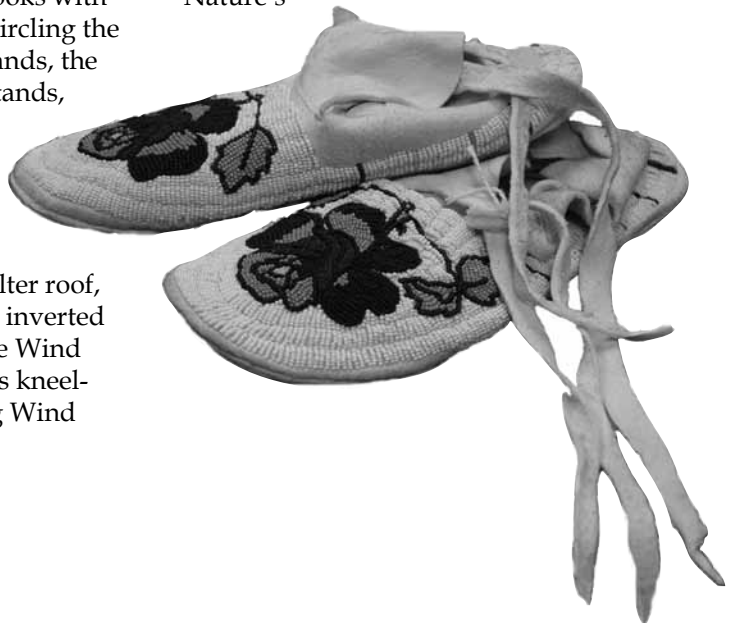
43rd Annual Treaty Days, Fort Washakie

Annette is dressed for dancing. Red satin dress with silver jingles of twisted chewing tobacco lids. Moccasins of white elk hide. Her long black hair in braids. "They'll give you two dollars," her uncle tells her. He holds her hand and guides her to the edge of the ring.

The pow wow grounds are a circle. From the center post, an open circle of earth. Above, the open sky. Around the ring, poles support a sheltering roof under which mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, neighbors, members of other tribes, but not Arapahoes, and a few whites, the drummers, and the singers sit. For each new dance, the soundman proceeds with his boom and mic to the next drum group. Big Thunder, Western Cuyutes, Big Wind, Southern Cree, Warm Valley Singers. Surrounding the shelter, a walkway, a promenade where young people look with ideas about one another, and everyone else looks with ideas about one another. Encircling the walkway are the frybread stands, the barbeque stands, the drink stands, the t-shirt stands ("Native Pride"), photo stands, artwork stands (forest scenes, wolves and DaVinci's little angels looking up). To the west, visible over the shelter roof, crossed teepee poles rise like inverted reflections of themselves. The Wind River. The upthrust hogbacks kneeling before the western-tilting Wind

River Mountains. The cumulo-cirrus clouds colored blue and white and gray intensifying into turquoise, pink and black like the colors of the diamond geometries on the Crow girl's vest and sleeves. To the east, rows of cars and pickups are parked on the dry stalks of grass, on the dust. From every county in the state, from Idaho, Montana, Oklahoma, Colorado. Beyond is the clapboard-sided hall where the hand game is played. Electric light spills into the darkness. Beyond is the road. The sign at the road: No Weapons, Drugs, Alcohol, Gang Activity. The BIA police shine flashlights into arriving and departing vehicles. Beyond is the highway, the fields of horses. Beyond the reservation lie the non-reservation towns, the ranches, the square state boundaries. The universe.

The heat of the day has passed and the mosquitoes have come. "Mother Nature's



turned on the air conditioning and we can all come dance to hell," the announcer announces over the P.A.

Annette collects her two dollars at the announcer's booth. Uncle Louie pitches in a dollar and she buys a pink inflatable alien at one of the stands. The alien is taller than she, with huge pools for eyes and long, slippery limbs. She holds it around the waist. "I love my alien," she coos. For seemingly no reason, Annette's nose begins to bleed. Aunt Joanne takes her to the first aid station.

"All they did was give her a tissue and an apple."

"An apple," Joanne repeats in disgust.

Will things get better when Joanne's mother, who works in Washington, becomes a top official with the Indian Health Service?

The announcer: "Someone has lost a child in a yellow sweatshirt. His name is Shawn. Better watch your children. The white people will run off with them. We are not a babysitting service. We have a program to run. Next up, grass dancers."

Joanne is the great, great, great-granddaughter of Chief Washakie, friend of the whites. Washakie and Jim Bridger, an American trapper only barely his senior, worked toward

manhood trapping beaver together. When it came time for reservations, Chief Washakie was among the first to sign on, and he is said to have done well. This Warm Valley. Washakie told of Ohamagwaya, who gave the Sun Dance. They danced, and the traders came with guns with which to stay the Blackfeet, to secure the bison, their future. He led the Comanche and Spanish against the Apaches, began the move toward the north, the direction of Wyoming. The Sun Dance is not for prize money. Young men dance for their souls, for the people's unity, for survival.

Announcer: "Someone has lost a stroller. Now if we could get the lost child and the stroller and some adults together, we could make a family up here."

During the all-Shoshone dance, radio interference breaks up the sound system mounted on the center pole. Hypodermic word fragments, like electronic shrapnel, explode from the speakers where the music should be. The hands of the dancers rise to cover their ears against the extrinsic transmission.

When Annette's braids are gray and thin, when she is not five but ninety-five or a hundred and five, will she tell of the night she danced for an alien?



Chavawn Kelley's essays and short stories have appeared in *Creative Nonfiction*, *Quarterly West*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *The Iowa Review*, among others, and in numerous anthologies. She has received fellowships from the Wyoming Arts Council, the Ucross Foundation, the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation and Can Serrat International Arts Center (Spain). She lives in Laramie, Wyoming.

Moccasins image 2006.16.006 courtesy Wyoming Arts Council Folklife Collection. Moccasins by Charlotte Alley. Photo by Kelly Gove.

Kristine Ong Muslim

The Decline

During the summer of redemption,
the children in my town chose names

for their favorite colors, shattered,
the worlds that existed only in their

minds. They spent the season
watching television, mouthing

the lines of commercials, laughing
canned laughter out of the tin.

By winter, all was frozen down
to the splintered layer, where earth

could no longer be overturned
by dirty hands. Inside the houses,

the secret rooms twitched
in their cracks.



Evolution of Small Creatures

– *“For still they raced...
And were like two revolving suns;
A brightness poured from head to head....”*
– from *“The Brothers”* by Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

It tests one mound after another,
looking for the right place,
the right way to die.

Twin elegies of spring-winter
cast doldrums, coefficients of beauty
until the hunger has been driven off
by camouflage. Now, its skin is the
essence of unlight, a precursor
to a mating call:

so pitiful it sings,
and the absence of echoes
is comforting.

A family room that doubles as camouflage

It is the moment of the flame that burns,
not the seasons before it. That is why,
where I come from, we measure our years
in terms of memories, of smells and sounds
of overhaul and dying strangers.

The Chinese vase cannot capsize; the walls
are vandalized by expensive abstract scrawls
and stains bought from an auction in the city.

Unmoved, the butterflies are pinned
in their place underneath the glass.
Death has not altered their symmetry.



Kristine Ong Muslim's work has appeared in over four hundred publications including *Boston Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and *Southword*. *Doll Plagues, Doll Lives*, her first chapbook has recently been released from Thunderclap Press. She has been nominated five times for the Pushcart Prize and four times for the Science Fiction Poetry Association's Rhysling Award. More of her work can be found at <http://kristinemuslim.weebly.com/index.html>.

Marcel Jolley

Exchange Rates



Too much from those years returns to me first in numbers, and that night is no exception. Seventy – the minutes I had lived so far in my eighteenth year. Three – the span from my eighteen to Shannon’s twenty-one. Two thousand three hundred – the elevation we had gained driving up to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, for the Dustball Softball Tournament. Ten to four – the final score by which our team was eliminated that day, the elevation gain assigned the bulk of the blame. Two – the number of bars a confident grin and tide of legal-age friends swept me through before Shannon and I struck

out on our own. Even now I recall suspecting how these numbers would join all the others that seemed to bear so much weight – GPAs, SATs, free-throw percentages, and so on – to culminate in some grand totaling done someplace I’d never even heard of, far from the small northern town which, up to that summer, was all I had ever known.

I was chasing Shannon around the decks of a sternwheeler now permanently aground where the Yukon River wrapped a sly arm around Whitehorse’s lower back. Ninety – the percentage with which I was confident she wanted to be caught. I heard giggles and knew the Western crew sweatshirt I saw in flashes of white had been earned by arduous early mornings on the river. She could’ve escaped with ease, as evidenced by the honest hustle she’d shown today by bringing herself in from third on an infield error.

“Car!”

I rounded a corner to find Shannon on her belly across the refinished planks and literally hit the deck beside her. An RCMP Blazer crawled through the parking lot adjacent to the river boat. A side-mount spotlight lingered on the Alaska plates and equipment bags visible in my mom's 4Runner, the lot's lone occupant. The Blazer itself sighed with knowing relief that Dustball was over and the summer already half-dead. The spotlight made an obligatory sweep of a nearby park's spring-mounted toys and play structure before dimming to head north and await the closing bars' flush of winners and losers, up to their mercury fillings with heavy beer and reindeer nachos. July was too early for honest northern lights, but a full moon and something about the earth's tilt promised the sun wouldn't set on all this entirely.

"Just what I need." Shannon jumped to her feet. "Trespassing in a foreign country with a drunk minor."

I shrugged off all but the *minor*. Any government serious about keeping us off the *S.S. Klondike* would do better than easily-jumped chains and padlocks.

"I was ready to sacrifice myself." Only after speaking did I study the ankle-snapping drop to the grass. "Serious. Like diving on their hood as a distraction."

She was gone again, her comfortable sweats suggesting only muscle and curves with no need for details.

"I'd expect nothing less."

We should have been concerned about being aboard a refurbished landmark most visitors paid six dollars to tour at a normal pace. And I should have been concerned about the Mounties catching me drunk and underage in two countries, but I was from here and didn't worry. Not from Whitehorse itself, but just a hundred miles south — still *here*. I knew the rivers and where all the pullouts on the highway led and what mountains got the first snow and how much gas I needed leaving Carcross so as to not end up coasting down the pass to town. I knew how far south the Mounties went and how far north the local cops would come to lay in wait. I knew which clouds meant rain and what black ice looked like in headlights and how to get across with only an adrenaline rush. If I am lucky I will someday again feel that much of a place, and so sure that things will work out okay.

Shannon was from Outside — one of Seattle's suburban understud-ies before heading to Bellingham for school, where I imagined she had tried things with down-south guys I'd only seen suggested in bath-room graffiti. She had shown interest after two weeks on the cruise ship docks, where I carried the radio and official clipboard of a shore excursion liaison. This was her first summer and I helped her sort through the carnival of confused stares, arthritic hips, shuttle vans and hucksters shouting bargain tours. My calm radio tone and comfort with the grab bag of accents suggested more than my seventeen — now

eighteen—years, and though Shannon had backed off a little upon learning my age, I retained hope.

I bore no delusions as to why the college kids allowed me on their softball teams and risked real jail buying me beer, and why I could chase Shannon in such a fashion without her blowing a rape whistle. Anywhere else I would be just another fresh dumbass grad, but here I was like a stamp on their passport or that lift ticket from Mount Baker they kept on their winter jacket months after fading beyond readability. I was proof of something real, evidence they had been here. In return I found out what bands I should be listening to and what books I should read or at least have conspicuously visible in my dorm room that fall. I got practice being a charming but mellow drinker. Most importantly I learned what kids Outside would be like and I paid attention, so when I arrived there they would not immediately see that I was not one of them. The trade seemed a fair exchange for seventeen dark winters of walking to school backwards in the wind and growing up with the same twenty girls who regarded you with the bored familiarity of a brother by the time you were old and brave enough to slip a hand in. They did nothing for fear you would talk—as I would have—and were granted other options sooner. Junior high found them cruising with high school guys, trading up a few years later to the summer college boys. In the seven weeks since graduation I had seen those girls around town, but knew they were gone for good.

Shannon had gone overboard and now stood in the grass near the ramp with its ornamental chain gate. A planted spotlight meant to illuminate the bow silhouetted her hair's more rebellious fringes. She was done running and looked like a rock star.

"Maybe I am," she said when I told her as much, in a drunk bravado that revealed no cracks even under the spotlight. "Tonight, to you."

If possible, her eyes lay in a deeper shadow than the one hiding her face. I again slipped over the chains and waited for the witty exchange that too much television had promised would precede real romance. No banter came, but our kiss did, arriving like that fumbling, buzzer-beating jumper against Haines my junior year—ugly, yes, but the shot went in and the place exploded. Her lips parted wider than I dared hope and her tongue bragged of White Russians. The seal broken, I started down her salty jaw line only to be trapped when she tightened her neck.

"I stink, Ryan," she said. "I didn't even shower today."

No lie—our team rose at eight a.m. for a consolation-round loss before sweating out a few games on the bleachers and then heading to the Kopper King for chunky burgers and smoky drinks. I didn't care and admitted as much to her thumping jugular. She retook our kiss with an athleticism that soon locked me onto the grass under her strong sweats. The slack hem of her sweatshirt hung like an invitation and I found her ribs first, then her honest underwire—my first outside of that dog-eared section of the Sears catalog. For a moment I was sure

her entire weight rested on my mouth and left hand. I wanted to grab that spotlight, wrench it off the beached relic and around on to us.

That beautiful weight was lifted, her tongue snapping back like a janitor's key ring. She sat upright, hyperextending my knees but I didn't flinch.

"This is crazy." She surveyed the old boat and the warm non-committal night above us. "This would have been technically illegal less than two hours ago."

I cited the time change, but the gain or loss of an hour did nothing.

"No. No," she said. "I don't want to mess things up."

"Mess what up? I like you, you like me."

The shadows reclaimed her face, leaving me to hope a smile lay in there.

"God, I'd kill to be eighteen again."

"I wish I was older," I said. "Nineteen. Twenty-six. Maybe even thirty."

Leaning back into me, her hair danced into my collar.

"No, baby, take those numbers back. Don't wish that. Promise me you won't."

I would have promised her that—promised her anything—but her mouth fell back on mine before I had to. Her throat cracked with a groan of at least two-thirds frustration, the remainder I hoped to be surrender. I was back under her sweatshirt and managed to unlatch her bra, leaving it rattling around her shoulders. Hands full of potential grazed my lower back and the perfect mix of muscle and fat danced under my fingers as I made for her drawstring. I attempted to mimic her moans but feared it sounded as if I were just taking a crap. A hand found mine and her lips pulled back, snapping tendrils of spit.

"We can't, Ryan..."

"Don't worry," I said. "I won't get weird or anything. I know it's nothing. Just an extension. Of our friendship, I mean. It's cool."

Her look now suggested I *had* crapped.

"An extension...what?"

"I won't think less of you."

"Gee, thanks." Her hands disappeared in search of the bra as she paused for the most soft and tired of smiles. "I'm sorry, hon, we just can't. I might be pregnant."

I set my full attention to adjusting my jeans, hiding evidence from the person who planted it. She refastened herself like a mother cleaning spit-up off an unplanned third child.

"Don't freak." She chuckled. "We didn't do anything, y'know?"

I asked who as she snapped her waistband back in order.

"A little personal, don't you think?"

Unsure of what level of intimacy public dryhumping afforded me, I wordlessly agreed and bit back on a clunky congratulations.

"Brad," she said without prompting. "Brad the Westours escort."

None of those summer people had last names—Jamie the bus driver, Timmy the cook, Margie in housekeeping, and so on. Now Brad the Westours escort had knocked up Shannon the shore ex. Two summers were ruined with worry and who knew which seasonal surname the kid would inherit.

I nodded when asked if I knew him. In khaki Nordstrom trousers and Oakley shades, big blonde Brad rode herd over select tourist clumps between Seattle and Anchorage every two weeks. The bluehairs adored him and he was just as quick to strip to 501s and a snug t-shirt for drinking with fellow collegians after his cattle's 7:30 bedtime. He was personable on the docks and routinely addressed me as "Randy" with such confidence I almost checked my own ID.

"Yeah, I know him."

They met at Western last winter, Shannon explained, where he'd been platonically influential in getting her this summer job. Nothing became of the potential she felt down in Bellingham until Brad found himself in town for Pajama Night at the Red Onion last month. Now she was five days late—I could only mirror her reaction to the number and ask if Brad knew.

"God, no." The night's first honest shiver shook her. "I can't drag him into this, at least until I know it isn't just a scare. He has enough stress. He's going to China this fall, you know? Before starting his MBA at the U."

I saw Brad rollerblading along the Great Wall, a bright yellow Walkman on his hip and headphone cords dancing in his wake, listening to a bootleg of some band I wouldn't hear about until they broke up or sold out, smiling and addressing the locals in their native tongue, if only to call them the Chinese equivalent of "Randy." Shannon heaved securely behind her underwire and the thick sweatshirt absorbed her first few tears. A wipe of her eyes blended mascara with grass stains.

"This fucks up everything," she said. "And right before my senior year. No crew. No parties. Who knows if I'll even graduate. And, Jesus, my parents..."

She fell into me, ratcheting up the sobs. I kissed the crown of her skull and let the strands cling to my lower lip.

"I'll help," I said. "Whatever you need."

She held in a nose full of snot from her laugh.

"Okay. How?"

I was no longer eighteen—fourteen at the most—and getting younger every second I delayed responding. I could sell my Nintendo to a summer hippy or frat-boy baggage handler, or wait tables part-time. I could get another job with an important clipboard, or use my radio to call someone for help.

"It just sounded like what I should say."

Her kiss left the corner of my mouth salty.

"Sweet, sweet Ryan. You don't need this either."

I didn't, but let her settle in and clutch my arm like we were walking into some 1950s prom.

"You are going to make some girl so happy someday. So sweet, so unspoiled."

I shifted in response to the singular *girl*. "Not by choice."

"Don't say that, sweetie. That's what's so great about you. You haven't fucked anything up yet. Promise me you'll try to stay like this. Like this summer. Like right now."

I bit my tongue on that promise and the numbers I wanted to lay out on the grass as proof that I had fucked up. Seven – the crucial seconds remaining in our tied 2A tournament opener when I committed that stupid defensive foul, sending their best free-throw shooter to the line. We were left with no time to match his two points and those seconds still hung in my teammates' eyes, even when we were laughing about something totally unrelated. Two – the number of hours I made out with that docile sophomore in the observation lounge of the ferry for mere contact and to kill time during the twenty-hour ride back from a track meet in Sitka, never stifling her suggestions that it might lead to more. Last month I drove past her – mine the street's lone car, her the only pedestrian – and declined to even wave, feeling that would be more cruel than no acknowledgement at all. Sixty-four – the dollar amount held in the money clip I discovered near the dock last August and said nothing about, even when I overheard an ancient couple from the *Noordam* looking for it. The clip burned in my pocket, and only after all the boats sailed and left me alone on the dock did I separate the bills and send the clip into the bay, where it flopped underwater in alternating glints like a fighting flounder's belly. Things had happened to me.

Shannon soon drifted off in a position only softball, beer and worry could make comfortable. Somewhere beneath her left shoulder my watch lay buried, but I didn't want to wake her and knew it would only confirm that some pivotal hour had passed. The night didn't get any colder but I was ready for the sky to dim. Nothing too dark or sinister, just enough to reveal some stars.

We stayed on the grass until Shannon awoke at four. I rearranged the equipment bags in the 4Runner and we clawed through a clunky sleep before giving up around seven. We left a note for our teammates at the T&M Hotel saying we would see them back home. Shannon requested no radio and bemoaned from beneath her sheltering coat the holy shit-rain of grief waiting to fall on us for disappearing together. On the more aggressive curves she burped complaints of nausea.

"But I think it's just last night." A brown Yukon morning rolled by as loose dirt and dry trees we didn't have on the other side of the pass. "Still, I guess I should cut back on the drinking. Until I know, right?"

I wanted to say no, that all those studies and warning labels and fetal alcohol syndrome posters were just government propaganda, but came up with only a shrug she took as easily as she had the undated

222s in mom's glove box. I pulled into the gas station at Carcross, named for the caribou who used to migrate through in droves but not so much anymore. The station's food mart was a last chance to purge any Canadian currency before the border. I found Loonies everywhere and Shannon eyed the store.

"What do they have?"

Everything, I said. Though the sixty-five miles to my house challenged the title, this was the only convenience store I knew. Inside waited thick-cut chips with flavors dreamed up by drunken lumberjacks and candy bars so exotic their legality was questionable down south.

"Old Dutch chips. Or Smarties, which are like M&M's," I said. "Or a Crispy Aero is like a Nestlé Crunch. And Coffee Crisp is good."

"What's that one taste like in American?"

Not every candy had a U.S. equivalent, I explained, and, well, it tasted like coffee. She agreed to try one with chocolate milk. I made a show of refusing her money and left Shannon stretching in a July sun already lonesome for the minutes it was losing every day.

Inside an accent-laden a.m. radio argued with itself about land use issues in places that sounded familiar, though I knew they weren't spelled how I thought they were. Both the man behind the register and his lone patron, a boy of about thirteen, appeared local and shared a hint of just enough native blood to get them undue shit in the redneck corners of Whitehorse and hopefully a little government help should they need it. The kid eyed me like I ought to follow the caribou's lead and then went back to fondling the Cracker Jack bags, an attempt to estimate the relative size and value of the enclosed prize. No one needed more lame stick-on tattoos.

"You probably shouldn't be handling them all, Tommy," the register man said. His tone said he didn't own the store, but admitted knowing that had he played his cards a little better he could have. "I don't think it's the spirit in which the prize is intended."

Tommy laughed like gravel and slung the candy back in the bin with a lightning wrist.

"Spirit in which the prize is intended," he said. "Nice job—you just lost a fucking sale."

The bell above the door undermined Tommy's theatrical exit and the register man was still smiling when I deposited my snacks before him.

"That's good." He nodded at the door. "Kid don't take any guff. He'll make out okay."

I dumped my Loonies and rainbow of stone-faced dignitaries onto the counter and still received several coins back with a denture plate whistle.

"You've done alright yourself, son."

The man looked beyond me to where Shannon stood outside stretching skyward like all men hope women do every morning

whether we're looking or not. Her hip muscles were awake and a soft divot flexed from her lower back.

"Thanks."

"I mean it." His false smile was a whiteout. "Nice lines. Real clean."

I wanted to say no, she actually hadn't showered in two days, had slept in those clothes and stunk up the 4Runner with several rancid farts courtesy of her Kopper King bacon cheeseburger. I said none of this and simply joined the man in staring. I needed to go and had numbers to prove it. Four—the number of ships that would be awaiting my clipboard and radio work tomorrow. One—the time this afternoon by which I was to return my mom's car or catch holy hell. But already these hard numbers were giving way to bigger ones that didn't lend themselves to grand totals or winning percentages, maybe just acceptable averages and hopes of breaking even. Ten weeks or so—my time before leaving for college and then four years until graduation, though the national average was drifting towards five. At least two—the number of kids I saw Shannon and Brad ending up with, give or take the one possibly percolating in her belly. Enough—the number of girls I hoped to find ready to keep me company on those nights that Brad and Shannon would spend in some cul-de-sac watching television and eating microwave popcorn. Everything beyond that door and its bell got more imprecise and uncertain the longer I waited, but I simply wanted to stand there and admire the clean lines of the girl I woke up with that morning. I had to walk out there sometime, but not just yet.



Marcel Jolley was born and raised in Skagway, Alaska, and now lives in Camas, Washington. His story collection *Neither Here Nor There* won the inaugural St. Lawrence Book Award and was published by Black Lawrence Press in 2007.

Sybil Smith

People Who Stand with the Buffalo

Buffalo are properly called bison, but for the purposes of this essay I used the common term, buffalo.



One morning, a few days after my daughter and I had arrived at the cabin in Montana that houses the volunteers for the Buffalo Field Campaign, I carefully climbed down from my high bunk, fashioned out of used plywood and two-by-fours. As I went into the living area to look for coffee I heard a woman say, "The dog is eating the buffalo head." I looked out the window and, sure enough, a black Lab was chewing on the hide that had been lifted from the skull the day before. Two campaigners had gotten the head from a slaughterhouse and had decided to make a mask out of the skin. They wanted to hang it on their teepee. I had watched them the day before as they carefully excised the hide from the skull, marveling at the juicy cavities, strange protuberances, odd knobs, and textures they uncovered. One of them was a pretty, dark haired girl who, aside from her bloody hands and skirt, could have just stepped off a college campus. The other

was a tall blond fellow with dreadlocks hanging like a shawl around his bare torso. It appeared they had completed the grisly task, but had left the skin on the ground rather than securing it in a place safe from scavengers.

We shoed the dog away and it skulked off as if it knew it was doing something wrong.

Later that morning I talked to my daughter out by our car, parked at the end of a row of beat-up vehicles, some abandoned, some still running. I told her I thought perhaps she should take me to the airport in Bozeman so I could fly home. I didn't think I could hack the lifestyle of the "buffalo hippies," as they are called by the locals, couldn't hack their camp coffee and roadkill hamburger, their ramshackle privy and lackadaisical approach to hygiene. I kept feeling like I was living in a post-apocalyptic world, holed up with a few other survivors. I was too old, too set in my ways, too particular when it came to what I ate and how it was prepared.

My daughter, the budding activist, urged me to give it some time, to "hang in there," and for her sake I did. After a few cups of strong coffee, I put on a damp apron, swept the entire cabin, and made a huge pot of lentil stew.

I HAVE ATTAINED THE RELATIVELY RIPE AGE OF 52, and live in comparative splendor, in a clean house I own, in a wealthy eastern town. Yet, all around me, if I pay attention, I can see American culture

beginning to show signs of disrepair; the roof leaking and cracks widening in the plaster. I believe our consumption-obsessed lifestyle can't continue as it is. Many of us sense this, but try to ignore it as we shore up what we have built and accumulated. But we ignore it at our peril. Comeuppance will huff and puff and blow our house down.

The denizens of the Buffalo Field Campaign know this, and, even before necessity forces them to do so, have begun living more sustainable lives. Rather than working shitty jobs and living alone in shitty apartments, rather than watching endless TV and taking drugs, prescribed and unprescribed, to fuel a false euphoria, they've chosen to form their own tribe. The buffalo is their symbol for God. Protecting the Yellowstone herd imparts meaning to them, and watching these animals live the way they have for eons is their church. For fun they learn to weave willow baskets, make pine needle tea, and cure hides. They have evening meetings and make up the rules as they go along. Though the ranchers in the area would deny it, they are the new pioneers.

WHEN THE WESTWARD EXPANSION BEGAN there were, at a low estimate, 40 million bison. They furnished a splendid example of how an ecosystem develops a symbiotic relationship with an animal. By and large, they made the Great Plains truly live. The grasses that grew had evolved in concert with them. The

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wolves and bears and Indians were their predators. The foxes and coyotes scavenged their remains. The cowbirds rode on their backs and ate the flies that swirled around their heads. The prairie dogs were their sentinels, with underground tunnels that stretched for acres, aerating the soil and providing dens for foxes and ground birds. They made the gama grass grow better and buried seeds that later sprouted bushes.

The fact that a relatively few Americans were able to kill all of the buffalo in less than 50 years is almost beyond comprehension. To annihilate such huge numbers of living creatures in such a short space of time takes tremendous energy. The buffalo hunters had to really work at it. They had to shoot till their trigger fingers were numb and they fell asleep on top of their hot guns. They had to keep themselves stoked on whiskey and buffalo tongue and endure the stench of thousands of large carcasses decaying in the sun.

It is mystifying that it happened with such rapidity, because there was no formal plan, no corrals, no camps, no ovens. It is a common misconception that the military actively killed the buffalo to deprive the Plains Indians of their livelihood, but in truth, this wasn't necessary. They didn't have to. People were already doing it for them. Anyone who needed meat considered the buffalo a walking larder. In addition, rich easterners or Brits sometimes came out west with a guide and lots of lackeys and fancy equipment to shoot buffalo just for the "sport" of the hunt. Then, when the

transcontinental railroad went through, the engineer frequently stopped the train so passengers could merrily blast away from the safety of their coaches.

The real problem came, though, when buffalo hides were found to be useful for the drive belts that drove the machinery of the industrial revolution. As a result a new niche opened up in the job market. If you were knocking around out west with a résumé that boasted a liking for whiskey, an indifference to physical discomfort, a passion

for killing, and access to a reasonably powerful rifle, you were in business. I'm not sure what buffalo hunters got in legal tender for one raw hide, but a couple of them could easily come back in a few days with 100 raw hides, and even if they only got ten cents a hide that meant they had earned ten dollars, a princely sum in those days, for shooting

100 peaceful, grazing animals. (It was noted that buffalo would watch another buffalo fall dead, would gather round it, bleat, sniff it, and continue grazing. The animals did not equate the sound of the shot with the death of their herd mate.) The smarter fellows hired skinners, often outlaws or men who were mentally impaired, so all they had to do was shoot with their Sharps .50 caliber rifle and let other people do the dirty work of skinning and cutting out the tongue.

Some buffalo hunters tried to pass themselves off as sportsmen, but few were fooled. By and large, they were low in the western hierarchy such as it was. Folks could smell them for a

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mile before they came into town with their wagons piled high with uncured hides. The saloons preferred to sell them bottles at the back door, rather than have them sit at the bar, because they never seemed to get the hang of hitting the spittoons. Their beards were long and stained with streaks of tobacco juice, their teeth were often leaning, old stumps like something marking a hasty grave, and their eyes, I can only imagine their eyes. They must have been worse than blank; they must have been empty. Not empty in a quiet way like the sight of an open green valley after a person reached the top of a hill on his horse, but empty the way they'd left the Plains behind them, scattered with bloated carcasses and a few bleating calves not worth killing, vultures so gorged they couldn't fly, flies so thick they filled the whole valley with a low, steady buzz like that of a machine, yet nowhere was there a machine, just this infernal humming. That horror was the last thing their eyes had seen, and in their pupils there was a ghostly afterim-

age, so faint you couldn't really see it but might come away with pictures in your mind that you'd not invited there.

When it was finally over, and the Plains were strewn for miles with rotting heads and bleaching bones, when suddenly there was no more of the comforting shuffle of the buffalo's loins, and rumble of their guts, and the grunt of cows calling their young, the Plains were emptier than they had ever been and stank like a charnel house. And when, finally, the bones were clean, a profit was found even from them. There is a scene in *Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry's great American novel, that I think of often. A mountain man, a trapper whose age has come and gone, is left with one self-appointed task he toils at like Sisyphus, piling up the bones of the slaughtered buffalo. In his case, there appears to be no reason, other than a certain need for order, or reckoning. But in time that is exactly what happened, for the bones were collected in vast piles and shipped and ground for fertilizer. Some bones were sold



Mounds of buffalo skulls and bones awaiting shipment, 1885

to ceramic manufacturers in England where the powder was used to impart a special glow to bone china.

The buffalo were like the Indians. They took up too much room and their value was not immediately evident to those who thought in terms of dollars and cents. To see their value, you had to pause, and watch them. You had to stop talking and just observe them for a while. Maybe a long while. You had



to humble yourself and admit there were things greater than yourself and your plan for the world. Americans have never been willing to do this. We insist on imposing our vision on everything we encounter, and, in that process, we break things never meant to be broken and end up with a fistful of shards, or a plain full of bones, in the valley of death-fearing evil.

The end of the buffalo broke the spirit of the Plains tribes, as the generals guessed it would, for something in their hearts was linked to the presence of the buffalo; the teeth cropping, shit plopping, hoof stomping, horn scratching; daily, prayerly, nourishing sound;

and their hearts could not beat right without the rhythms of the other. Or maybe they simply didn't want to live in a world run by men who cared so little for the earth and its creatures.

IN THE END THERE WERE 24 BUFFALO LEFT, hidden in the mountain pockets of what is now Yellowstone Park. From this herd and a few calves collected by a rancher some years before, the herd was started that we know today, the last wild, free-roaming herd of buffalo.

There are now about 3,000 buffalo in Yellowstone, and they want to do what they've always done, which is to seek lower elevations, where the grass greens up earlier in the spring, to have their calves.

During the winter, they migrate to lower elevations, when the snow is too deep in the park for them to paw through it. Man-made lines drawn on a map mean nothing

to them. They don't know when they leave the park and enter the Gallatin National Forest to roam in the rich meadows there. And this is where the problem arises. These meadows are also used for that peculiar form of welfare known as grazing allotments, which ranchers now see as their God-given right. The government only charges \$1.50 per cow/calf pair for grazing rights, whereas private landowners charge at least \$12.00 per cow/calf pair. So, in the end, it comes down to who gets the grass. Cattle or buffalo.

In a bewildering miscarriage of good sense, the Montana Department of Livestock (the DOL) was given the power to

manage the buffalo when they left Yellowstone Park. They shoot them, harass them, and sometimes even round them up to be sent for slaughter. Though the American public has paid millions for winter grazing rights for the buffalo herd to graze in the Gallatin National Forest, the ranchers are still trying to keep the buffalo from using this winter forage because, they say, of their fear of brucellosis. This disease causes cows to miscarry their first fetus, and then goes dormant. Some buffalo carry it, and though there has never been a documented case of buffalo-to-cow transmission of the disease, ranchers claim to be afraid that such infection will occur. However, their cattle can be inoculated against brucellosis, and the elk in the area, who also carry the disease, are allowed to graze outside the park in great numbers, yet are not harassed. Why? Because so much money is earned selling licenses to hunt elk.

The Buffalo Field Campaign was formed to try and protect the buffalo that left the park. They have set up four-to-six car and foot patrols that leave the cabin daily, September through May, to monitor the areas where buffalo graze. They have walkie talkies and video cameras to document the actions of the Montana Department of Livestock and the park rangers, who together try to haze the buffalo back in the park with helicopters, four wheelers and horses. During these so-called hazes, the calves are often separated from their mothers and die, and in the winter buffalo some-

times fall through the ice on the lakes and drown. Other animals break their legs or, exhausted, fall prey to wolves, but none of this seems to matter. As far as the DOL is concerned, the buffalo belong in the park and nowhere else.

ONCE THE HERD GETS BACK INTO YELLOWSTONE PARK THEY AREN'T SAFE, EITHER. This very year park officials sent more than 900 buffalo to slaughter. The animals are shipped many miles from the park, crammed in livestock trailers with no food or water. Because they are wild animals, they sometimes gore and trample each other in their panic. The public would not be aware of these developments if the Buffalo Field Campaign weren't there, taking pictures and video, writing the governor, and making news available on their web site. Some volunteers

This very year park officials sent more than 900 buffalo to slaughter. The animals are shipped many miles from the park, crammed in livestock trailers with no food or water. Because they are wild animals, they sometimes gore and trample each other in their panic.

even follow the livestock trucks to their distant destination to bear witness to the slaughter. One of them, Josh Osher, wrote to me: "[T]he Park Service and the Montana Department of Livestock, for their part, do their dirty work in secrecy, where only the sounds of frightened buffalo fruitlessly banging their heads against steel walls escape to the outer air. We hear the sounds, if they [the powers that be] allow us to even get that close, and know the pain and suffering, the fear and anger, the utter uselessness of struggle and the need to resist until the final moment. We do not stand by simply to observe. We are there to give the buffalo one last gift before their journey to a distant death."

For those like Josh, devoting their lives to the Buffalo Field Campaign, solace comes in the times when there are no livestock trucks nearby, no idling Ford pickups with gun racks, no cowboy-hatted, tobacco-chewing men; when it is quiet and they can sit in a field and look at the remnants of the last wild herds of buffalo as they graze and wander.

Because I stayed and did not run home, I sat with them. I spent an afternoon on Horse Butte, sitting in the sun. Shoots of new green grass pushed up between the sage and lodgepole pine. Bald eagles and ravens flew overhead. The buffalo were often only a couple hundred feet away, but they ignored us. The cows graze in groups with their young, the older bulls often graze alone, and the younger bulls graze in groups of three or four. They are magnificent animals, even in spring when their ragged winter coats begin to peel off. The calves are red colored and like to bounce around, testing out their limbs. The bulls have long, lustrous beards, great ruffs, and pantaloons on their front legs. All have horns, lovely, curving crowns that grace their heavy foreheads. Despite their memory of

men on horseback and four wheelers, screaming at them and throwing stones, they have a steady dignity, these complacent kings and uncomplaining queens. They are strong, simple, serviceable, superbly adapted, undemanding, warm home to worms and parasites, perch for the foraging bird. It is as if they remember they once covered a continent. Running together once made a sound like the Great Spirit drumming his fingers. Grazing together, they swayed and farted and rumbled like one being, which they are. One Being.

So much so that, remembering their majesty, I don't see them in my memory ending at the grass. I see no line between earth and buffalo; it is not clear where one begins and the other ends. As I drove home across the empty, rolling plains toward Vermont, shadow buffalo populated the land. Where each was slain and lay tongueless, skinned, it was absorbed back into the earth, which was its womb in the beginning. All they need now is our will to give them back their bones, our hands to give them back their skin, our voice to give them back their tongue, for the prairie still waits to be their keeper.

Sybil Smith's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Connecticut Review*, *The Crescent Review*, *The Cumberland Poetry Review*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *Ellipsis*, *Harvard Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, *North Atlantic Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Seattle Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Yankee Magazine*, and other literary journals and anthologies. She won an honorable mention in the 2005 Pushcart Prize Anthology and was nominated for a Pushcart in May 2006. She lives in Vermont and works as a psychiatric nurse.



Will Michelet

The House that Fidencio Built



It was bright and warm this Sunday, but Fidencio wished the scattered white clouds in the west would hurry to reach Prescott as he had an awful headache. He had tuned the portable radio strung from the Sandoval home to the town's Western station. Most of the songs it was playing soothed the throbbing in his head, but occasionally it played one that was *más moderna* to irritate him.

He had no choice but to endure the pain, though, for he had to get the floor poured today on their new home-in-progress or he would have no chance to return the rented cement mixer before he had to go back to work tomorrow. It was his own fault he was *tan crudo*, but he couldn't help but hit the tequila after the Cinco de Mayo dance the way Locaria had acted.

She was pregnant again, and, as usual, she would hardly let him touch her. So she had to expect that he'd dance a lot with Lola. Sure he'd run around with her a little when Locaria had been carrying Shorty, but what did she expect? A man had to have some *amor*.

She didn't have to remind me of it all the time, though. Every chance she got last night, he thought as he slammed his shovel against the mixer door when it started to close after he had finished loading the sand,

and she could be so mean. I'm no different than any other man. And you wouldn't love me, vieja, if I didn't run around when you won't have anything to do with me. You would think you could get me to do anything you said.

"Dad," little Ramon called him from inside the new home where he was helping Juan and Pablo smooth the last batch of cement Fidencio had mixed and dumped there for the family room. "Didn't you tell us to get the cement level with these boards," he said, pointing with his miniature rake to the horizontal runners set on the foundation blocks and joining in the corner he was working, "before we even start on *este lado*?" Ramon gestured toward the other side of the room enclosed by the boards where his older brothers were leveling the cement.

"*Sí, claro que sí!*" Fidencio barked, lifting his orange canvas hat with the brim turned down and running his fingers through his long, still-black hair. "Otherwise it'll never set up right."

"Juan *dijo que ...* that's wrong. He said we should cover the whole room with level cement first," Ramon responded.

"Well, *escúchame!*" his diminutive father yelled. "*Soy el jefe aquí!*" He glared at Juan. *That little pendejo, he's never poured a floor in his life, Fidencio thought angrily, yet he thinks he knows more than I do.*

"But we'll get cracks if we do it that way, Dad," Juan stopped his troweling to earnestly argue. "Mariano Robles *dijo*—"

"Mariano doesn't know what he's talking about," Fidencio interrupted his older son. "That *cabrón* never poured a floor in his life. Better a few cracks at the top than if the bottom layer starts to dry before we can get the floor level with those runners," he declared, leaning on his shovel and indicating that corner of the foundation, which came within ten feet of the old Sandoval shack that the family had outgrown.

"Dad," Pablo protested, standing up over his long rake. "It'll never dry before we get to the top—"

"*Cállate, Pablo!*" Fidencio yelled. "Look at this sun," he said, raising his eyes to the cobalt sky above. "It might even dry in this heat before I can get this next load ready." *These little pendejos think that just because they can drive now they know everything.*

"See," Ramon said, looking proudly out from his little straw sombrero at his older brothers and grinning. "I told you."

"*Tu cállate también, Ramon! Horita!*" Fidencio shouted. *That little pendejo is always trying to please me. Doesn't he realize I can't build this house alone? "Just get back to work."*

Pablo slammed his rake into the cement and stepped back off the foundation wall into the long, seeding grass which was to be the new house's front yard. He glared at his father and threw down his baseball cap.

"Pablo!" Fidencio took a step toward him, lifting his shovel slightly. "You get back to work too!" His head ached from the rapid movement.

Pablo's eyes flared a moment. Then the husky young man muttered something under his breath and retrieved first his cap and then his rake. Juan, slimmer though several years Pablo's senior, carefully watched the argument, then laughed a moment, and started leveling the cement again with his trowel. "Okay, Dad," he said quietly. "*Vamos a ver.*"

Fidencio kept looking at them until all three of his sons were at work again. *At this rate, por dios, we'll never get this floor done today.* Just as he was about to turn to load the mixer again, Locaria opened the door of the old house and leaned out.

"What's going on out here?" she asked, her distended stomach heaving beneath the white apron she wore over a shiny, blue, cotton dress.

"Nothing, Huar—"

"Paul and John were arguing with Dad," Ramon contributed with his bright eyes opened wide.

"Ramon!" Fidencio silenced his ten-year old.

"Fidencio, leave those boys alone," Locaria, starting to take her apron off, came back at her husband. "*Siempre tienes que ser tan corajudo.* They're helping you, aren't they? Why do you have to be so mean all the time?"

"Go back inside, Locaria," he tried to quiet her. "This isn't any of your business."

"Our new home isn't any of my business?" She came all the way outside and defiantly put her hands akimbo.

"That's not what I mean—"

"Well, you *cállate, viejo!* I got a right to be out here if I want to!" She stepped forward and folded her arms, resting them on her stomach in front of her swelling bosom, and fire spit from her eyes as she removed her glasses.

Just then three small girls came squealing out of the door of the old house behind her. "Can you give us a ride on the wheelbarrow again today, Dad?" Amanda, the chubby oldest one, cried.

"Please, Dad! You promised," echoed Patricia, the even-plumper youngest.

"Yeah, Dad," Julia, the girl in the middle, added from behind her horn-rimmed glasses which her mother had picked out to match her own. "Besides, I haven't even gotten a ride yet. You know I had to go over to Ernestine's for her birthday yesterday," she pleaded. "But Mandy and Patty told me how much fun it was."

Fidencio brought his eyes to this favorite among these daughters, whose features looked the most like Locaria of the three. As her father, he had ironically nicknamed her "Prieto" for her light skin following his first glimpse of her after her birth, yet now he was about to shush her. But even though Locaria, surprisingly, had said nothing so far, Fidencio reconsidered. "Okay, just a minute," he said. "Let me get this load going first."

He turned to the mixer and closed its door.

"Goody!" the girls clapped and squealed again. Then, getting a quick nod of approval from Locaria, they rushed around her to the other side of the foundation to get in line behind the wide plank their father had fashioned to cross over the new family room to be.

Fidencio clicked the mixer switch, and the old machine began to growl. "*Bueno, Prieto.*" He smiled, picking up the wheelbarrow and looking at the middle daughter in her perfect, white pinafore and new, black, patent-leather slippers. "I guess you're first." He tipped his head to her, lifting the barrow's soft wheel onto the board inclined on the side of the foundation where he had located the mixer.

"Yippee!" Julia yowled, clambering up the foundation wall, upon which the plank crossing the wet cement of the family room floor rested. "My turn!" she screeched, jumping up and down.

"*Cálmate, muchacha.*" Fidencio laughed, gently nudging Julia aside so he could wheel the crude vehicle from the foundation wall onto the plank. "Let me get this thing set here."

Paul and John were delighted to lay down their tools and come over to help. "Just a minute, you guys," their father said, chuckling. "Hold your horses."

When the wheelbarrow was at last in place on the plank running between the walls of the foundation, Fidencio nodded to his sons. "Okay, boys, help her in."

Carefully John and Paul lifted Julia, and Locaria, who had rushed over with a blanket from inside the old house, placed it over the barrow's bed. Slowly the boys lowered their younger sister onto the crude blanket.

Now two older sisters, Rosie and Linda, came laughing out of the tiny old house. Hardly had they positioned themselves outside the weather worn door of the shanty to watch than their oldest sister Lila arrived on the scene. She had been riding with her beau Arthur in the snazzy, new, turquoise coupe he had just purchased on his wages from the new mine down in Bagdad, and quickly the two jumped down into the street and ran across the front yard to better see the show.

"Okay, Julia," her father announced, stiffening his arms which firmly held the handles of the wheelbarrow. "Here we go."

Fidencio carefully edged out on the plank from which he had already dumped so many loads of wet cement for the family-room floor that day. The worn tire of the old, red wheelbarrow seemed nearly flat under the weight of the razor-thin and giggling little girl, and her father grunted as he urged it into motion above the sea of gray cement waiting to be made level.

"*Qué bueno,*" Julia cried to mask her fear as they left the security of the foundation wall upon which the near side of the plank rested. "This is better even than the rides at the fair."

About halfway across to the other side of the foundation, the radio began one of those modern tunes Fidencio didn't care for. He flinched as the electric guitar began a strident riff above Hank Williams Junior's declaration that "all my rowdy friends have come over tonight." He remembered Lola had laughed raucously to those words last night as he had swilled his shot of Cuervo, while they sat naked on the side of her bed after they had made love. He shuddered as Junior's raspy voice stabbed into his forehead.

But he pushed slowly on to the other side, as the family watched in silence. Then, *por dios*, Junior faded away, but the guitar elevated its shrieking unaccompanied. The high notes pierced Fidencio's temples. He stumbled, then teetered, struggling to hold the handles level.

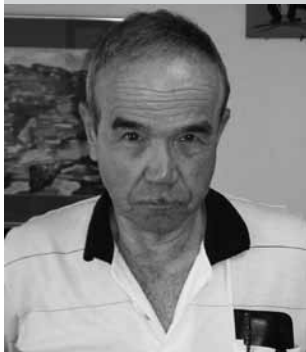
The guitar cranked up a notch, and Fidencio's head seemed to split.

He could hold it level no more by the time the mellifluous tones of "Elvira" began to emanate from the radio.

So he grabbed for his Prieto ... cradled her in what seemed an infinite instant ... and finally let himself fall slowly into the gray sea below the boys had not yet gotten around to working. In the silence he could almost see the startled faces of the audience as his head eased beneath the dense, murky waters of the floor that would be the back upon which their new home would rest

When he surfaced again at last, there was laughter everywhere. Julia had not gone under, but the lacing of her new dress was no longer unblemished. She was crying a little, but in a moment, Locaria had plunged into the cement and lifted her from his arms.

As his wife began berating him, her accusatory "*borachone*" was drowned, however, by the rising gales of glee from the family. He and his Prieto quickly joined the laughter and postponed for another day the patient leveling of the house that Fidencio would build.



For his day job, Will Michelet is an employment lawyer in Flagstaff, Arizona. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Philosophy and Economics from Ripon College in 1965 and served in the Peace Corps in India and in VISTA with the Newark Legal Services Project in New Jersey. He received his J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1971 and an M.A. in English (Creative Writing) from Northern Arizona University in 2005. He has previously published short stories in *The Antigone Review*, *Weber*, and *The Oyez Review*.

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.

LANGUAGES LOST

In April, Christian Science Monitor staff writers Leigh Montgomery and Elizabeth Ryan reported on the United Nations' Atlas of Endangered Languages. The Atlas lists the world's 18 most endangered spoken languages – languages with only one remaining speaker. Today, about one language disappears every two weeks. Among those listed are Native American languages spoken in the West.



From A.L. Kroeber, *The Patwin and Their Neighbors*, 1932

Number 8, Patwin is a language whose descendants live outside San Francisco in Cortina and Colusa, California. There was one fluent speaker documented as of 1997.

Number 14, Tolowa, the language of the Tolowa Native American tribe, is spoken by a few members located in the Smith River Rancheria, a sovereign nation near Crescent City, California. Tolowa is part of the Athabaskan language family. One speaker remained as of 2008.

Number 16, Wintu-Nomlaki is spoken by the Wintu tribe in California. The language has two dialects: Nomlaki, which is spoken along the Sacramento River south of Red Bluff, and Wintu. As of 2008, there was one fluent speaker and several speakers with moderate command of the language.

Source: Leigh Montgomery and Elizabeth Ryan, "World's 18 Most Endangered Spoken Languages," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 27, 2010; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-Issues/2010/0427/World's-18-most-endangered-spoken-languages>.

UNPRECEDENTED

According to the Endangered Language Alliance:

Of the approximate 6,500 languages spoken on the planet, as many as 90% may be gone by the end of the 21st century. While languages have come and gone over the course of human history, the present rate of extinction is unprecedented. On average, one language dies every two weeks. The globalization of finance, communication and culture has had a profound effect on the type and rate of language change. The most obvious effects of globalization are the spread of world languages and national languages at the expense of minority languages. Right now, the top 10 languages in terms of number of speakers (Mandarin, English, Spanish, Hindi-Urdu, Arabic, Bengali, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, German) are spoken by over 50% of all humanity.

Source: <http://endangeredlanguagealliance.org/main/>

ELECTRONIC SURVIVAL

The Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages is located in Salem, Oregon. It was founded by K. David Harrison, Associate Professor and chair of the linguistics department at Swarthmore College, along with alumnus Matthew Thomas, whose iPhone applications company BoCoSoft Inc. launched the first talking dictionary for Tuvan – an endangered language – as an iPhone application named the Tuvan Talking Dictionary in March 2010.

Harrison said that having the languages available on the Internet or iPhones as talking dictionaries gives these languages a chance to survive: “Every language packages knowledge differently. We’re losing a part of the human knowledge base when we lose a language. The idea is to have an environment where all languages can thrive Having linguistic diversity is good for all of humanity.”

In 2007, the Living Tongues Institute began a 5-year joint project with the National Geographic Society titled “Enduring Voices,” which involves expeditions and research in 5 major “hot spots” for language loss. Those are:

1. Northern Australia
2. Central South America
3. The Northwest Pacific Plateau
4. Eastern Siberia
5. Oklahoma-Southwest

Source: Linda Hou, “Professor Revitalizes Endangered Languages,” *The Phoenix*, April 22, 2010; <http://www.swarthmorephoenix.com/2010/04/22/news/professor-revitalizes-endangered-languages>. See also: <http://www.living-tongues.org/index.html> and <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices/>

LANGUAGE RESCUE

One effort to retain a native language has been Lushootseed Research, founded in 1983 by Upper Skagit elder Vi Hilbert (1918-2008). Hilbert made it her life's work to preserve Lushootseed by telling stories, teaching the language at the University of Washington, and lecturing broadly about traditional culture. Hilbert was recognized as a Washington State Living Treasure in 1989.

Once spoken by thousands of Coast Salish people in Washington, Lushootseed is part of the Salishan family, which includes Native languages spoken in parts of Washington, British Columbia, Montana, Idaho and Oregon. Today, few elders remain who learned Lushootseed as a first language.

A recent conference offered a forum for teachers and students to talk about what strategies can best shore up the vulnerable language.

"...We almost lost the language," explains Jill K. La Pointe, director of the nonprofit organization Lushootseed Research, which organized the Lushootseed Conference at Seattle University. Fortunately, efforts began many years ago to record and preserve Lushootseed, and that documentation is invaluable for today's language learners.

Recent decades have seen a cultural resurgence in Puget Sound tribal communities, including carving, weaving, canoe making, and efforts to revitalize Lushootseed. New tribal museums and long houses have been constructed, and events such as the annual Canoe Journey involve hundreds of participants and thousands of spectators.

In 2007, Washington state amended its teacher certification process to permit tribal communities to certify language teachers, citing the federal Native American Languages Act (PL 101-477) in acknowledging that "the traditional languages of Native Americans are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values."

gʷəʔtudxʷləʂucidəb
 čəʔ ʔə kʷi haʔkʷ
 tuʔal kʷi haʔt ʂəč
 ʔə tiʔiʔ tuʔiʂədčəʔ.

Translation: May we continue speaking Lushootseed for a long time, as did our ancestors, with a good mind.

Source: Holly Taylor, "Preserving the Lushootseed Language for the Next Generation," *Crosscut.com, News of the Great Nearby*, May 06, 2010; <http://crosscut.com/2010/05/06/tribes/19787/Preserving-the-Lushootseed-language-for-the-next-generation>

CENTERS FOR LANGUAGE PRESERVATION



Among the many important centers for language preservation are:

- The 'Aha Pūnana Leo, best known for "Language Nest" Preschools. It is the leading entity in Hawai'i and the United States for indigenous language revitalization. In the past twenty years, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo has moved the Hawaiian language from a population with less than forty children speakers to one with over 2,000 children speakers. <http://www.ahapunaleo.org/>

E Lei i ka lei ha'heo o Hawai'i ka wehi o nā ali'i i hala.

Translation: Wear the proud lei of Hawai'i, the adornment of departed chiefs.

•The Alaska Native Language Center was established by state legislation in 1972 as a forum for research and documentation of the twenty Native languages of Alaska. It is internationally known and recognized as the major center in the United States for the study of Eskimo and Northern Athabascan languages. <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/index.html>



•Native Languages of the Americas is a Minnesota non-profit corporation dedicated to the preservation and promotion of endangered American Indian languages begun by Orrin Lewis, but now operated by Laura Redish. <http://www.native-languages.org/>

Osiyo, my name is Orrin Lewis. I am Cherokee. I also have Muskogee blood (my father's mother was half-Muskogee) and also have white ancestors (my father's father was half-white, and so were some older ancestors on my mother's side). But I never knew them, and I don't know too much about them. I was raised in Oklahoma. I am a tribal member of the Cherokee Nation. But, I do not speak my language. That really hurts my heart. I am the broken link. Back in the fifties, a lot of people were not teaching their kids to speak Tsalagi. They didn't want them to get hit at school or anything. The schools were very aggressive about only speaking English, and my oldest brother had a really bad time. Anyway, so my parents didn't teach it to me. But I have a granddaughter now who is learning the language again. My daughter-in-law's mother is a fluent speaker and she moved in with them to help care for Winnie. She is six now and speaking Cherokee pretty good. So maybe that circle has closed again. Listening to her and Maryann talking together makes me remember my own grandmother, a long time ago, and it gives me hope for the future.

•Northern Arizona University houses Teaching Indigenous Languages, a web site which is the outgrowth of a series of annual conferences started in 1994 at the university to help achieve the goals of the Native American Languages Act of 1990. That Act made it government policy to promote, protect, and preserve the indigenous languages of the United States. The conferences focus on the linguistic, educational, social, and political issues related to the survival of the endangered indigenous languages of the world. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/TIL.html>

MOTHER LANGUAGE

Only Canada, New Zealand, and the United States have not ratified the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which includes language rights. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>

Article 13-1 reads: Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons...

Article 14-1 reads: Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.



EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED

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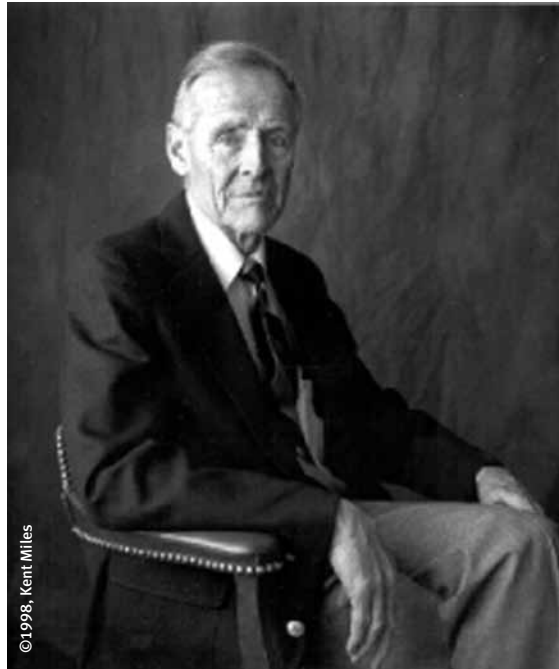
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to
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for
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