



# Ai

m a g a z i n e issue 14. spring

**PREVIEW**

## IN THIS ISSUE

Anthony Seidman

Kathleen Frank

Jeff Corwin

40+ authors & artists

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*Junk, by Philip Wexler*



*Peacock, by Philip Wexler*

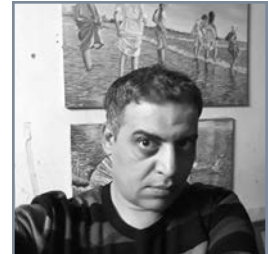


# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## Osama Afify

Osama Afify's full name is Osama Imam El-Laithy Imam. He has exhibited his art individually and in various collections at the Ahmed Shawki Museum (Cairo, 2001), Cairo Atelier (2007), American House of Art and Design (2011), Saad Zaghloul Museum (2011), Cairo Metro (2011), and in an international exhibition at Cairo Atelier in 2012. Learn more about him and his art at <http://www.osamaimam.blogspot.com/>



## John Allen

John Allen was born in Jersey City in 1958 but was raised in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1999-2000 he attended Rutgers University earning his teaching certification in Spanish. After 19 years of teaching, he decided to retire from public education. A lecturer at Rutgers University, Allen is writing a textbook and designing a new course.



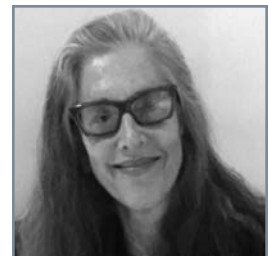
## Tom Barlow

Tom Barlow is an Ohio writer whose work has appeared in journals including *The Stoneboat Literary Journal*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Voicemail Poetry*, *Hobart*, *Tenemos*, *Redivider*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Heron Clan*, *The Remington Review*, *Your Daily Poem*, and many more. See more at [tombarlowauthor.com](http://tombarlowauthor.com).



## Mariana Berkman

M. D. Berkman writes poetry and fiction and blogs on women's rights and the environment as an NGO Representative to the UN from the Women's National Book Association. Her poetry appears in the *Comstock Review* and *Caesura* 2020, among others.



## Nick Bertelson

Nick Bertelson is a writer from southwestern Iowa. His work has appeared in *Valley Voices*, *Prairie Fire*, and *North American Review*, as a James Hearst Poetry Prize finalist. His chapbook *Harvest Widows* won the Poetry of the Prairie and Plains Prize through North Dakota State University Press in 2019 and is available through the press.



# Artists & Authors

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## Maroula Blades

Maroula Blades is a multifaceted artist living in Berlin. She was nominated for the Amadeu Antonio Prize 2019 for her educational multimedia project, “Fringe”. Works were published in *The Caribbean Writer*, *Thrice Fiction*, *The Freshwater Review*, *Abridged*, *The London Reader*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Newfound Journal*, among others. Chapeltown Books published her new flash fiction collection *The World in An Eye*.



## Ann-Marie Brown

Ann-Marie Brown is a Canadian artist working in oil & encaustic. She has lived & worked around the world, but in the age of covid is hunkered down on the edge of the Pacific Ocean on the far west coast of British Columbia.



## Nancy Christopherson

Nancy Christopherson’s poems have appeared in *Helen Literary Magazine*, *Peregrine Journal*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Third Wednesday*, *Verseweavers* and *Xanadu*, among others, as well as in various regional, national, and international anthologies. Author of *The Leaf*, she lives and writes in eastern Oregon. Visit [www.nancychristophersonpoetry.com](http://www.nancychristophersonpoetry.com).



## Bill Cushing

Called the “blue collar poet” by peers at the University of Central Florida, Bill Cushing moved to California by way of Puerto Rico after earning his MFA from Goddard College. Besides writing, he facilitates a writing group (9 Bridges). His book, *A Former Life*, was released in 2019 by from Finishing Line Press.



## Darren C. Demaree

Darren C. Demaree is the author of fourteen poetry collections, most recently “Unfinished Murder Ballads”, (October 2020, Backlash Press). He is the recipient of a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louis Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from Emrys Journal.



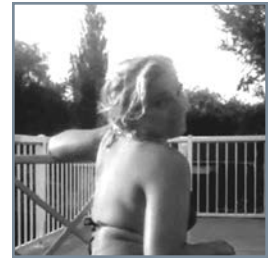


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## Jody Filan

Jodie Filan is 27 and from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. What influenced her art the most was a traumatic series of events leading to addiction. Losing her family and friends greatly impacted her style. Her art page is [www.facebook.com/Jodiefilanart](https://www.facebook.com/Jodiefilanart); she can also be found on Instagram under Jodie Filan Artwork.



## Hillary Frances

Hillary Frances has published nonfiction in *Salt Hill*, *Sojourners Magazine* and *The Christian Century*. She holds an MA in International and Intercultural Communications from the University of Denver and has published peer-reviewed research in *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health*, *Psychosocial Work* and *Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*. She has studied nonfiction under working authors at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver.



## Kathleen Frank

Santa Fe landscape artist Kathleen Frank, raised in Northern California, has a BA Design/San Jose State University, a Masters of Art/Penn State and has studied woodcarving and printing. In Pennsylvania, she taught printmaking and costume design and co-founded the Printmakers Studio Workshop of Central Pennsylvania.

Frank shifted to painting, seeking light and pattern in Pennsylvania farms, California scenery from mountains to sea and now the unique landscapes of the Southwest.



## Helen Fukuhara

Helen Fukuhara began her visual arts education at the Braille Institute of America in September of 1987. Despite being blind from birth, Fukuhara has pursued a range of fine arts in earnest, even dedicating her university studies to music. Today, she remains a prolific and passionate artist who works in ceramic, mosaic, printmaking, and fiber arts.



# Artists & Authors

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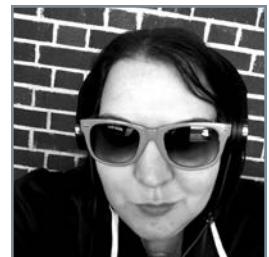
## Jeff Gabel

Jeff Gabel is a writer from Denver, Colorado. His fiction has appeared in *The Agapanthus Collective*, *Literary Orphans*, and *Litro Magazine* (Online). He is currently a candidate at the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.



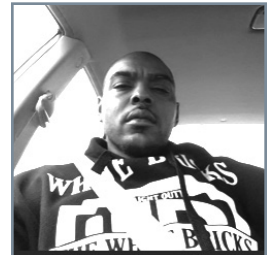
## Pia Simone Garber

Pia Simone Garber earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama. Some of her poems can be found in the anthology *Tuscaloosa Runs This*. She currently lives in Staten Island, New York with her cat and her husband, where she is working on her first chapbook.



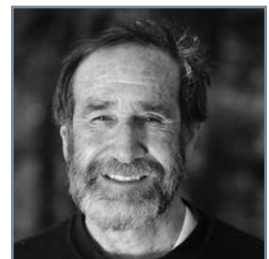
## Marcello Gibbs

Marcello Gibbs, incarcerated in a Texas prison, is taking a writing class called “Pen City” taught by Professor Deb Olin Unferth from the University of Texas-Austin. His work has been published through an Ithaca, New York non-profit called Prisoner Express. His poem “Lose” was published in *The Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Volume 21*. Find out more at [www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org)



## Joel Glickman

Joel Glickman is Professor Emeritus of Music at Northland College where he continues to teach music, including jazz studies, part time. He is a previous contributor of poems to *Aji* and several other publications. Other endeavors include those of singer-song writer, banjo player, clarinetist, fisherman. He lives in Ashland, Wisconsin with his wife Susan and their Bichon, Madeline.



## Carol Gloor

Carol L. Gloor’s work has been published in many journals, most recently in the online journals *Leaping Clear* and *Gyroscope*. Her chapbook *Assisted Living* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2013, and her full-length collection, *Falling Back*, was published by WordPoetry in 2018.





# Artists & Authors

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## Nels Hanson

Nels Hanson's fiction received the San Francisco Foundation's James D. Phelan Award and Pushcart nominations in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. His poems received a 2014 Pushcart nomination, Sharkpack Review's 2014 Prospero Prize, and 2015 and 2016 Best of the Net nominations.



## Monique Harris

Monique Renee Harris was born an African American woman with cerebral palsy. She learned how to use imaging software to create digital art with a head wand. Her artwork has been featured in *Pentimento Magazine*, *Penumbra Literary and Art Journal*, *Whispers of Krip Love Shouts of Krip Revolution*, and in her book *Strength and Tragedy: the Mystery of the Blue Lady*.



## Kristen Ott Hogan

Kristen Ott Hogan's work has appeared in *Segullah Magazine*, *The Ravin Perch*, and on her website: [kristenotthogan.com](http://kristenotthogan.com). She co-authored *Phoenix Flame*, a memoir chronicling her nephew's battle with mental illness. She currently lives in Syracuse, Utah, with her husband and four children.



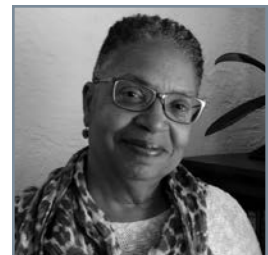
## Nwenna Kai

Nwenna Kai is an educator in the Philadelphia area. She has been published in *Obsidian*, *Moondance.org*, and *The Def Jam Poetry Anthology*. Currently, she is working on a screenplay and some short stories.



## Deborah LeFalle

Deborah LeFalle is a former college educator who started writing in her retirement. Besides writing, she enjoys being involved in the arts and humanities, digging into her family's past, and spending time outdoors communing with nature. Her work has appeared in various journals and magazines, and she has authored two chapbooks: *Worthy* (2017) and *Little Suites* (2019).



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## Brian James Lewis

Brian James Lewis is a disabled poet, writer, and book reviewer who feels that writing is as important as breathing. He is a member of the SFPA and has been reviewing poetry and speculative fiction since 2016. First published in 2014, Brian writes daily on vintage typewriters, including one previously owned by Rod Serling. You can follow him on Twitter [@skullsnflames76](#).



## J. Lintu

J. Lintu's work has appeared in *Presence*, *West Wind Review*, *The Penwood Review*, *Newversenews.com*, *Earthsongs*, *Foxfold books*, and *Perspectives*. An Associate Artist in Poetry under Joy Harjo at the Atlantic Center for the Arts and a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, J. recently returned home to the Pacific Northwest after a 20-year absence and happily lives a few minutes away from Multnomah Falls.



## Frances Mac

Frances Mac hails from the Texas Hill Country and currently lives in Washington, DC. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The MacGuffin*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Lammergeier*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Collateral*, and others. Learn more about her work at [www.francesmacpoetry.com](http://www.francesmacpoetry.com).



## Katharyn Howd Machan

Katharyn Howd Machan writes poetry on her dragon patio when weather allows and elsewhere when it doesn't. A professor in the Writing Department at Ithaca College, she mentors students in fairy-tale-based courses. Her most recent publications are *What the Piper Promised* (AQP, 2018) and *A Slow Bottle of Wine* (The Comstock Writers, Inc., 2020), both winners in national competitions.



## Dennis Maloney

Dennis Maloney is a poet and translator. A number of volumes of his own poetry have been published including *The Map Is Not the Territory: Poems & Translations*, *Just Enough*, and *Listening to Tao Yuan Ming*. A bilingual German/English volume, *Empty Cup*, was published in Germany in 2017. Recent collections include *The Things I Notice Now* and *The Faces of Guan Yin*.





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## Carol Marsh

Carol D. Marsh, a 2014 graduate of Goucher College's MFA in Creative Nonfiction program, has won essay awards from *Solstice Literary Magazine* (Summer 2020), *New Millennium Writings* (2016), *Under the Gum Tree* (2017), and *Soundings Review* (2014). Other essays have appeared in Los Angeles Review's Best of Annual print edition, *River Teeth*, *Chautauqua Journal*, and *Lunch Ticket*, among others.



## Alex Nodopaka

Alex Nodopaka originated in 1940, Kyiv, Ukraine. He speaks San Franciscan, Parisian, Kievan & Muscovite and mumbles in English & sings in tongues after vodka. He propounds having studied at the École des Beaux Arts, Casablanca, Morocco. Presently a full-time author, Nodopaka is a visual artist in the USA but considers his past irrelevant as he seeks new reincarnations.



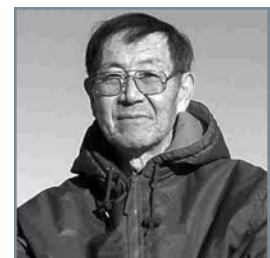
## Mary K. O'Melveny

Mary K. O'Melveny, a retired labor rights lawyer, lives with her wife in Woodstock, New York and Washington DC. Mary's award-winning work has been published in many print and on-line journals and on national blog sites. She authored *A Woman of a Certain Age* and *Merging Star Hypotheses* (Finishing Line Press 2018, 2020) and co-authored *An Apple In Her Hand* (Codhill Press 2019).



## Suchoon Mo

Suchoon Mo lives in the semiarid part of Colorado. His recent poems appear in *North of Oxford*, *Rabid Oak*, *Seattle Star*, *Jonah Magazine*, *Modern Poets Magazine*, *Armarolla*, and *Misfit Magazine*.



## Glenn Pape

Although Glenn Pape was first captured by poetry (reading and writing it) in childhood, it was only upon reaching his mid-fifties that he put any effort into submitting his work. In the past few years he has been published in the *North American Review*, *The Sun*, *Poet Lore*, *Pulp Literature*, and *The Rhysling Anthology*, among others.

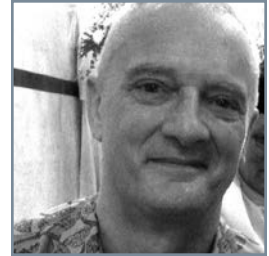


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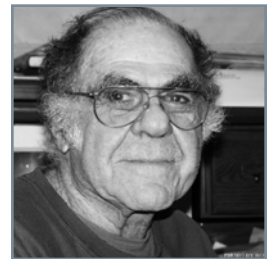
## James Penha

A native New Yorker, James Penha has lived for the past quarter-century in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work has lately appeared in several anthologies. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. Reach him here on Twitter: @JamesPenha



## Simon Perchik

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Weston Poems* published by Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library, 2020. For more information including free e-books and his essay “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities,” please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com).



## Benjamin Pierce

Benjamin Norman Pierce is a professional dishwasher with BA's in Philosophy, History, and English. He lived in Sophia, Bulgaria for two and a half years, teaching history at First English Language Gymnasium of Sophia, participating in the expatriate writing circles there, and taking time to learn painting. He paints in tempera and draws in chalk or pastels.



## Claire Scott

Claire Scott is an award winning poet who has received multiple Pushcart Prize nominations. Her work has appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Enizagam* and *Healing Muse* among others. Claire is the author of *Waiting to be Called* and *Until I Couldn't*. She is the co-author of *Unfolding in Light: A Sisters' Journey in Photography and Poetry*.





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## Daryl Scroggins

Daryl Scroggins has taught creative writing and literature at The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of North Texas, and the Writer's Garret, in Dallas. He now lives in Marfa, Texas. He is the author of *Winter Investments*, a collection of stories (Trilobite Press), and *This Is Not the Way We Came In*, a collection of flash fiction and a flash novel (Ravenna Press).



## Anthony Seidman

Anthony Seidman (1973) is a poet translator from Los Angeles who has lived for significant stretches of time in Ciudad Juárez and Mexicali, Mexico. His most recent full-length translation is *A Stab in the Dark* (LARB Classics, 2019) by Facundo Bernal. Earlier this year, Spuyten Duyvil published his collection, *Cosmic Weather*. His work has appeared in such journals as *Aji*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Poetry International*, *New American Writing*, and *Huizache*, among others.



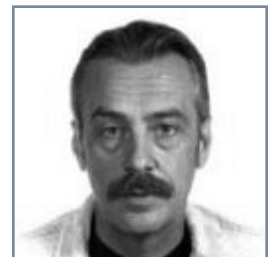
## Joe Sonnenblick

Joe Sonnenblick has been featured in such publications as *The Reject* and *Citizen Brooklyn*. Joe is pleased to have been selected by *The Flea Bitten Dog* for their 7th issue, which was published in September 2020, and to have been published through *In Parentheses* for their 6th volume of poetry, which was released in October 2020.



## Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries. Both sides of his family worked in the coalmines and steel mills of Appalachia.



## Roxanne Halpine Ward

Roxanne Halpine Ward is a graduate of the MFA program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a past attendee of the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. Her work has appeared in the *Georgia Review*, *Greensboro Review*, and the *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, among others, and her chapbook, *This Electric Glow*, was published by Seven Kitchens Press in 2012.



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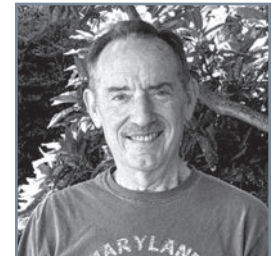
## Robert N. Watson

Robert N. Watson is Distinguished Professor of English at UCLA. His poetry has appeared in the *New Yorker* and twenty-some other journals. His published books study Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, the fear of death, Japanese cinema, cultural evolution, and the roots of modern environmentalist consciousness in Renaissance literature and painting. For more biographical information, see <http://english.ucla.edu/people-faculty/watson-robert-n/>



## Philip Wexler

Philip Wexler lives in Bethesda, Maryland. He has had close to 170 poems published in magazines through the years. His collections of poetry, *The Sad Parade* (prose poems) and *The Burning Moustache*, were published in November, 2019 and June, 2020 respectively (Adelaide Books). He also organizes Words out Loud, a spoken word series, at Glen Echo Park in Maryland.



## Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, *Barfly Poetry Magazine*, *Ragazine*, and *Cardinal Sins*.



## Marshall Woodward

Marshall Woodward poetry is featured in *The American Writers Review* (2020), *Synkroniciti* (2019) and has been translated into French & Korean. He is a contributor to *Gossamer* and *Runner's World*. He is grateful for the support and wisdom he received from his mentors at the Gulkistan Creative Residency in Laugarvatn Iceland, and to Elaine Kahn and Emily Hunt for the access they each provide for digital poetry communities.





# Editor's Welcome

“To be’ is to inter-be. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing.”

*-Thich Nhat Hanh, Thich Nhat Hanh, Dharma Talk at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism, May, 21, 2011*

By introducing his verb “to inter-be,” the beloved Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us of the causal relationships between disparate concepts, mindsets, and phenomena. You can’t have darkness without light; you can’t have love without hatred. You can’t have east without west, or night without day. Eradication of opposites includes the inevitable nullification of your most cherished beliefs, as all things and ideas exist only in relation to other things and ideas, and their relevance and meaning can only be derived from distinguishing the differences. Hence, we present this exquisite mosaic issue filled with Kathleen Frank’s amazing landscapes, which would have no beauty without their contrasting colors and shapes. Likewise, the subtle shades of white, gray, and black in Jeff Corwin’s photographs work their magic in showing us our familiar world in newer, better light.

The voices in this issue are more diverse than perhaps ever before. As artists and poets and writers, it makes little sense for us to enclose ourselves into solipsistic sameness, where the relevance and meaning of our work would surely wither. Instead, it seems more important than ever to be inclusive in an authentic way, to share in our pages voices and perspectives that might be otherwise unheard, and to encourage and support all of those who have taken up the pen or the paintbrush or the camera toward self-expression, wherever they may be on their journeys.

In this issue, images, essays, stories, and poems are often positioned in distinct counterpoint to surrounding pieces, offering readers and viewers an exquisite intarsia: from an elder parent’s goodbye to her beloved, long time home, to a young woman’s reconciliation with her own face, to a would-be advocate’s experiences in rural Thailand. The somber recounting of *El Hijo*, an Argentinian play set in a prison during the terrible Dirty War (read in the original Spanish by John Allen) segues into the review of *All I Have Not Made*, the selected poems of Robert Sward, a highly accomplished and

# Editor's Welcome

unmistakably unique American/Canadian poet and novelist. And there is so much more incredible art, poetry, and short fiction among these pages.

Special thanks go to Anthony Seidman for sharing with us his experience as a translator, and for offering our readers evocative, moving poems from selected border poets. Once again, my sincerest thanks to all who submitted, and to *Aji's* all-volunteer staff, without whom this extraordinary issue could never have been possible.

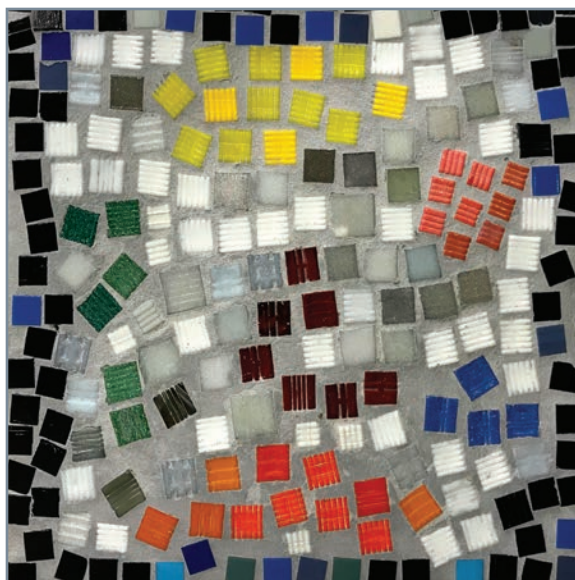


Erin O'Neill Armendarez

Editor in Chief



Erin O'Neill Armendarez



Bitmap by Helen Fukuhara





## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT ON PHOTOGRAPHER

# JEFF CORWIN

**Erin Schalk (ES):** Please tell us about your history and that of your creative practice. What have been some defining moments that have brought you where you are today?

**Jeff Corwin (JC):** I began my career pursuits in Los Angeles in the late '70's as a photographer's assistant. After a couple of years of assisting, I decided to go out on my own and began banging on the doors of users of corporate photography; I had some mild success. At the time, it was well known that the aerospace company, Northrop, now Northrop Grumman, had an amazing company brand, exclusively using black and white photography. With little experience and a horrible portfolio (BUT, all b/w), I nervously picked up the phone, called their headquarters, got put through to the vice president of communications, Les Daly, who picked up his own phone, and I got a meeting! It was a miracle. He offered me a 3-day assignment that I successfully completed, and my career and life were set and never the same. I was still in my 20's, but I found myself doing more work for Northrop, which led to other aerospace companies (Boeing, Lockheed,

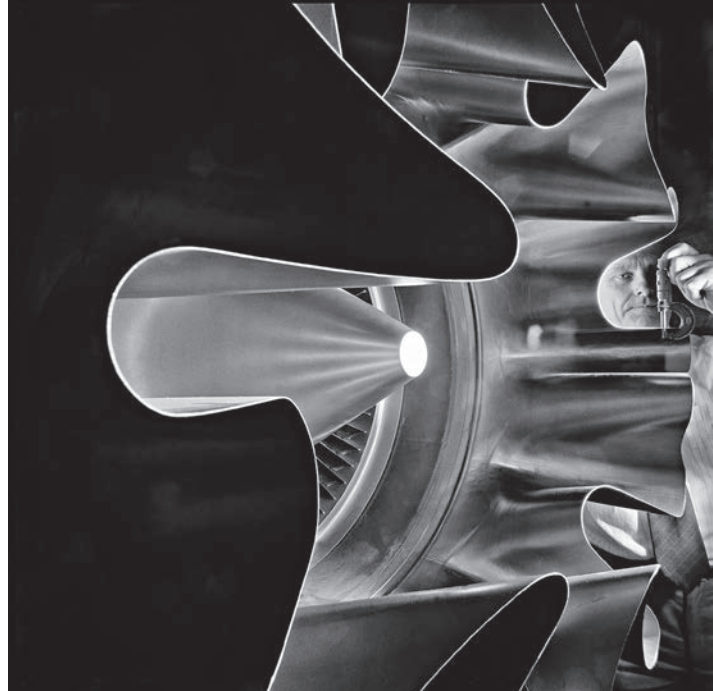
UTC, Rolls-Royce and Loral Space Systems, among others) and then to oil, computer, financial, hospitality and communication companies.

**ES: Your longstanding career has led you through revolutions in both analog and digital photography. How have these shifts in media, technique and tools shaped your work over the past few decades?**

JC: To be honest, I went screaming and kicking into the digital age. Much to the annoyance of probably every client I had, I shot film until it just was not viable for anyone. But once I adjusted to digital, I found a system and workflow that really worked for me. I had always shot medium format film and was able to find a medium format camera system and program that worked seamlessly. I have used that same system ever since. What is nice is that none of that really changed my approach or thinking. I use the same lighting and tools I have for decades. There are just more cables to trip over and gizmos to replace and endless upgrades than there was in the past. I occasionally still shoot film for myself, but have really moved into digital almost exclusively. Even for the landscape work I have done in the past two years, I shoot with my medium format digital system.

**ES: Describe your transition from commercial to fine art photography. Does your ability to work within both spheres independently (and simultaneously) fuel your work today? In what ways?**

JC: At the time I was living in Seattle, Washington. I had been shooting commercial work for about 25 years when I got an assignment from a bank for a shoot in the eastern part of the state. At the time, I had never traveled east of the Columbia River in Washington. The landscape is vastly different there than in the western part of the state. The areas north, south and west of Seattle are lush and green and beautiful! But, photographically, never got me excited. However, east of the river gorge the landscape becomes totally different: sparse, agricultural communities where you rarely see other people. That really clicked for me. Finding the lone barn roof peeking out of a low rise or a winding black top road snaking through wheat fields became an exciting “assignment” for me. I spent the next 15+ years returning to that corner of Washington State.



*Rolls Royce Flower B by Jeff Corwin*

**“The scenes I choose to photograph, what I gravitate towards, are often bleak, lonely and isolated vistas. They speak to me; it is what I see because it is what I feel.”**

**-Jeff Corwin**



I told someone a few days ago in an interview that my landscape work is 100% informed by the commercial work I did for 40 years. My way of thinking and seeing in offices, aerospace facilities, refineries and other industrial settings had almost always been to home in on the assigned subject, whether a person, a place or a thing, and seek out simplicity, accomplished either through lighting or compositions, or both. I automatically entered an environment and looked for the graphic elements of what I saw. Any repeating shapes, graphic blocks or something that was available to help me divide my empty rectangle in a way that was compositionally successful to me was my goal. Nothing changed in my present fine art photography. When I am out and about now, driving through the panoramas of New Mexico or Montana, it is the same exercise.

**ES: Recent interviews note the geometric, pared-down precision of Mondrian's abstract paintings and the expansive vistas of the American West as influential to you. Does the phrase "poetry of place" resonate with your photography? In what ways?**

JC: I have not heard that term, but I like it a lot! (Not that long ago I worked on a campaign for a hotel/resort company out of Hong Kong. The art director burned the term "sense of place" into my brain...)

I'm a bit unsure how to answer that question about poetry of place, but I think I have to say no. The majority of my images of the American West are typically unrecognizable as a specific location. There are hints to locations, but, for instance, much of what I have photographed in Washington could have been shot in Kansas. Driving through Paradise Valley in Montana, I tend to pass by the postcard shots of the mountain ranges on all four sides. I certainly marvel at the vistas and wonder of it all, but I find myself stopping for something else.

The scenes I choose to photograph, what I gravitate towards, are often bleak, lonely and isolated vistas. They speak to me; it is what I see because it is what I feel. I viscerally react. For me, trust is an extremely important aspect of what I do. I learned long ago to trust my vision and not second guess things like content. My reactions corroborate what I always felt was one definition of photography - a recognition of what personally and immediately resonates, defined by experience, spirit and instinct. So it is not the actual location of the photograph that is significant, but more the imaginative correlations with expansive, yet subtle, feelings and ideas.

I mention Mondrian's work as an influence because of his attention to composition. Obviously, and unfortunately, my photos look nothing like his paintings. But in studying his work, it made me more attentive to the importance of looking into a rectangle or square space and then consider how best to divide that emptiness. I have to thank my biggest influence, Arnold Newman, for pounding into me the importance of art history. His portrait of Mondrian is the perfect example of that considered thinking. I do not believe I have ever shot a photograph, commercial or personal, in which Mr. Newman's work and words have not entered somewhere into my process.



*Waterville, Washington by Jeff Corwin*





*Mammoth Hot Springs by Jeff Corwin*

**ES: Also on the topic of Mondrian, you've noted formal qualities (such as color and shape) of Mondrian's work as inspiration for your own. In your photography, what are the formal elements that are of greatest importance to you? Have these chosen elements evolved over time?**

JC: I hope I answered much of this above (I should have looked ahead...). The color use in Mondrian's paintings, while amazing, did not resonate with me as much as his use of space. With regard to composition, it is possibly the most important part of my thinking about creating a photo, especially in my commercial work. It is not always something that exists and so sometimes needs to be created, either through a rearrangement of what is there or with lighting. But it is always a starting point for me. I will let go of a landscape image and move on, even if lighting or color or tone exist, if the composition is not just right.

**ES: You've also cited Edward Hopper as a strong influence in terms of his use of light and allusions to introspection. Hopper's iconic *Nighthawks* springs to mind with its themes of social isolation, which are especially relevant to today's pandemic-stricken world. Has your work's relationships to light, quiet contemplation, and/or loneliness changed in response to 2020's challenges?**

JC: I have always thought Hopper would have made an amazing photographer. Of course, he was an amazing painter and, as such, more successful. His sense of light has always been a definite inspiration. (Thank you again to Arnold Newman!)

What has happened this year with the pandemic has not changed a thing with regard to my consideration of what I look for; I still seek out the same qualities I have for decades. And it has not changed my process for my landscape work as I still get in the car and drive the back roads and highways of wherever I am at and tend not to come into contact with anyone. (Nice!!)





*Dillon, Montana by Jeff Corwin*

**ES:** To date, much of your fine art photography centers on American themes including the *Guns in America* series landscapes in New Mexico, Montana, and Washington. In contrast, your commercial photography career has taken you to the far corners of the globe. What has it been like to shift from international to regional settings? How has this influenced your creative practice, as well as you personally?

JC: I traveled internationally for work for about 35+ years and absolutely loved it. And I do not miss it at all now. I haven't left the country in about 6 years and my last international assignment was a nice one to end on. I do not see any assignments overseas anytime soon given the state of the world - and that is fine. I am at an age now that hauling 600 pounds of equipment in and out of airports and hotels does not seem physically possible, let alone attractive. It would have to be just right. I spent the last four months traveling around the west and ended up in Santa Fe, New Mexico. One camera, six lenses, no lights, a bag of clothes and a dog. Not always as "romantic" as shooting in Italy or Borneo, but it was a nice ride!!

**ES:** You're also well-known both in the commercial and fine arts spheres for your portraits. *Farm Workers* and *American Architects* immediately to mind. Could you tell us more about those bodies of work?

JC: Aside from shooting for the aerospace industry, photographing portraits is my favorite thing to do. I've mentioned my connection to Arnold Newman (the Jesus of portrait photographers) and his amazing body of work. I have photographed countless numbers of CEO's and workers all over the world and Newman's influence, his thinking is always present in those images.





*Richard Meier by Jeff Corwin*

The series of farm workers came about as a pro-bono assignment for the state of Washington, via an ad agency in Seattle. The state was interested in raising awareness of living conditions of migrant farm workers in Washington. The idea was to go to the camps where people lived. The concept I floated was to show the workers within those environments for greater impact and to shoot in black and white.

The architect series was a project I did for myself and personally financed. After years of shooting for corporations and finding that architecture provided great environments for portraits, I thought why not shoot portraits of architects? I started by researching who was doing amazing work, and of course famous names like Michael Graves, Richard Meier and other luminaries came up, but also many firms that were not as well-known at the time. Then it was just getting on the phone and asking for permission and time. At a certain point, I ran out of money for it and had to stop. But it was an utterly satisfying project!!

**ES: Continuing on the topic of your portraits, it seems there's this powerful relationship among the ways in which you choose to light the photographs, compose the setting, and capture the psychology of the sitter. Would you speak more to these connections?**

JC: Again, Arnold Newman. Although lighting has always been an evolving process for me, it is actually my favorite part of the process. Not that long ago, I was hired to shoot the CEO of a major corporation. In an act of complete self-absorption, I spent 1 ½ days to set it up and used 18 strobes and 9 power packs. Hey, the client said it was fine! This is not typical at all, but thoroughly enjoyable. Lighting portraits is not only about the light that hits the subject but the environment as well. Newman is credited with the term "environmental portrait." He felt, as do I, the environment can be used to communicate information about the subject (and I'm in the business of communicating). So, typically for me, I start by lighting a stand-in for the subject and then begin to light around that person. I think that I am good at capturing a moment that works for the subject, but I feel better about my ability to create an environment that speaks to the portrait overall.





*Boeing Hummingbird by Jeff Corwin*



**ES: To date, what has been your favorite project or series you've completed and why?**

JC: I really like the series I've done on gun violence for several reasons. The photographs show an evolution of my thinking, how the project started and where it is at today. They communicate my personal views on the issue. They are completely different from other work I have done in the past. And I love the process of coming up with the concept of each one, shopping for the props, building the sets and, of course, the lighting. The process has been fun, and I like the results. I have made 30x40" prints of these and the sharpness of the lighting and the crazy color palettes feel successful.

**ES: What advice would you give to someone just beginning or reconnecting to a creative career, whether in photography or the fine arts in general?**

JC: One thing that I realized in the beginning, but then promptly ceased to heed my own advice, was the importance of creating a signature look, a specialty, and really just showing that in my portfolio at the outset of my career. Because I enjoyed shooting so many different things commercially, I started to show a more varied side to myself too quickly. I think I might have been more successful if I had kept a more pared down version of my portfolio. Art buyers on both sides of the aisle really want to see a specific vision and could possibly get confused about what you do otherwise. So, show your strength and then once you are in the door, present your other ideas and styles.



## **ABOUT JEFF CORWIN**

Over the years, Jeff Corwin has taken photos out of a helicopter, in jungles, on oil rigs and an aircraft carrier. Assignments included portraits of famous faces and photos for well-known corporate clients. After 40+ years as a commercial photographer, Corwin has turned his discerning eye to fine art photography, primarily landscape.

Trusting his vision is important to Corwin. He has always kept the same approach, the same discernment and his desire to create photographs grounded in design. Simplicity, graphic forms, strong lines or repeating configurations personally resonate. He cites his mentor Arnold Newman and the works of Piet Mondrian and Edward Hopper as inspiration.

His experience has taught him not to second guess elements like composition or content. Humble shapes, evocative lines. Eliminate clutter. Light when necessary. Repeat.

His commercial work has won many prestigious awards and garnered vast international media coverage. Corwin's career shift into fine art photography is being met with the same serious attention. He is currently exhibiting in several important contemporary galleries throughout the western United States.

<https://www.jeffcorwinphoto.com/>



# LUMINOUS LANDSCAPES

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN FRANK

**Erin Schalk (ES): Please tell us more about your paintings themselves, your preferred media, and your process.**

Kathleen Frank (KF): I will paint anything that has a good foreground, a good mid-range and a good background. It has to be interesting in its color, contrast, pattern or atmosphere. Something has to be exciting about it. I almost always know, when looking at a two-inch image in a photograph that I took, if it will make a good painting. I rarely think about who might want to buy it and always feel lucky when someone likes a painting enough to want it in their home.

I paint with oils because I love the feel of the paint and because, let's face it, the smell feels like creativity itself. How I loved that dangerous waft of turps and oils. Now, however, I try to avoid smelling that perfume of the studio by painting almost exclusively straight from the tube, with no additives and use vegetable oil of cleanup.





*Picuris Bison II* by Kathleen Frank

My process is to take the photographs and run them through Photoshop Lightroom. There I can crop, work on the lighting and generally prepare the image for printing. I paint the canvas red- orange. This will show through the single brushstrokes, which is my preferred way of applying paint. I then use the traditional method of transferring the image onto the canvas by applying an ink grid to the print and a chalk grid to the canvas.

**ES: You describe that your formative years involved printmaking and woodcarving, and these are disciplines that can be methodical and process-oriented. What was it like for you to transition to painting? Do you find painting more flexible and expressive in comparison?**

KF: Transitioning from printmaking and woodcarving to painting was freeing. Woodcarving is very hard on the elbows and hands. Printmaking is dangerous for your lungs. For eight months, I had to paint with my left hand because of a riding accident that left me with a broken arm. I could not have done that if I had still been printing or carving.

Painting is absolutely freer and more expressive. It is like the difference between performing with a script and improvisation.

**ES: You've had opportunities to live and work in California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and New Mexico. How have the unique features and landscapes of each region impacted your work?**

KF: Each of the regions where I have lived, like countries in Europe, has a unique personality, flavor and color. Pennsylvania has rolling ridges full blazing trees and valleys full of patterned farms. Northern California has granite peaks, evergreens and alpine lakes. Colorado has cattle, aspen trees and soaring mountains. New Mexico has red rock, arroyos and mesas. Painting such diversity helps keep me flexible.

**ES: How do you develop your paintings' compositions? Do you select specific natural settings and land formations, or are any of your paintings a composite of multiple landscapes?**

KF: I compose with my camera. It may take some hiking, a plunge down an arroyo or a lie down in the sage to get it right, but that sets the stage for the rest of the work. I am not above adding a more dramatic sky to a painting than was captured in a photo. We are usually in California during the summer and clouds are a rarity that time of year.

**ES: You describe that in your paintings, patterns occurring in nature play an important role. Would you describe this emphasis on pattern in greater detail, formally and/or conceptually?**

KF: My quest for pattern and repetition is a hold-over from printmaking. There is a bold serenity in the flow of repetition. I think patterns help in the seeing of a painting. The eye is carried with it and may be led around a painting by it. Like being in the ocean waves, you can be transported along until one breaks on the surface and you have found something special.

**ES: Your use of vibrant and vibrating color is especially striking. Could you describe how you go about selecting color palettes for your paintings? Do you attach particular symbols and/or emotions to certain hues?**

KF: If a painting were all shades of yellow it would be a yellow painting. If the yellows were surrounded by blue-violets, purples and red-violets, now you have something to look at that is striking and vibrant and joyous. This is where the playfulness of art making is found for me.

I took a course in color theory in college and somewhere I still have the book that I made during that course. Though I have not thought much about it in the past 50 years, I am aware that it influenced my work.

**ES: In particular, New Mexico landscapes offer striking color contrasts. On one hand, there's the subtle shifts of neutral tans, russet, and sage green in the desert landscape. On the other hand, little compares to the saturated brilliance of New Mexico skies and sunsets. Do any of these contrasts come into play in your work?**

KF: I grew up in California and still have a home in the Sierras. My four generations-long affection for the Sierra Mountains is deep and ongoing. The juxtaposition of the live oaks set in the rolling, yellow California foothills is ingrained and may be why I bonded so easily with the colors and contrasts of New Mexico.

**ES: When thinking of the rich legacy surrounding the history of landscape painting, there's often a balance struck between the physical features of the land itself, as well as the particular memories and associations individuals bring to that specific location. Is this true for your work as well, and if so, in what ways?**

KF: My husband is a fourth generation New Mexican, and this landscape has been part of my life for fifty years. Early in our marriage we spent seven years in Colorado, where we added two sons to the family, explored and grew to love the Rockies. And though we spent twenty-five years in Pennsylvania, the West has always been home. This is where my heart is and always will be. I suppose it is a kind of imprinting that makes the land of the West what I am most compelled to paint.







"I am in love with nature and I love her best when she puts on a show. That brilliance and gaiety of the nature around us is what makes my heart sing. Isn't that what we're all searching for, each in our own way?" - Kathleen Frank



*Arroyo to the San Juans (left); Ghost Gold Old Bodie (above) by Kathleen Frank*



**ES: In your artist statement, you describe your connection to the land in terms of adventure, joy, and beauty. In your short bio, you also mention your daily hikes with your corgis. Do your paintings seek to instill similar senses of delight and wonder in viewers?**

KF: I am in love with nature and I love her best when she puts on a show. That brilliance and gaiety of the nature around us is what makes my heart sing. Isn't that what we're all searching for, each in our own way? That is what I seek to impart to my viewers.

**ES: Do any themes and/or concerns surrounding environmental protection and preservation apply to your work?**

KF: Much of the West is still as it was hundreds of years ago. In those places, and there are many, we are visitors, and we don't belong. We are insignificant guests whose footsteps will be soon forgotten. I try to express that in paint - the freedom of the wild land, the otherworldliness of the scenes, but also the spiritual connection to nature. I am not romanticizing nature. I hope I am revealing it. If I am able to share that reverence of our natural world with anyone, that is a joy.

**ES: Please describe some of the most profound influences on your work and your artistic career to date.**

KF: I never felt compelled to study under a master painter, learn the classic techniques or paint in someone else's style. I thought that, for better or for worse, I would make my own mistakes and muddle along in some natural progression of painterly evolution. Influences cannot be avoided unless you live in a cave, but they have not sent me off trying to be something I am not.

**ES: How do you envision you and your paintings evolving in the coming years?**

If my work evolves, it will happen naturally. We are all products of what has come before. That is the one thing that makes us human. If we are lucky, we keep on learning, changing and growing.



*Chaco Snow by Kathleen Frank*

## ABOUT KATHLEEN FRANK

Kathleen Frank was born and raised in Northern California and had the good fortune of being surrounded by teachers and artists. She earned a BA in Design and a K-12 teaching credential from San Jose State University and taught art in California, Colorado and Pennsylvania. Later she earned a MA degree with an emphasis in printmaking from Pennsylvania State University. She created and ran the Printmakers Studio Workshop of Central Pennsylvania for four years with Mary Lou Pepe. For many years she specialized in woodcarving and fabric printing. Kathleen now paints the landscapes of her three homes: California, New Mexico and everything in between. She lives in the wilds of Santa Fe with her intellectual husband and hikes daily with her two magic corgies.

Having been an art teacher, woodcarver and a printmaker in my formative art years, I emerged as a painter, awash in color and searching for pattern. While seeking brilliance in color is a worthy goal, pattern in nature is primal - the need to find a glimmer of logic in a vastly complicated, confusing and tumbled landscape. The goal is lofty, but when the quest is conducted with paint and brush, it is a joyously daunting adventure.

Color and pattern are everywhere, but the seeing and the interpretation of them are different for each of us. I look for the brilliance and the gaiety of life around me. I try to catch the light and design in all its strangeness and beauty. There is so much joy and adventure to paint in one lifetime.

Painting can be seen at La Posada de Santa Fe in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The curator is Sara Eyestone. Her contact number is 505-954-9668. In Tucson, Arizona, they can be found at the Jane Hamilton Fine Art Gallery.

<https://kathleenfrankart.com/>



*Kathleen Frank in her studio*





# THE •DNA• OF LANGUAGE

an interview with

## ANTHONY SEIDMAN

**Erin O'Neill Armendarez (EOA):** Please share a bit of background information about yourself.

**Anthony Seidman (AS):** With pleasure. I was born in Los Angeles in 1973 to a 16-year-old biological mother of Polish Catholic background and a biological father, slightly older, who was of Irish background on his mother's side but whose father was full-blooded Ute. (These are the bare facts, among a few others, I gleaned from the adoption papers that my father showed me when I was an adolescent.) I was adopted and raised in the San Fernando Valley by a New York-born Jewish Ashkenazi father and a mother whose family hailed from Morocco, all Sephardic Jews... a weird type of cultural stew, with British passports, as my grandfather was born in Gibraltar, and yet with roots in Cuenca, Spain. Hence, my maternal last-name, *Conquy*, a francophone reinvention of the original place. I was informed that I was adopted early on—a healthy choice on the part of my parents—and I believe that that helped nourish my sense of reaching out to different languages and, thereby, different cultures, as I grew up hearing French, Ladino, English, and Yiddish as a boy, and then went on to become a Bar Mitzvah and read or pronounce Hebrew. As my family was middle class, there were no aspirations to enroll me in prep schools. I am a product of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and during the 1980s and early '90s, the campuses were lively dens of heteroglossia. I remember being in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and a friend gifting me a crisp bill of 5 Córdoba while we waited in the cafeteria line for square slices of Wednesday pizza; I now realize that he was a refugee from civil war in Nicaragua. In my classrooms, the majority of the students were of color, and if they were white, that may have meant Armenian and Iranian, or they were Jewish, and many of those Jewish students were Levantine, with families originally from Iraq, Syria, etc. That was my linguistic and cultural reality. How could one not end up being a translator in such a mix? And who knows how the dice tumble and settle.... Many of my high school friends were second-generation Mexican, Central American, or South American. I was eating meals at friends' homes where the parents would simply address me in Spanish. (And with these friends, I was sharing poems, and we were reading not only Pound, Whitman, Williams, Eliot, and Shelley, but also García Lorca, Nicolás Guillén, and Paz.) Some particularly fond memories involve a friend's father and mother suggesting I be the chambelán for their daughter's quinceañera. There I was, giving confession in broken Spanish, taking communion, and dancing the waltz, followed by a beautiful party in the patio of bungalows that once dotted the hills outside downtown, now all razed in the cause of gentrification. Upon graduating high school, I attended Syracuse University, from which I graduated with a BA in Spanish and English. I was lucky enough to take classes from and experience a friendship with

Pedro Cuperman, an Argentine-Jewish professor of Poetics and Semiotics, and also to have as a roommate a Dominican by the name of Amaury Terrero, proudly from Las Matas de Farfán. And that taught me how vast the Latin American experience is.... the differences between Mexican culture, Argentine culture, the Afro-Caribbean realities. From there, I went on to do an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Texas at El Paso. It was a bilingual program, in the desert, on the border. I opted to live on the Mexican side of the border.

**EOA: How did you become interested in translating poetry from Spanish into English?**

**AS:** By necessity. When I found myself living in Ciudad Juárez during the latter half of the 1990s, I wished to read the best of contemporary Mexican poetry. I had an intuitive sense that Paz's style and tone were very much of the past, and that there was a true struggle by poets, especially from the northern border regions, to capture a different image of their country in their verse.

**EOA: How do you discover the poets whose works you wish to translate?**

**AS:** I like visiting thrift shops. You hold up a coffee cup and say to yourself, this meant a lot to someone. As did that complete set of plates. That piano, well, someone may have gracefully played Satie on it, or plodded through the finger exercises that Bach composed for his daughter. Maybe some kid pounded out the opening bars to Black Sabbath's "Iron Man." The stacks at universities and great public libraries are somewhat akin to that... you discover voices from the past in footnotes, asides, letters, allusions that no longer click with many contemporary readers. Yet these voices are gasping to be resuscitated. The role of the translator is like that of the archeologist who finds hidden statues, inscriptions. I have found—and translated—so many wonderful poets from anthologies considered outdated. The coteries change, the general taste, but often some gold gets swept away with the dross. I have some very specific poets and poems in mind... It was a pleasure to do a full volume by Salvador Novo (Mexico, 1904-1974) titled *Confetti-Ash*, co-translated with David Shook, for The Bitter Oleander Press in 2015. Although not exactly forgotten in his country, Novo is rarely included in contemporary anthologies of Latin American poetry, especially bilingual ones for English readers. It's criminal, as far as I'm concerned. His poetry brims with a sense of play, irony, candid homoeroticism, and a tone more like that of the US poets of his time than the highly refined sonnets of a Jorge Cuesta, or the elegance in the earliest poems by José Gorostiza. I happened to discover him in a water-damaged volume published by Mexico's Secretary of Education, a rather unattractive edition from the 1980s. I picked up the volume from a street-vendor in Juárez who was quite happy to get a 10 Peso coin and rid himself of the book.

**EOA: How and when did you meet Alejandro Meter? How do his photographs and your translations work together?**

**AS:** Great question... But to be clear, we don't exactly collaborate—we work in the same spheres. Alejandro is a professor of Latin American literature at the University of San Diego, as well as an immensely talented photographer. For the past decade, he has dedicated his work to documenting the writers who write on both sides of the border and in close proximity to (now) Trump's wall. It has been a delight and an honor to see that in various publications my translations of poets and narrators also showcase his photos. Alejandro has tapped into the energy of these border-region creators, and he is a regular on the scene at festivals and readings. His project is immense, and it highlights writers that are often overlooked by the "establishment"



in Mexico City. Some Mexicans intellectuals still believe that the official or major culture comes from the capital, and they dismiss everything else as provincial. The far-flung cities on the border fare the worst. The Mexican writer and politician José Vasconcelos even claimed that culture in Mexico ceases where the inhabitants grill meat. (And indeed, *carne asada* is very much a northern thing in Mexico.) But thanks to the efforts of those like Alejandro Meter, and of such poets as Jorge Ortega—and, I hope, to some of my efforts—there is a new vision of the literature from the border.

**EOA:** How do you manage the difficulty of translating different dialects of Spanish? Have you worked with dialects for which there are no complete dictionaries?

**AS:** Although I have recently translated Dominican and Peruvian poetry, and I am well familiar with Mexican poetry from Sor Juana to Díaz Mirón to the *Contemporáneos* to the poets of the '80s, like Alberto Blanco, and younger poets, I have felt that I can best render into English the poetry from the northern border of Mexico. The reasons for this are simple.... Roughly from 1995 to 1999, and with extensive stays during the early 2000s, I lived in Ciudad Juárez. Many of those from the United States don't grasp how multicultural Mexico is, and how the south differs from the nation's capital, which also differs from other parts in the center, and how the desert's northern expanse is vastly different. Different as far as attitude, social interaction, language, and manners of addressing others... even dress, gastronomy, not to mention music, or what one drinks at parties. By living in Juárez, becoming a father while living there, working at the city's main public university, paying bills, going to the bank, etc., I was immersed in the border region's Spanish... and although there are some differences between the Spanish spoken in Tijuana, Mexicali, and Cd. Juárez, the differences are minor. Actually, the bickering that sometimes exists between citizens from Tijuana and Mexicali strikes this individual as a textbook case of Freud's "narcissism of minor differences." Prior to a literary festival in Cd. Juárez to which my wife—the noir fiction author, Nylsa Martínez—and I had been invited, she had never visited that border city. After a day or two, she surmised that it was like Mexicali... yet not as hellishly hot. I heard a nearly identical comment from the great Juárez writer Willivaldo Delgadillo when I asked him for his opinions of Mexicali. Tone is so important when it comes to translation... tone and register, and discerning from which social point-of-view the turn of phrase, the judgment, the gaze surfaces. I must admit to feeling lost, sometimes, in the deep south of Mexico when it comes to irony, understatement, or the endless "albures," all of which are far more easy for me to decipher up north. Thus, when I read a poet like Roberto Castillo Udiarte, and his lines: "Damas y caballeros/ welcome tu Tijuana,/ el lugar más mítico del mundo,/ onde las lenguas se aman y se unen/ en el aló, el oquei, el babai y el verbo tu bi." Well, I easily pour that into: "Ladies and Gentlemen,/ bienvenidos a Tijuana/ the most mythical place on the face of earth,/ where two tongues make-out and meld,/ and the local speak in Hel-oh, oh-kaye, and the verb tu bi." It's a Spanish, Caló, and general zest in which I was immersed on the border. That being said, when I translated J.M. Servín's new-journalism-like account of his time living in the States, *For Love of the Dollar: A Portrait of the Artist as an Undocumented Immigrant*, for Unnamed Press, I also tapped into the energy he derived from his love of The Ramones, James Brown, the Beats, and Bukowski, and I remembered that landscape he conveys—New York right before it underwent "deep cleansing"—from my visits to my grandfather during the early '80s. And Servín is very much a *Chilango*, a proud lifelong resident of Mexico City. We got along swimmingly when we met for our presentation of the book in Los Angeles. The first words he said to me were, in Spanish, "But why do you speak like you're from the north of Mexico?" That made me laugh heartily.

**EOA: Some claim poetry is too difficult to translate because idioms and symbols are so culturally specific. How do you handle these challenges?**

**AS:** I wouldn't have ever translated if I believed that. There is always some bridge, some connection. Poetry and narration are so embedded in the human DNA, it's so natural. We tend to overlook that some of the canonical poems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in English are translations... just think of Pound's *Cathay* or his version of "The Seafarer." Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* is just as much Castiglione's creation as it became Thomas Hoby's, whose translation is considered a classic of English literature. I get dizzy when thinking of the centuries of translations, new versions poured into different tongues, from the languages of India, from Arabic, which gave us the *Thousand and One Nights*. Hardly anyone seems to pause when quoting from the Old Testament or the New. Interesting to note that our most sacred texts are translations, and these versions have their unique twists and takes. "Vanity of vanities" is uttered with great feeling and meaning, when the original Hebrew is more like "vapor of vapor." But those idiosyncratic or sometimes flat-out wrong choices don't perturb me. We're dealing with language, sound, basically air. Things are going to get lost, and then again recaptured, and perhaps—dare I say it?—transmogrified into something equally luminescent. Still, clearly, one hopes to be able to read Dante, Camões, the Popol Vuh in the original. Alfonso Reyes—that most cultured and wise essayist and poet—proposed a simple triad when it comes to the challenges of translation: "A. If it's possible, read the texts in their original language. B. Read translations that respect the distance although they may sacrifice the beauty. C. Read translations that help us better grasp the original, even if they may contain certain errors." I believe that option C will end up producing more poetry and literature in the translated version. Ever wonder why *The Cantos* open with a translation of a translation?

**EOA: What do you love most about your work as a translator?**

**AS:** García Márquez quipped that he wrote (and published!) so his friends would love him more. I think that was an honest and fine statement to make. I have benefited in a very human way—making contact, knowing other realities—from translation. I have made friends, and I have gained from their visions and realities. Recently, some of my most interesting conversations have been with Pergentino José, a Zapotec writer who employs his nation's language from the Sierra, not the Isthmus, and I have been stunned, enraptured when he discusses the intricacies of his mother tongue, its syntax, idiomatic expressions, etc. (To be clear, I have not translated Pergentino, yet we met among our circle of poets and translators.) An example, if I remember correctly, the word for "innocent" in his variant of the Zapotec language means literally "to be flower and dew." For a legal or moralistic concept, we get a tangible image... which is what metaphor should always be.

**EOA: What is most difficult about your work as a translator?**

**AS:** You're working with very slippery material. But I nodded in approval when I read how the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hebrew poet David Avidan dismissed the Frostian mantra that poetry is what gets lost in translation. (Avidan translated many of his own poems into English.) Avidan insisted "poetry is whatever is gained while moving from one language to another, and what's lost in translation should better have been disposed of in the original." As I consider myself quite functional in Spanish and French, and read in those languages, socialize in them, ponder poetry in them, I find that comment by Avidan to be comforting, a true guide. So. The difficulty is there, but it's also not a terminal roadblock. A new bifurcation opens. I have always been indifferent to the translation of "moreno / morena" as simply dark or dark-skinned. Looking



though old books on my shelves the other day I (re)discovered Rexroth's *Twenty Spanish Poems of Longing and Exile*, and relived the jolt I had experienced when I was sixteen—having just bought the book at the now defunct Dutton's in North Hollywood—and read his version of “Niña morena y ágil” by Neruda. (I had already read Merwin's version.) And it was simply that employment of the adjective of “tawny” that made my skull split open with delight. Not exactly “morena”... not this, nor that... but a “gain” for the poem in English.

**EOA: Why is it important to provide the poems and images of authors who write in Spanish to Americans and to other audiences globally who read and speak primarily in English?**

**AS:** My answer to this is very simple. We lose so much by not reading poetry and literature in other languages. We lose a lot, as well, by not regarding the poets' faces, our shared humanity. How many times have I had wonderful evenings discussing Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Corso, Rich, with poets from Latin American countries who have experienced the dagger and poison of American imperialism? It's about touching the real nerve, bone, and marrow of other cultures and countries... and bypassing the political slogans, the rapacious leaders and con artists.

**EOA: Are there additional poets you'd like to work with in the future? What is it about their poetry that intrigues you?**

**AS:** Oh, yes! Without a doubt. Two come to mind. After meeting David Huerta at a poetry festival in Tijuana where we both participated, I mentioned that we had in common a dear friend and a superb poet-translator: David Shook. I reminded him of our desire to translate his father Efraim's legendary verse, specifically the volume *Los Hombres del Alba* (1944), which injected an urban landscape into Mexican poetry, a sense of class divisions, the mire of daily life, the tender skeletons of poets, the lack of birds, and the poet's voice drenched in the saliva of oblivion, like a fish amid a shipwreck's waters. Well, we received his blessings. We hope to carry over his father's poetry into a worthy English version. And soon.

The other poet who comes to mind (among many now rushing up in my memory) is the Peruvian Jorge Pimentel (1944). Rather late in his career, he published a collection entitled *Tromba de Agosto* (1992), a violent and righteous whirlwind howl from the poor and marginalized in his country, in a vigorous and idiosyncratic Spanish that reminds one of Vallejo in *Trilce*.

Then there are the usual, canonical subjects whose poems in English version can always be furthered honed. Two examples: José Gorostiza is considered by Mexicans to be one of their greatest poets, especially for his long meditation, in Baroque register, *Muerte sin fin*. His earliest volume of verse was entitled *Canciones para cantar en las barcas*, and I have yet to find a translation of the lovely lyric “Quién me compra una naranja” that reflects the tone and meaning of the title: the speaker is not saying, “Who will buy me an orange?” but, “Who will buy an orange from me?” I would love to translate that poem's lilting quatrains.

A final case: perhaps the most famous poem by Vallejo, “Los heraldos negros.” The opening verses exclaim: “!Hay golpes en la vida... yo no sé!” English versions vary little from this: “There are some blows in life... I don't know!” Yet for the Spanish speaker, it's clear that the exclamation “Yo no sé!” should not be conveyed in such a literal manner.

**EOA:** What advice would you give to future translators?

**AS:** Read. Research. Collaborate. Do the saturation-job... read all you can of a certain poet whose work is deeply important to you. All you can about that poet as well... as in reviews, essays, letters to and from, even stiff, peer-reviewed academic studies. Know that you're not alone. And some of the kindest and most helpful folks I know have been fellow poet-translators... among them Boris Dralyuk, who translates from Russian, Kent Johnson who translates from Spanish, Martín Camps for his translation of the Brazilian masterpiece *Parque Industrial: Novela Proletaria* by Patrícia Galvão, David Shook, who translates from Spanish, Nahuatl, and Zoque, Michael Casper, who works with Yiddish, Gaspar Orozco who translates from Chinese poetry, Roberto Castillo Udiarte who was the first to translate Bukowski, Lamantia, Robert Jones, and Bill Knott into Spanish, Blandine Longres, who translates into French from English... so many! I ache that I will remember others, but too late! And know that we always need new translations. Borges felt that he hadn't suffered too much from not learning Ancient Greek—instead of resorting to only one Homer, he had Chapman's and Pope's. And now we have Lattimore's, Fitzgerald's, Wilson's... It's a beautiful process, awe-inspiring, as if we were watching tectonic plates shifting at a heightened velocity, with mountains rising in months rather than over eons.



*Anthony Seidman, photograph by Nylsa Martinez*



## *Ciudad Juárez Unplugged*

Ever since childhood I only cling to the fear  
that some stranger  
taking advantage of the dark  
will break into our home  
and because of that  
my love for lightning-bolts  
that light followed by a great din  
that arm snapped apart by death  
revealing the vertebrae of the heavens

between darkness and lightning  
word and rain are a murmur  
and the children look like black trimmed cardboard

in darkness  
one hears the course of water through the streets  
and thanks to the lightning  
once again we can glimpse our veins  
our bones honed on every street corner  
belonging to this city that no longer is

now the river churns and returns      the *barrio* sinks  
once again dirt and water under one's soles  
in this ruckus we remember  
that childhood is lightning  
appearing from the cloud of years

and along with this rain that silently falls to our eyes  
we also praise that flash  
revealing the ruins of a city  
which no longer exists for us  
and so we learn  
that the fidelity of rain  
and the persistence of darkness  
do not erase the faces nor the names  
of our dead friends

Translation by Anthony Seidman.



*Edgar Rincón Luna, photo by Alejandro Meter*

**Edgar Rincón Luna** (Ciudad Juárez, 1974). Rincón's collections include *Aquí empieza la noche interminable* (Tierra Adentro, 2000) and *Puño de whiskey* (Ediciones sin Nombre, 2005), which was then republished by the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez in 2018. Long considered as a key voice from the poetry of the border region, Rincón's poetry has also appeared in journals and anthologies throughout Mexico, and in the US, in such journals as *The Bitter Oleander* and *Huizache*.

## from *Smooth-Talking Dog*

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
*bienvenidos a Tijuana*,  
the most mythical place on the face of Earth,  
where two tongues make-out, then meld,  
and the locals speak *Hel-oh* and the verb *tu bi*;

where the Duty Free Zone exists,  
the black market and lil' trinkets  
for the boss-man, the secretary,  
the voluptuous girlfriend, the ol' lady,  
and the unbearable children;

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
*bienvenidos to TJ*,  
where homies, surfers, and punks,  
*narcos*, cut-throats, and detectives  
make a vacation of their vocation;

where politicians and investors,  
factory heads and customs agents,  
businessmen and money changers,  
lottery ticket hawkers and cops  
are the true illegals;

guys and gals  
welcome to Tijuana,  
where computers and hearts are assembled,  
old technologies along with the new,  
and zebra stripes are spray-painted on donkeys;

welcome to Tijuana,  
the streets, the unexpected quip,  
horniness and the binary system,  
the border crossin' and the double entendre,  
the goin' over there, and the happy endin' here.

Translation by Anthony Seidman.

**Roberto Castillo Udiarte** (Tecate, 1951) Long hailed in Baja California as the godfather of Tijuana's counterculture, Castillo Udiarte has produced a vast amount of poetry collections, translations, articles, anthologies, as well as having led workshops in universities, community centers, juvenile incarceration centers, and homeless shelters, on both sides of the border. The poem included is a selection of stanzas from his long meditation on Tijuana, entitled *El perro labioso*. The complete translation appears in *Smooth-Talking Dog* (Phoneme Media, 2016).



*Roberto Castillo Udiarte, photo by Alejandro Meter*



## *Bedouins*

Unawares, we cross the threshold,  
until reaching the center.

What did we know about borders?

We enter the desert  
like entering water,  
like leaving water  
and entering dryness once again.

“Excuse the mess,”  
thought one of the two.

And you smiled before the vacancy spreading  
like a vast parenthesis,  
before the awkward  
syntax  
of our trusting step.

We have yet to discern  
if being within the circle  
is to be inside the center,  
                    or if the center  
                                    is  
the circle.

The breeze galloping across your brow  
frees us from inquiries.

Translation by Anthony Seidman.

**Jorge Ortega** (Mexicali, 1972) has published over a dozen collections of poetry and essays in Mexico, Argentina, Spain, and the United States. The prose poem included here is culled from his collection *Devoción por la piedra*, which was published in 2010, after having won the Jaime Sabines Prize for poetry, from the fine arts council of Chiapas. Currently, he is a professor at CETYS University in his native city, where he also edits the university press, as well as its journal, the vibrant *Arquetipos*.



*Jorge Ortega, photo by Alejandro Meter*

## *Carne Asada*

The men  
gather  
round the grill  
each with  
beer in hand  
they laugh at themselves  
mock one another and  
glance back at their wives

The children play  
baseball  
it's obvious they'd  
rather be watching TV  
or playing on the computer

The women  
gather  
round the patio table  
each with  
beer in hand  
they laugh at themselves  
mock one another and  
glance back at their husbands

On the grill  
the meat is still red  
still succulent

Translation by Anthony Seidman.

**Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz** (Mexicali, 1958) is a widely published scholar of border studies, poet, author of science fiction, noir and detective fiction, and the leading historian of Mexicali and Baja California. He has published of hundreds books, both as author and editor.



## *Mexicali*

It has to be some sort of gag,  
bad joke, slap to the face.  
Just who came here and thought: *City*  
in this inert place,  
    vast and empty?  
Furnace of rusted humanity.

Even so, you gave birth, coins of impalpable talc,  
clayish loam bursting forth a flower.

Spotting things on your plain is useless,  
trying to do so will result in a mirage.  
Luminescent steppe.  
You come from the sky,  
a grid of salt,  
trace of an imagined planet,  
hollow of volatile earth.

Your heart  
lodges within an artificial cloister  
and rations saliva in order to speak.

Your city center,  
the same that was once a fiesta,  
today is but a cadastral record,  
a route of passage  
sparkling in memory.

You sit, dwarf-like,  
on concrete platforms,  
yet you preen

forgetting what you once were,  
how the wind inhabited you  
when the Sun was in its kingdom.

Translation by Anthony Seidman.

**Rosa Espinoza** (Mexicali, 1968) is currently a professor at CETYS, as well as the founder and editor of the independent press *Pinos Alados*. She is the author of numerous collections of poetry, including *Señero: Poemas 1994-2014* (Pinos Alados, 2014). She has published poems in journals like *Tierra Adentro*, *Yubai* and *Aquilón*.



*Rosa Espinoza, photo by Alejandro Meter*

## *Stillness*

The bodies bound in duct-tape  
have awakened  
without tongues  
dumped in a vacant lot

half-stripped  
lacerated  
hands tied  
wrists welted by  
the wires'  
tension

heads inert and  
facedown in dirt

eyes empty  
their blood-bog soaking them

they have awakened  
cadavers sprawling  
immersed in the death of  
all of us who see  
and anxiously feel  
the anguish  
of their stillness.

Translation by Anthony Seidman.

**Jhonnatan Curiel** (Tijuana, 1986) finished his BA in Communications at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, and then pursued graduate studies in Colombia. He now resides in his native city where is widely recognized as one of the most important poets of his generation. He is the author of seven collections of poetry, many of them unflinching in their documentation of violence in Tijuana. His poetry is very much a poetry of witness.



*Jhonnatan Curiel, photo by Alejandro Meter*



## Review of Edgar Brau's *El Hijo*

The history of Argentina's Dirty War (1976-83) has been scrutinized and examined in attempts to understand what took place and how to avoid it from ever happening again. There are countless books, essays, works of literature. Memorials have been built to remind not only Argentines but the world of what took place during this time, including *Parque de la Memoria*, which is situated on the banks of the famed Rio de la Plata. It serves as a testament to the victims of state-sponsored terrorism. It is no surprise, then, that a new play on this same theme has been written by the talented and insightful Argentine playwright, Edgar Brau.

*El Hijo* takes place in a sparse jail cell somewhere in Argentina, perhaps in the rural countryside outside of Buenos Aires. During the Dirty War, clandestine detention and torture centers were built or converted from existing military installations throughout the country as the military junta (led by General Jorge Rafael Videla, who was president of Argentina from 1976-81) forcefully cracked down on dissent. Using the most macabre examples of man's inhumanity against men and women (emotional, psychological and physical torture), these heinous acts were committed with impunity (for several years, at least) as the world community turned a blind eye, claiming that the junta was keeping communism from taking root in Argentina.

The junta established and enforced a strict curfew, censorship stifled civil discourse; distrust pervaded all levels of society. By the end of the Dirty War, over 30,000 men, women and children were "disappeared" (*los desaparecidos*). Included in this total were many allegedly "subversive" women who, sadly, were separated from their babies. The children in turn were given to families of the military, many who could not have children of their own. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*) were instrumental in bringing to light this horrific "policy" during these terrifying times, marching weekly in defiance of the military.

In many countries, it is women who have fought and played an outsized role demanding an end to military regimes (see not only Argentina, but Chile, the Philippines, Egypt and others). This theme resonates throughout *El Hijo*, zeroing in on the torture of innocent women.

Argentina continues to stay shackled to the past, unable to move forward. The legacy of the military dictatorship has rendered the country economically impotent. The memory of the 30,000 "*desaparecidos*" continues to weigh heavily on the Argentine psyche. Just what does this have to do with Edgar Brau's play *El Hijo*? The answer to this question is, as they so often say in Argentina, "*es complicado*" (it is complicated). *El Hijo* demands multiple readings and not always in chronological form. Readers will want to return to certain points in the play, taking into account the historical backdrop, the inhumane methodologies used by the military, and finally, taking note that, as Jorge Luis Borges once said, "description is revelation." The playwright chooses his words and phrases carefully, and one can only comprehend the magnitude of his choices with multiple readings.

Brau's sparse use of detail is intentional; readers must fill in the blanks with their imagination and their sense of the historical context in which the play exists. The play is set in a jail, a building that was never finished. Argentina's residential and business zones are forever dotted with unfinished edifices, giving one the sense that the construction was either never completed, or is in the process of being dismantled. This

speaks to the endless cycles of economic tumult that Argentina has experienced, regardless of whether a democracy or military dictatorship has been in place (*El gobierno de turno*.)

Brau uses the verb “revocar”, which translates as “to repeal”, when describing the unfinished construction of the building that at one time housed the dormitories of military conscripts but is now being used to hold people against their will as “enemies of the state.” To repeal is to reverse, to revoke, to annul. This construction, such as it were, therefore revokes or annuls the lives of those housed within. Their existence becomes open-ended, just as the outside of the building appears to be, what? In the process of being built? Or in the process of being destroyed? Are the incarcerated made to be examples of what happened to women who did not obey; or are their lives to be rendered void, rescinded?

The playwright engages the reader in a juxtaposition of realities, a duality between what is real and what is fiction. Fictional are the names (Camila, Ines, Silvia, Graciela and Martha), but what they experience is all too real. “*Las señoras*” use adaptive emotional survival techniques while they are held against their wills, waiting (and hoping) for release. But their jailers revel in subjecting the *las señoras* to ridicule and humiliation throughout each tortured day. The military had abducted the women and had separated them from their children; once in jail they were given dolls, which soon became stand-ins for each lady’s actual son or daughter. This is an example of psychological torture.

General Videla serves as the historical backdrop, a constant audio presence, his speeches broadcast over the detention center’s loudspeakers as the mood turns ever more somber, dark, ominous, like the gathering clouds before a deadly storm. The reader’s sense of morality, ethics and fair play is important. In one scene, the sergeant and a guard are doling out food to the *señoras*, who are told to eat everything, lest good food go to waste. Brau’s impeccable and well-timed sense of irony accentuates the cruelty and hypocrisy of the regime. The *señoras* are about to find out that one in their midst will be executed shortly; to the regime, her life did not matter, yet her food would not go to waste. This perversity on the part of the junta is one of many examples of the extreme psychological torture that their captives would have to endure, even if their fates were sealed once they were abducted from their homes and separated from their children. They would not get out alive.

Evoking memory is one of Brau’s overarching objectives as he weaves in and out of history, from fiction back into history, and then into surrealism. Brau does not so much play with words as much as he plays with our emotions, using sounds (a clanging chain and a speech by the military dictator General Videla) as a means of creating a foreboding, disconcerting environment. The entire play takes place in a jail cell; the only signs of life outside of the cell come from the rays of sunshine that penetrate the window. The window is a tantalizing and frustrating medium whereby any sense of normalcy, of optimism, is extinguished by the fading sunlight at the end of each dreary day.

The loss of so many young lives is troubling and devastating. Could even just one of the disappeared have been able to change the course of Argentina’s history, had she or he lived? Could just one of those have been able to become leaders in industry, in politics, making the country and the world a better place?



Cover art for *El Hijo* courtesy Edgar Brau



The ending is open-ended, unfinished, in need of explanation, but that is exactly the point. The uncertainty that the five señoras endure as the play draws to a close reflects the real-life dangers that everyday Argentines faced during that time period. The grown-up hijo (son) of one of the señoras suddenly appears in the jail cell just as his mother is being led out to her execution. Here Brau deftly plays with the juxtaposition of different perspectives and time. It's present tense for the women. The future tense... they have none. The son's present and unexpected presence is because of his mother, who now belongs only to the past. Yet without her, *El Hijo* would have never existed.

*El Hijo* is a new and lasting memorial to Argentina's "disappeared." I look forward to eventually seeing the play performed live.

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**Available now through Amazon:**

<https://www.amazon.com/El-hijo-Spanish-Edgar-Brau-ebook/dp/B005GXLLVI>

## ***Review of All That I Have Not Made: Poems 1957-2020 by Robert Sward, 2020, Hidden Book Press.***

I hesitate to review these “collected selected” poems—actually, an excellent review has already been penned and can be found in the afterword, written by Jack Foley, who has known the author and his poems for some sixty-odd years. Or you could take the words of Robert Bly, or Dana Gioia, just to mention a couple of the well-known writers and critics who have endorsed Sward’s poetry. What I have to say here matters little, but let me take a shot at it anyway, as the author has so graciously invited me to the task.

Imagine a collection of poems spanning a lifetime written by a poet who early in his career taught for the legendary Iowa Writers’ Workshop, poems arranged chronologically covering six decades and then some. Perhaps the best pleasure for readers, many of whom are likely to be poets themselves, is to trace the book’s unique persona as he speaks of ex-wives, deceased parents, even talking dogs, channeling their voices, allowing them to speak frankly from the page.

The truth the poems relentlessly pursue from the Iowa cornfields to India and beyond is sometimes best perceived from the dogs’ perspectives. Sward’s dark humor is revealed through the picaresque depictions of the enigmatic people moving in and out of his world, none of whom appears to have the answers to life’s most pressing questions.

In “Iowa,” an early poem in the collection, Sward extols the “strange happiness” of being a poet:

Sixty poets have gone off drunken, weeping into the hills,

I among them.

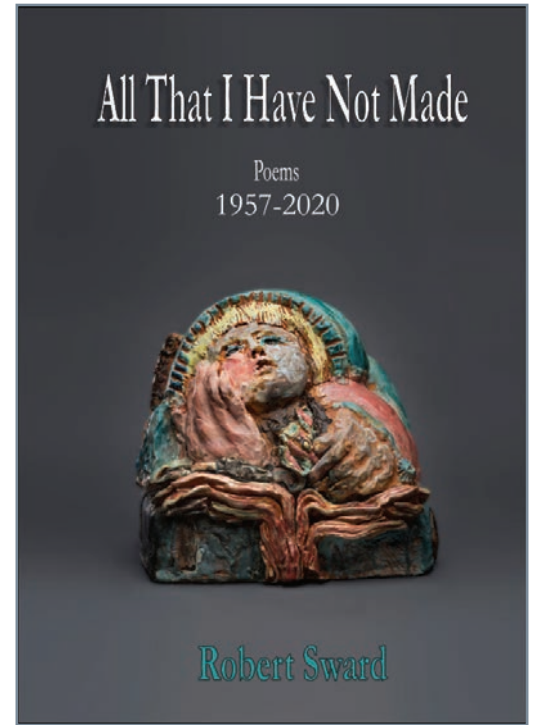
There is no one of us who is not a fool.

What is there to be found there?

What is the point in this?

Someone scrawls six lines and says them. (lines 2-7)

A few years later, in “Statement of Poetics, or ‘Goodbye to Myself,” the poet outlines a fundamental shift in his writing from “angry for twenty years” to “poems that use the word *heart* and/self-confession and incorrect/grammar and the soils and stains of Neruda and Lorca and Kabir and Williams and Whitman and Yeats” (stanza 2). Of these poems, the narrator announces, “. . .No one/ has to publish them” (lines 14-15), thereby confirming that the pressures of a successful literary career would not confine or define him. There is wisdom and courage in this collection, courage to be admired by anyone facing the same dilemma, the safety of extrinsic reward vs. the authentic quest, no matter where it leads.



Cover art for *All That I Have Not Made*  
courtesy Robert Sward



Poems from *Four Incarnations* track Sward's journey as a poet from childhood to the amnesia he suffered after a car accident just at the height of his career. Whether in verbal encounters with lovers, wives, a son, or his father, the narrator's attempts for genuine understanding seem hopeless, as no one seems able to truly listen, like the wife in "Alfa the Dog" who would rather have her husband, who has been absent for three weeks, talk to the dog than to her, the dog she adopted in his absence. Like all the other dogs in this collection, Alfa doesn't lie nor delude herself: she seems, Sward implies, to be alone in her candor.

Smack in the center of the collection we find "The Biggest Party Animal of Them All," a guru who had sex with "as many as 300 of his youngest followers" (lines 10-11) and above all else loved to party. The sacred kundalini *Shaktipat* is delivered by this "trickster," "con man"—so much for the search for truth. Turns out the dogs have it right, spot on.

Sward's persona faces an odyssey of spells, challenges, fantasies, and disappointments, all imparted with unflinching honesty and a good dose of humor. It is clear Sward means to tell us not to take ourselves too seriously. Is there mysticism in this book? That can be debated. But Sward definitely demonstrates a rare gift for summoning the voices of the dead, who appear to lack useful advice even after crossing over. Although the veil cannot fully be lifted, these voices are real, particularly the voice of his Jewish podiatrist father, advising him to take care of his feet, as they hold him to the ground, yet apparently never appreciating the true center of his son's life, his gift for poetry. "You want me to be proud of you? Be a foot man" ("God is in the Cracks," line 21). Sward's father is with him, as he promises to be after fitting him for arch supports, "every step of the way," habitually unimpressed by his son's academic appointments or other accomplishments ("Arch Supports—The Fitting" line 29). In his father's eyes, the poet could never find a stable, reliable life.

What poet can? Some do. Many do not, maybe because we're listening to Keats and not to our elders when it comes to what matters in life: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,--that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." How far can you get with that sort of advice? Read Robert Sward to discover the answer. The beauty is in the truth. Everything else seems to fall by the wayside, all the standard pursuits and agreements tossed off like useless garments along the way. He lived the life; he wrote the tales. It is our good fortune to be able to stumble along behind as if we were picking up the crumbs in the story of Hansel and Gretel. There are plenty of witches in this book, rest assured.

If Sward reads this review, he will probably laugh at this latest failed attempt (read mine) to testify on his behalf. He knows he needs no one to speak for him, having decided long ago to do it for himself.

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## ***Review of Poetry En Plein Air by Marianne Szlyk, 2020, Pony One Dog Press***

“Small Town America,” an oil painting from Tom Brown, seems a perfect visual encapsulation of the writings contained within *Poetry en Plein Air*, Marianne Szlyk’s latest collection of both previous and new work. First, Brown works in the en plein air style of painting, making Szlyk’s title appropriate. Then, the reproduction of his impasto-style work shows the thickly textured relief aspects of his work.

Why is this apropos?

Much like Brown’s painting, Szlyk’s words create the illusion of depth.

*Poetry en Plein Air* collects 62 poems from three of her earlier volumes along with 29 new poems, making this book a “sampler plate” of her work.

While Szlyk’s love of music is always evident in the diction and meter of her work, many of her new poems grow from her admiration for visual art, which also may explain the title using a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century French style of painting. In a two-part poem, “Working With Stone,” she honors Italian painter Bice Lazzario while “Rothko on Portland Street” studies the Russian-born American artist. Even when not relating her words to a specific artist, there are visual aspects to poems such as “Birch Trees in North Carolina” that encompass “this quilt of sky, earth, and vine.” Equally visual is when Szlyk places readers in the Midwest “At Mile Zero on SR26.” One problem in that poem is it’s difficult to determine the most powerful image at a place where

The open road unspools

Like a fresh typewriter ribbon.

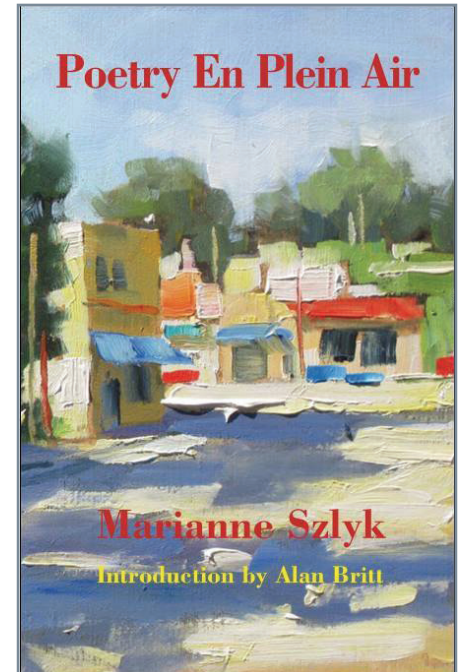
Her inclination toward music abounds in these pages, including previous titles such as “After Miles Davis’ Amandla,” “The Jazz Harpist Considers a New Album” or “The Jazz Harpist Lies Sleepless,” as well as “The Music of Her Life.” In “Of Music and Metaphor,” the poet classifies people as various recording formats, from vinyl to downloadable. The newer selections offer “Listening to Electric Cambodia,” honoring a Khmer singer who “will not live to see thirty,” and in “Music in a Spring of Wind and Rain,” Szlyk she details how

Piano notes and drum beats flow,

a waterfall contained in a courtyard.

I imagine a friend, a jazz poet, listening to this

and after a series of memories, concludes that



Cover art for *Poetry En Plein Air* courtesy Marianne Szlyk



Everything I hear is water.

Like the example above, many of her pieces end with strong, succinct closing lines. In “Chicory,” Szlyk’s narrator is the plant itself, a life form proclaiming, “No one civilizes me.” Meanwhile, “Midsummer Moonrise” advises readers to “smell the earth at night.” She mourns the loss of small businesses in “Bethesda,” where “No one notices this ghost” now haunting

chain restaurants

that rise up

like invasive flowers.

Szlyk commemorates Marianne Moore’s influence on her own writing in a poem titled “In Pale November” and recounts how “I count syllables the way she did.” Such powerful finishing statements might well culminate in “Summer Solstice on U Street,” a poem celebrating jazz sax player Gary Bartz whose music was so strong that “We can no longer pretend.”

Like many of her time, Szlyk recalls the personal impact of 9-11 in “Lafayette, September 11, 2001,” which ends with the plaintive yet simple “I prayed for rain.” Other pieces reflect history, whether it be personal experience when “My Mother Told Stories” of “cars with no radios” or “her favorite candy/Necco wafers,” or the modern as presented in “Green Corners Park,” a place that offers an escape from “a symphony of smartphones/and car stereos.” Facing her youth in “Facing Worcester,” she commemorates the regional language she grew up using. Originally from New England, her imagery from that region shines through in various spots, such as “In Another Life, We Live in Presque Isle, Maine” where

the fog will roll in with dawn,

binding us here

to this place.

Mood likewise figures into the 91 pieces here. The inevitability of “November” promises to be “the safest month” even though

she stands, a sharpened face in the muted month

that nonetheless, for her, promises sorrow.

This stands alongside “Home from the Oncologist” as exemplars of reflective melancholy. Meanwhile, note the sly humor in “A Paralegal in DC” as a young woman wonders “where all my time in this city has gone.” In a similar fashion, “We Never Can Live Where We Want” documents a ghost who “can’t leave town” while recalling a place “upon which I, no angel, dance.” Then, there is the worldly advice to readers when Szlyk tells them to “Find Your Beach Where It Is.”

While Szlyk prefers the shorter poetic structure, it’s not to say she can’t riff as well. Writing a “Waleje for Caroline,” she employs the Nigerian poetic format that extends a series of seven-stanzas and recalls a generation of women who “glowed” and notes that

Her daughters will sweat,  
playing tennis to win, lunging for the ball.  
Caroline does neither.  
Standing, chilled behind the picture windows,  
she lights a cigarette.

Another departure from her poetic norms is “Scene from the Blue Room.” The piece is a multi-page examination of three women, each speaking in her own voice, and has a theatrical quality about it. Perhaps Alan Britt sums up Szlyk’s poetry best in his introductory notes when he informs readers that her work “presents an open invitation into the poet’s inner sanctum.”

My personal recommendation?

Répondez s’il vous plait to *Poetry en Plein Air*.

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**Available now through Pony One Dog Press:**

<https://www.ponyonedog.com/book/poetry-en-plein-air-the-poetry-of-marianne-szlyk/>

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## *Disentangling Spirits and Other Ways to Stop Oppressing Others*

The first time I saw a body burn was in northern Thailand. Even the birds came to watch, clumped in the trees overhead. The village had lost an elderly man, and we were there to send him to the next life.

A cluster of forty or fifty people stood around a six-foot pyre topped by a man's body stiff on a wooden bed. The bed was covered with a miniature temple painted pink and green with intricate carvings that edged a pointy roof. The whole flammable structure tilted slightly as it rested on an uneven pile of sticks.

Someone started chanting. Someone hit a gong that sat in the bed of a pickup truck. Someone lit a match and carried a smoking handful of dry grass across the clearing. It was the only dry thing here in this sweating farmland where even the water buffalo swabbed their foreheads. The pyre ignited without any overt prayers or wailing. Without a bulletin or procession, we began to send the man home.

It seemed that others weren't here to grieve as much as see someone off. It was the type of gathering you find at a train depot, babies fussing, bodies facing different directions, but all waiting for an arrival or departure.

The flames burned the middle of the man's body first, leaving his feet sticking out from a column of fire. I watched as his feet eventually curled up and melted like the witch under Dorothy's house in the *Wizard of Oz*. The people around me didn't seem to wish for the flames to stop, like I did. They didn't seem prepared to rescue the body from this violence. They mingled, some ignoring the pyre, some making suggestions to the people in charge, some eating mango slices, slapping mosquitos—all of it the sound of bodies at ease with the way things are.

For over a decade now, I had been entrenched in the work of *helping*, the work of changing how things are. I believed in this sort of change deeply enough to imagine that even a dead body might need something from me. But in that moment, I could almost hear the funeral guests saying, "Throw your need to help others on the fire. It no longer serves you—or us. There are even more generous ways to be in the world."

Even so, I couldn't heed them because I was too deep into imagining what it would feel like to lie still while your body burned.

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In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paolo Freire writes, "Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression." Pedagogy—teaching others—is closely related to helping others.

As I read Freire, I realized I needed a way to check my motives. For years I had carried a measuring stick for the virtue of all helping relationships, with a scale that ranged from oppressor to liberator. I judged myself and others' efforts with this stick.

There were very few, in my mind, who landed on the liberation side. They were revolutionaries and not white. White people rarely knew how to act against the oppressive system they were born to reinforce. So, I became leery of my ways of being in the world. I looked for teachers everywhere.

In graduate school, I had a Nigerian professor who said the best way to “help” Africa was to let the civil wars rage unabated until a political economy unbalanced by colonialism and global aid programs found its own equilibrium. My professor would have been a liberator on my stick.

By the time I watched the corpse burn, I had reached a point where the measuring stick meant nothing. I had become everything on the scale at once. I was a lineage colonist attempting to soften the impact of my whiteness. I believed my awareness was immunity from being an oppressor. With intentionality, I believed I could play a significant role in changing the system that oppressed people.

I realized later that the motions of a liberator and oppressor may not even be something anyone can hold in balance. In the end, I was still just a white American in Thailand at a Buddhist funeral worried about a dead body’s experience.



I had come to Thailand to help friends run a guest house for traveling aid workers. My job was to shop for flowers prior to the arrivals. To scooter over to the market and fill a bowl for the kitchen counter with fluorescent fruits that might get ignored. Then to put the final touches on the laminated checklist: adjust the air conditioner, double check that there was no hair in the drain, wipe the dirt off the swing set, pump air in the bike tires.

For the first couple of weeks I studied the slow pace of Thailand like an assigned mantra. But because I was twenty-five with a looming sense of losing some invisible competition, I could never find a way to relax until my work became difficult enough to exhaust me. I’d inherited the helping professions from a long family lineage; my father was a therapist and a nurse, and my mother a midwife. There were more nurses and missionaries behind them. Like my ancestors, my nervous system felt more comfortable while in a constant state of emergency than in an exhale. It calmed me to be in the presence of acute pain—other people’s acute pain, that is. The more catastrophic, the better. I needed it in order to assure myself that I could help them, a round-about way of constantly reassuring myself that I mattered.

The severity of other people’s injuries fascinated me, but I was also interested in how foreign their experience was to me. The distance between myself and another person’s pain has always been a humming electric fence, permeable, but hot. Given my privileged white upper middle-class childhood, stepping between the wires into someone’s inner world of suffering is like a border crossing. And closing the gap has always allowed me to “rewrite my own story.”

Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, writes, “Their stories [gang members] are like flames. You have to keep your distance, or you’ll get scorched.” Part of what drives my desire to approach the flame is that I’ve always wanted to get scorched, badly, and keep the ashes in a box. Not to show off. But rather to scatter like tea leaves across the table and study like a fortune. *Where did you come from?* I want to ask this desire to help. *How long have you lived in my body? What will I become if I give you up?*



My father's voice sounded like an airline pilot when he talked about pain. I had heard pilots talk to each other through a channel on the radio station I listened to whenever we flew to visit my grandparents. They, the pilots and my dad, sounded safe, like no emergency could justify an elevated voice. When I first heard my dad talk about pain, he was a nursing student. He and his friend Kurt practiced trauma scenarios in our living room.

I was a good patient. I lay on the rug, closed my eyes, and listened to them fix me with the same cadence as the pilots. One knelt behind me holding my head in place, while the other poked his finger into my neck. I flailed and moaned. It might have been a game to me, but they responded mechanically. A strong hand held my left wrist to the rug, to stabilize me, another picked up my limp right.

"She has a good cephalic vein," Kurt said dryly, tapping on the side of my wrist.

"Don't cephalics usually roll?" my dad asked.

"Pull it tight first. With your thumb," Kurt said. "Then it holds." They never used actual needles, there in our living room. And when they finished their flash cards, I was free to continue whatever I'd been doing, a Barbie talent show maybe. But after each practice, I felt prepared for something. It wasn't quite voodoo, but somehow at 6 years old, I was already programmed to crave the sounds of healing.

Years later, my father would start an IV in the wrist of a boy in the parking lot at Columbine High School, another one in the arm of a BASE jumper. Another in the neck of a woman whose arm had been eaten by a tiger. At the time, he may not have named his egoistic interest in helping. He may have just been trying to use a skill.



Two weeks into fluffing pillows at the guest house in Thailand, I secured a job working with stateless refugees with an international mental health organization dedicated to the talent of local healers. I would be teaching a photojournalism workshop on the Thai-Burma border. The first local healer I met was Pao Hom, a twenty-one-year-old refugee from Burma who whisked me around on her motorbike for errands, like finding dry noodle packets and matches, buying chicken skewers from the lady with the Celine Dion t-shirt. Pao Hom led a team of five or six others, familiar with entertaining whatever consultant my organization sent. The consultants came one at a time and stayed alone in a cinder block building on the outside of town, leaving notes in the team journal about the provincial serenity.

I didn't realize until I arrived that I'd struggle with solitude. It only took two nights lying awake on the floor mat, listening to lizards chirping in the open rafters above my head, to decide that I no longer wanted the job. It wasn't just the isolation and rugged conditions; it was also the realization that my presence there was a burden. Could a photography workshop really change the course of generational trauma? I had done work like this before, always thinking that I would be the one white foreigner who wouldn't be a colonizer. But as I lay on my mat, I conjured images of my friends working at stations in Kabul or Cairo. We were all aware of our egoistic interests and yet we continued to take up residence in other people's homes. We continued to hope that the liberator in us would overcome the oppressor.

On the third morning of solitude, I woke up feeling hollowed out. The smoke from the chicken cart down the street spelled a message in the sky. *They're fine without you.* Instead of giving up completely, I decided

to commute from the city to the village on weekends. In a photo I took of myself riding the bus you can see that I'm in the thin space between things. My hair blows around my head from the open window like an aura, my eyes squint as if to say *I dare you to call me an oppressor*. But my body was also soft, like someone who was trying to share a seat with her darkness.

When Pao Hom picked me up from the bus station the next week, she was not surprised that I invited myself to sleep at her house on weekends. "I knew you didn't like it there," she said, handing me her motorbike helmet.

"Don't you need it?"

"You're a baby," she teased. "You get lonely so much. You need a helmet for your little baby head."

I settled on the back of her bike. There was already a baggy of brown liquid dangling from the handlebars, the Thai iced tea she knew I enjoyed.

"Is that tea for me?" I pointed.

"Tea isn't for babies. You have work to do." She maneuvered the bike around potholes, past cinder block homes, men staring at wires, a dog trotting alongside, a barbeque with steaming skewers, a girl wearing men's sandals. I was relieved to be on the back of her bike, leaving the fringe, moving closer to the center.

Pao Hom lived with her extended family and several cats in a house with a dirt floor kitchen. I was an addition to the cluster of people she already cared for. Pao Hom and I shared a small wobbly bed covered in a Hello Kitty comforter. Each night she fell asleep studying for her college entrance exams. Each night I waited for her long breaths, then pulled the sharp pencil from her fingers and set it on the floor.

I felt shy during the photo workshops. I had lost my reputation as a self-sufficient consultant from America. Everyone knew I had moved out of the consultants' house. They knew I feared snakes and couldn't remember my students' names. But it was Pao Hom who lay her narrow frame next to me at night, and even though she was asleep, she guarded me. It may have only happened for a few hours in the night, but the humanitarian I used to be left me. In her place was a small girl on a living room rug whose heart swelled while someone stronger held her arms down and fixed her.

"Tomorrow you come with us to a funeral," Pao Hom said one night. There was no grief in her account of the man who died. It was the same voice she used for the story of her journey through the jungle in Burma. A whispery voice, one that had become softer with pain; the kind I would normally tune into. But as soon as she told the story, I forgot it.

By 7 am on the morning of the funeral, the sun was already hot. Pao Hom's father drove the pickup truck, waving family members and neighbors into the back as he slowed. We bumped sticky arms into one another as the truck wound out of the village to the top of a hill sheltered by tall trees.

I wish I could remember what it smelled like when the body, and finally the feet, caught fire. I can't even remember if we stood there long enough to watch it turn black. I know that I stiffened, my heart raced with the sight of the match, the pile of sticks, the body lying in wait to be charred. I looked at Pao Hom, whose head was bowed. I bowed mine as the ashes of the man began to dance over our heads.



When the sticks gave way and the dead man's miniature temple slipped, I felt relieved that we were almost finished. At the end of the burning, when the man had been safely thrust into his next life, we all piled into our vehicles and drove through the clearing in the trees. On either side of the driveway, smiling men perched on top of trucks dipped branches into buckets of water and splashed everyone who passed. "Protection from the spirits," Pao Hom explained. "So the dead does not follow us out."

Funeral traditions in this part of the world understand something I couldn't at the time. We are prone to tangling in each other's spirits. Caring for one another is a pre-disposition of our spirits, not our will. We need funerals to disentangle the oppressors within us and leave us with a sense that "our liberation is bound to one another," as the activist and artist Lilla Watson reminds us. I closed my eyes when the water from the branches fell on my face, hoping I too had been sent to my next life, or that the drops would show me a new way.



I can't tell if I've learned a new way. I can't tell, yet, if I'm still a mercenary. My father and I still have some of the symptoms. When they said there would be a draft for medical professionals to assist with COVID-19, I imagined my father standing at the doors of a hospital, triaging patients like he did years ago, dropping a sheet of paper on each gurney with words in large sharpie lettering 'Now' or 'Hallway.' He would have volunteered to manage the bodies. To load the refrigerator trucks or work with the inmates to dig graves. But as it turned out, they said they didn't need his help. When I asked if it was hard, he said, "Nurses live for moments like this."

I thought, *we will always live for moments like this.*

Instead of triaging patients, my father stood on an orange dot outside Home Depot and waited his turn to shop. Once inside, he pushed a cart and swiftly found what he was looking for: a thermostat and wires to connect a lightbulb that would regulate the temperature of his sourdough starter. He said the starter would be ready by Wednesday. He gave me a portion in a jar and talked me through its first feeding. The steps were complicated and urgent. "If you're going to help it grow, you're going to need to do exactly what I'm telling you," he said.

I made an incubator under my dining room table with a lizard lamp and a cooler. I sat under the table and left messages for my father. "I melted the inside of the cooler with my lamp," I reported. "I think my meat thermometer gave me a false reading. Please call ASAP." When my father finally called me back, I was still sitting under the dining room table watching my jar.

For days we sent each other pictures of our jars. We admitted how much we loved our starters.



When Father's Day came around, I asked my mom if Dad already had banneton proofing baskets, the kind we saw in the YouTube video. But she said he had given up his starter. He was busy with his beehives.

"He gave it up completely?" I asked.

"Yes, he had to. The bees had mites in their hive or some such thing. He's out saving the bees."



*Song of Bernadette by Ann-Marie Brown*



## *How to Move Your Life*

### *Get started early*

It's too late to start early. My mother has hoped against hope she'd never have to leave this place that has been home and security for decades. During a paring-down attempt a few years before, she'd gathered my father's suits, had them cleaned, and taken them to a Goodwill store. To her horror, the attendant had tossed them from the car as though they were so much superfluous baggage. She drove away with the image of those suits falling into the indifferent bin and lost heart for any more organizing, uncharacteristically giving up.

Before she'd contracted Lyme disease nine years after Dad's 2006 death, before its complications of osteoarthritis and neuropathy, this was a decisive and independent (fiercely independent, note her children) woman. She'd done all the heavy work for my father—who'd broken his back in 1947 and couldn't lift over 25 pounds—shoveling snow, lifting suitcases into the car, carrying furniture from the basement to the deck every spring and back in late fall. She'd worked part-time retail jobs to help put her four children through college. She'd raised and obedience-trained six German Shepherds, earning titles on several of them, the most recent at the age of 87 when she had to use a cane in the ring because she never knew when her legs would give out. She'd never had any sort of pill regimen in her long years of robust health, disdaining even multi-vitamins.

Abetting her surrender to indecision are Depression-era lessons about thrift. Born in 1930, her mantra had always been *don't throw that away, we may need it one day*. It simply wasn't in her to get rid of that which wasn't broken, or could be fixed or re-purposed. She was eternally prudent, she who'd grown up planting Victory gardens, knitting and darning her own socks, stretching leftovers into an extra meal or two, and pinching pennies until they squealed.

Learned frugality serves her poorly just now.

### *Calculate your space: how much you're moving from and how much you're moving into*

The space from which she's moving is a 5-bedroom, 2.5 baths suburban house with fenced quarter-acre lot, front and back porches with a back deck, full basement and two-car garage. She's lived there for 53 years raising her four children and eventually running a business with my father. The space into which she's moving is a one-bedroom, one-bath retirement community apartment with a den, living/dining area, and tiny kitchen. It's not possible to imagine the change, though the numbers are provided her: she must down-size from a 4,000-square-foot colonial to a 778-square-foot apartment.

She married my father in 1951. He died in 2006. In the thirteen years since his death what she's done with her space is preserve his memory. There are his hats, still on the top shelf of the front hall closet. In the living room, their wedding portrait and a 50th anniversary photo sit atop a cherry wood drop-leaf table, the first piece of furniture they ever bought together. On the refrigerator is his final shopping list written the week he died: tall kitchen bags, Cascade, instant decaf, Jim Beam. All his gardening and other tools

hang on the garage peg board in the same arrangement as on a day in June 2006 when they left together, not knowing he'd never come back. Small boxes on the workbench overflow with all sizes of screws, nails, drill bits, nuts and bolts. It's as though time has created its own preservative amber around these objects left for over a decade: nothing's moved, nothing's changed, though we children have been prompting her to discard unused things for several years now. Could he, by some miracle, walk into his garage today, he'd be able to close his eyes, reach out a hand, and find exactly what he wants.

Naturally reticent and raised by immigrant British parents who were of stiff-upper-lip stock, she rarely talks about him and won't admit to loneliness. But how much space do memories take and how do we know what's being kept hidden?

### *List your most prized belongings*

She's the only child of the only daughter of a British wool manufacturer and mill owner. Her parents had moved to the States from Yorkshire in the early '20s, when her father got a job with the DuPont Company. What might be the most prized belongings in the legacy passed down to her, the sole heir, the sole living repository of her family's myths and saga? She—who teasingly chides me when I mispronounce “scone” (it's *skawn*, not *skone*), who can produce recipe cards for Yorkshire pudding or steak and kidney pie written in the graceful cursive of Victorian England—cannot begin to prioritize to the point of saying what goes and what stays.

She possesses the accoutrements of the rising wealthy business class of 19th century Britain, a lifestyle long gone. Her grandchildren don't want bisque figurines, old crystal, formal china, elaborately scrolled sterling silver tableware and monogrammed linens. Her own children's lives are settled. Except for small things—a few books, a small carriage clock, a silver tea set—they have no use and no space for the furnishings she so wishes could stay in the family. It hurts, it cannot help but feel like rejection, though she won't say so and I am left to surmise from the look of helplessness on her face and the abruptness of her demeanor. But no one wants what she's treasured all these years, what she's kept safe behind the glass doors of carved-wood cabinets, placed atop the sideboard in the rarely used living room, and stored away in barrels purchased for the purpose seventy years ago by her mother.

Her belongings include anachronisms like two full sets of bone-handled, sterling knives, spoons, forks and serving utensils intended solely for meals with a fish entree. These are in addition to full settings of ornate sterling silverware for meals without fish. The manners, habits and dining room rituals of the BBC show, *Downton Abbey*, didn't seem exotic to us, her daughters, after years of Sunday dinners in her formal dining room. We, too, never began to eat until the hostess lifted her fork, we learned how to set a formal table with fine china, tableware and crystal, positioning each implement in the correct way at the correct spot: the bread and butter plate goes above and to the left of the dinner plate, the various glasses to the right, the spoons in a certain order next to the knife. We knew not to leave the table until permission was granted, and never to leave the soup spoon in the empty bowl but beside it, on the plate. Not that we'd grown up in *Downton*'s wealth and splendor. Our parents had raised their four children on a single middle-management income and seemed constantly to be saving for the future and its promise of four college educations. There was no money to spend on other than necessities. I, the third daughter, wore hand-me-



down clothing, and we all wore items Mom sewed or knitted. We'd lived amid the furnishings, formality and habits of a wealthier and more mannered time in a different country yet in a way that, so seamlessly had it been it integrated into our lives, had never seemed dissonant. Not until now.

*Be honest about what you can live without*

Here's what she hasn't lived without since he died: his last few grocery and errand lists; his hats and coats; the computer and even the old typewriter on which he wrote several attempts at what he laughingly called the Great American Novel; his World War II Army uniform and three scrapbooks-full of letters he wrote home to his parents while he was overseas; the leash he used to walk his German Shepherd, Max, whose ashes she scattered over his grave in 2009; every wallet, pair of glasses, key fob and cuff link he used and put by.

She hasn't lived without bins and bins of birthday and holiday cards he gave her, as well as the photographs: the five cross-country trips they took during the nineties in their Airstream RV; their two trips abroad; her family's photos going back two and three generations. There are boxes of slides taken in the fifties and sixties when we four kids were growing up, memorializing every birthday, Christmas, family vacation, and the 1964 move to the house she now must leave.

She's lived with the banjo clock he loved that hangs on the family room wall above the television, though it hasn't worked for years. She's lived with the cookbooks he gave her, one every Christmas for as long as her children can remember, all of them stacked in the kitchen cabinet and none of which she uses these days because she's alone and her appetite isn't what it used to be. Cocoa and a piece of fruit for lunch, oatmeal or a bagel or an egg for breakfast, and who needs a fancy dinner? With the purchase of a piece of salmon and a rotisserie chicken from her favorite grocery store, ingredients for a slow cooker recipe she can freeze in single servings, a bag of broccoli florets, some fruit and snacks, she's good for the week.

She's lived—I have to imagine this because she's won't say, but even I, an occasional visitor from out of town, can feel his presence in the house—with the echo of his resonant voice and just-out-of-view ghostly visits: he gets up from his La-Z Boy chair to make himself a mid-morning snack, he hums and yawns on his way downstairs in the morning to start the coffee and do his back exercises, he prepares the sourdough batter for Saturday mornings' ritual pancakes, he grabs his car keys for an outing to train the dogs—ain't we got fun, though?—and every chance he gets, he talks about how much he loves his wifey.

*Sell, donate, or recycle what you don't need*

The woman we've persuaded Mom to hire to help her organize and make decisions for the move holds up a fork with a peculiar tooth on its outer tines, raising an inquiring eyebrow. That's a pickle fork, Mom explains, and doesn't mention it was her mother's and probably her grandmother's and it survived the German bombings in World War II to be packed away and brought to the States in 1946. How can she say, *oh no, I don't use that any longer and it's only a pickle fork, tarnished at that, so throw it away*, with the fingerprints of her maternal ancestors upon it? With the powder of German bombs and the ash of British

lives embedded in it? I, heartsick at the look in her eyes, put out my hand for the fork, unwilling to witness my mother watching as it's tossed it into the discard pile. Later, Mom allows me to take from her reluctant hand books her parents owned that she knows she cannot use and does not need, without which she can't imagine living but for which there's no space in the new apartment. She forgets most of the hundreds of decisions she's made during the hours and days we've helped her, duress and emotion tangling a mind already fogged with the fatigue that comes of old age and fighting fate.

We—the woman hired to get her downsized and my older sister and I—have suggestion after suggestion: throw this away, donate that, I know you like this but there will be no room for it in the apartment. She's tired and drawn, and her affect is newly frail. She tries to downplay her agonized worry about losing or leaving something behind only she can value. But it's there in her inability to decide and a helplessness I've never before seen in her eyes, not even after my father died. Episodes of flaring anger illuminate what she can't or won't say aloud: these people going through her life pickle fork by book by photo by sweater, an invasion that she, private and introverted as few are, must endure in the name of getting the job done and her into the new, safer place. She'd left it all undone in the hope she'd never have to do it and now the job is so huge it can't be completed without this invasion. Bewilderment supersedes the decisiveness she'd told me she'd muster. Resistance follows that. *I'm moving my life*, one imagines her thinking. *Slow down! Give me some time!*

*Go away.*

### *Optimize the space in your new apartment*

After the latest fall down the single step into the family room, she's finally agreed to use a walker. It's arrived, with its wheels, a seat that lifts to reveal a small storage area, and its mockingly cheerful red metal legs. She tries to calculate floor area and furniture size while dithering about leaving behind or giving away or selling or donating furniture imbued with the spirits of the beloved dead and the history of an immigrant family. Because how will she get the damned walker around her living area?

For her, optimal use of space would mean never, ever leaving this home until all she requires is that inside a wood box placed in a 6x3-foot bit of ground next to her husband.

### *Moving day*

She sets her jaw and moves mechanically, barely speaking to me through the grim morning except to panic about a letter she thinks she forgot to mail and, several times, where are my keys?

She sets her jaw and pushes from one task to the next—final walk-through, gather dog's things (where's the bone? *where's the bone?*), find purse, struggle into coat, get dog into car. I climb into the passenger seat. She drives out of her garage for the last time, utterly silent.



## *Sitting With Winslow Homer's The Gulf Stream*

Sadie did not expect to see anything that afternoon that would excite her. Years of curating for small galleries had numbed her to the awe she used to feel when taking in a great work of art. Now, whenever she found herself in the halls of a museum, she thought only of the interviews she was not granted, the job titles she would never hold. If it were up to her, she would have gone anywhere else that day.

But there was Carl. He rarely came to the city anymore, and since she met him a few days ago at Grand Central, he kept mentioning The Met. So there they were. At one point, he beckoned her over to the far end of a gallery in the American Wing. He was standing in front of a painting she did not know. As she approached, her eyes darted from one piece of canvas to another and the old feeling came upon her, singing to the tune of reclamation.

In the center of the frame, a man lay, stretched across the deck of a small sailboat. The mast had snapped off. The ocean rose and fell around him. He had propped himself up, leaning into the crook of one elbow. His other arm extended down to his thigh, slightly bent in such a way that it appeared broken. Sharks circled the boat. The snouts of two of them jutted out from the surface. Their mouths were agape. In the background, sunlight bathed the distant sea, revealing the faded silhouette of sails carrying a much larger vessel somewhere else.

This man was forsaken. That much was clear. What struck Sadie more than anything, however, was his face. He did not have the look of someone on the cusp of an agonizing and violent death. He seemed, in fact, lost in thought. His brow was furrowed. His expression hinted at the possibility that he had always expected to meet an end like this. Nothing about it surprised him.

Holding onto this thought, Sadie read the small placard mounted next to the canvas. *The Gulf Stream: Winslow Homer (1899)*.

"Here I thought he only painted white people," she said, thinking of other Homer pieces she knew: a line of boys playing "crack the whip" in front of an old red barn; two men canoeing down rapids; a collection of young women standing on a beach, wringing their skirts of the Atlantic.

Carl winced. "I guess the Caribbean was less vanilla than he was used to in Maine."

This made Sadie laugh. "I'm sure it was." After a pause, she added, "I think it's brilliant."

A few hours later, they sat on a butcher-block bench in a subway station, waiting for the downtown 6 Train. Sadie's feet were sore from all the standing. A small plastic bag from the gift shop dangled between Carl's knees.

"It's strange," Sadie said. She was looking across the tracks to the opposite platform.

"What is?"

"To feel so—" she wriggled her shoulders. The word eluded her. "Moved," she said. But this felt lame, inadequate. That evening, after dinner and a few glasses of wine, she would think: *drawn to, compelled by, entwined with—it'll come to me.*

Carl shrugged and replied that that was perfectly fair.

A woman on the opposite platform caught Sadie's attention. She was walking back and forth with an idle step, and she spoke agitatedly into her phone—her feet at odds with her lips. Her free hand swatted at the air in front of her, as if she were asserting her position for the umpteenth time. Her head was tilted to the left, her brow furrowed. Though Sadie could not hear her, she picked up on the cadence of her speech. If anything, the woman seemed to be on familiar terms with the irritant needling her from the other end of the line. It was as if she knew that, by the end of the call, not only would she be heard, whomever she was speaking to would be beaten into submission, bent to her will. Things would fall into place. Just as they were supposed to, just as they did every time.

Sadie knew this woman. She knew her as well as she knew the faceless person on the other end of the line. Her stomach churned. For an instant, she felt as though it were her being railed.

Clearing her throat, she said to Carl, "It's weird to be moved by something so final." *Enticed by, spoken to, illuminated.*

Carl frowned in that conciliatory way of his, when he had nothing to respond with but wanted to keep the conversation headed in the right direction.

"Not sure what that says about me."

Gradually, Carl worked himself into a monologue about how it didn't say anything except that Sadie was tapped into something or other, and while her point was valid, he didn't think the painting had to be read as a gesture to some kind of *finality*. "How about courage, or perseverance," he said. The sharks in the foreground didn't have to be taken as literal. Nor did the broken mast. Shadows, yes, but there was sunshine also.

While Carl got excited—the points he made opening doors to tangents and digressions of varying relevance—Sadie eyed the opposite platform. She wanted so badly to know what the woman was saying that she moved her own lips, trying to get them in sync with those berating the poor soul on the other end of the line.



## *Autobiography of My Face*

I vomited blood all night and into the next day. A nutritionist from the hospital cafeteria came to my room, voicing her concern over my lack of nourishment. I'd sent every tray back to the cafeteria untouched. As she stood in a huff, I grabbed the plastic kidney tray next to my bed and threw up another bout of the blood I'd unwittingly swallowed during the surgery. She retreated without a word.

With my nose packed with gauze, I inhaled greedily through my mouth which was swollen open like a fish, two elastic bands stabilizing the gaping hole. The setup seemed haphazard, like fixing a flat tire with duct tape or making a makeshift belt out of old twine.

Then I wet the bed. I was as mortified as when, in junior high, I'd slobbered while flirting with Tom. Unable to speak with my wounded mouth, I gestured to the nurse for writing materials. When she brought paper and a pencil, I scribbled: *Sorry! But I wet the bed!*

"No matter," the nurse soothed, helping me up so she could change the sheets.

In the bathroom, I glanced in the mirror for the first time.

What had I done?

I recently read a memoir by Lucy Grealy. At the vulnerable age of nine, she lost half her jaw from a rare kind of cancer. Before the surgery, a kind nurse tried to prepare an unsuspecting Lucy: "Do you know you'll look different afterwards?"

Lucy answered she understood everything perfectly, which was a lie, and added a few jokes about bandages and looking like The Mummy. The nurse realized she was getting nowhere. How do you prepare a child for disfigurement?

After the surgery and some horrific 1960s chemotherapy, Lucy returned to childhood with a distorted face and a self-image as warped as water. Not surprisingly, her identity became her face, the face she hid behind a sheet of hair like Cousin It.

There is something about the face that breeds connection. We value the symmetrical aspects—the long lashes, the sharp cheekbones, the jawline, the wide and feckless smile. Our physical identity resides in our face, not a hand or hip or foot. The tragedy of a burn victim increases tenfold if the face suffers deformity. Normally, we cannot hide our face behind sunglasses or clothing for very long. Lucy would have loved our COVID mask-wearing world, a world where her personal leprosy could be hidden from all eyes by fashion and mandates.

I did not recognize the face I saw in the hospital's mirror. My cheeks and lips were swollen into a thick rubbery mass. A yellow hue nested under my eyes, and blood rimmed my nostrils and mouth like stray red crayon.

When I crawled back between the fresh sheets, I felt claustrophobic in my body. My husband had been visibly shaken by my appearance after the surgery and now I sensed the tangled mess between my body and

soul and the futility of separating them into different therapy couches. Would such a drastic change on the outside cause a crumbling of the inside? It was my own private identity crisis.

For months, the stages of recovery vacillated through my face as if I possessed shape shifting abilities. The ferocious swelling peaked at day seven. My face mushroomed into a dense lopsided ball while a headache lurked behind my forehead. Rebelling from the cruel treatment, my mouth generated enough saliva to drown a rat. When my five-year-old daughter saw me for the first time after surgery, her cry sounded like the calls of scattered crows. Who was this monster? Where was her mommy?

At one follow up visit, my surgeon instructed me to press on my chin several times a day so the skin would reattach to the jaw under my bottom teeth. The stitches he had inserted during the surgery had long since fallen out. To say this directive caused me anxiety would be an understatement. I obsessively pressed the skin on my chin up to my lips like smoothing a blanket on the bed. I dreaded ending up a freakshow. Now was not the time to watch *The Elephant Man*.

I remember on the first day of first grade receiving the horrifying news that my class had been assigned to one of the dreaded portables on the south side of the school. But my despair disappeared when I entered the aluminum structure and saw my teacher, a young blond with a pink skirt. She was a far cry from gray-haired Mrs. Robbins from kindergarten, and I couldn't believe my luck. She looked like Superstar Barbie, for crying out loud, and therefore she must be both kind and good. Ah, the shallowness of a child. Yet, even as adults we assign too much meaning to physical beauty. We value it, even as we complain about size 4 jeans and fake eyelashes. Furthermore, to be comfortable with a barefaced defect might be on par with the commandment to love our enemies.

Over a twenty-year period, Lucy endured over thirty reconstructive surgeries that echoed the primitive horror of a Dr. Frankenstein's lab. The surgeons carved out tissue flaps from different parts of her body and inserted them into her mouth where the jaw should be. Time and time again, those skin grafts reabsorbed into her face. She spent her childhood believing a meaningful life would start after the surgeries stopped. She believed once her face was fixed, her soul would heal. She lived for the next surgery, the one that would make her presentable to a world obsessed with facial beauty.

But Lucy's final attempt to fix her face flummoxed even her closest friends. The surgeon proposed removing the fibula bone from her leg to use as a jawbone graft. Lucy opined that her fibula was "really doing next to nothing down there."

The surgery proved disastrous. Her leg never really healed and when the doctor opened her up for a follow-up surgery, he found the native jawbone too fragile for the procedure. This was her last chance. She could no longer pin her hopes on some future surgery. Her face had been a revolving door, but now it slammed shut. She grew empty as a gutted walnut shell.

I grew up with an underdeveloped jaw which years of orthodontic work failed to fix. My orthodontist recommended corrective jaw surgery back when I was ratting my bangs in high school. The price tag steamrolled my parents and the prospect of a liquid diet for six weeks trenched me. I never had the surgery.



I ignored the deficiency as best I could, avoiding my profile in the mirror or on home videos. When it did infiltrate my radar, I'd walk around with my jaw stuck out in a futile attempt to fashion a pronounced chin. Of course, the position was unnatural and only lasted until my focus shifted to kissing Scott or speeding down University Avenue to catch a flick at the Movies 8. Although the issue didn't commandeer all my attention, there were reminders from time to time. A boyfriend once confessed his aversion to my lack of chin, devastating my fragile ego. We had one of those brutally honest relationships which sound good on paper but often hurt like hell. Another time, I came across a photo of me taken during the last mile of a marathon. The photo exhibited my profile in a particularly vivid way. With my mouth hung open in exhaustion, my Lilliputian chin burrowed into my neck. I'd clipped my bangs back from my forehead, accentuating the receding shape of my face. The picture rattled me.

Was this how people saw me? How would I ever be taken seriously with such a flaw? In such a visual world, could I succeed without a jawline? No matter how I angled the mirror, I couldn't find a chin worth diddly-squat. Years later, when an oral surgeon again recommended corrective jaw surgery as a way to stretch open my pencil-sized airway and alleviate my sleep apnea, my husband and I decided it was time.

In her memoir, *Autobiography of a Face*, Lucy described a visit from her family after the initial surgery, the one that took half her jaw:

*"I could tell they were shocked at the sight of me. I had been an absolutely normal nine-year-old the last time they saw me, some ten days before. My older sister spoke politely to me, as did my twin sister. They'd never been polite to me before and I knew that a chasm had opened between us."*

After my surgery, friends came to visit with an assortment of berry smoothies. They tried to hide their shock behind the striped paper cups. The correction was so dramatic I looked like an imposter, a sister of the person they knew. Honest friends told me it was disconcerting to hear my voice come out of my new face. One outspoken lady at church asked flat out why I had done it. *What was wrong before?* she bristled, as if my choice to have surgery had really put her out. The crowning moment was when a neighbor approached me at a church social to ask if I'd just moved into the neighborhood.

"Terry!" I said, "It's me, Kristen. Your neighbor?"

Her eyes widened; her forehead furrowed. "No, you look so different. Something is different about your face! Why do you look so different?"

I stumbled over an explanation—surgery, snoring, correcting my jaw—before slipping out into the spring night. I felt like a grown-up who'd just been told the truth from a very honest child. My appearance was making people uncomfortable.

For Lucy, all the surgeries and procedures—the tissue flaps, the expanders, the bone grafts—shrunk and reabsorbed back into her face over time. It was a disappearing act of gigantic proportions. She recalled a moment in a fitting room where she finally recognized the failure of her most recent graft.

*"My eyes had been secretly working against me, making up for the asymmetry as it gradually reappeared. This reversed image of myself was the true image, the way other people saw me."*

For weeks, she'd seen only symmetry in the mirror—a phenomenal not unique to Lucy. Looking in the mirror can be a very subjective experience. One day our ears resemble jellybeans, the next we vow allegiance to Dumbo. Our hairline suddenly recedes an inch or two without our knowledge. And did I always have an unibrow? But always, we search for some acceptance of our reflection so we can face the world. *Just forget about the bags under your eyes. Jason didn't know what he was talking about in the eighth grade.*

For Lucy, she hoped her brilliant mind would eventually counteract the visual hackwork of the cancer, but in the end, her face flatlined all other considerations. And although many people saw *her*, the person beyond the face, she never could.

On the last page of her memoir, she wrote:

*"I used to think truth was eternal, that once I knew, once I saw, it would be with me forever, a constant by which everything else could be measured. I know now that this isn't so, that most truths are inherently unretainable, that we have to work hard all our lives to remember the most basic things."*

We do have to work hard to remember the most basic things. Truth seems unretainable because we see through a glass darkly most of our lives. We don't always *feel* the truth and therefore get rather confused. It's hard to retain the truth that our earthly appearance matters very little in the long run when it seems to matter a great deal to *Vogue* right now.

But there are glimpses, flashes of seeing things as they really are. Christ was the master at this, seeing the spiritual core of even the driftwood and flotsam. Maybe Lucy experienced those moments of grace, but the lure of the next surgery kept her from doing the emotional and spiritual work required to retain these eternal eyes. Instead, she medicated herself with sex and drugs and died of an overdose at the age of thirty-nine.

But I cannot judge her.

Once the swelling abated and the saliva dried up, my jawline appeared like a dragon from the mist, and the people in my life became climatized to my new face. I might still struggle to bite into a loaded hamburger due to the permanent numbness in my bottom lip, but I can now watch home videos without running for the hills.

Now there are other flaws to consider. Wrinkles crowd around my mouth, extra pounds camp around my bellybutton, my shoulders slope and my hair sprouts gray. And these are only the flaws on the outside. The case can always be made for another surgery.

The answer lies somewhere in the middle of the meadow where I realize the goal isn't to white-knuckle my way to bodily acceptance, but to see this myopic earthly experience from a different vantage point. There is a preciousness that can be injected directly into the veins, like an antidote for disease.

I'm only beginning to *know* and *see* the truth.

That I was enough even without a chin.



## *Flea Market Special*

Flea Market! Now there's a pair of words that elicit strong feelings in the hearts of many Americans. Some people immediately turn away. "Ahhggg! Who wants to buy a bunch of disgusting old crap? Probably has germs on it, or bugs. Keep driving!" Others have a completely opposite reaction. There's a quickening of the pulse and a deep hope that today is the day they will finally find that comic book to complete their collection. For others it may be car parts, antique lamps, or tools. Some people "just want to look." Well, that's what they say anyway. But before you know it they're hobbling towards the exit with bargains that were just too good to pass up. Believe me, I understand.

Before the accident that changed everything in my life, I enjoyed a good flea market now and then. Sometimes I even took a run down to one of the more famous flea markets in Upstate New York and set up a few tables myself. Did I make a lot of money? Not really. But our family business had gone belly-up and I had two storage units full of stuff that wasn't doing anything except costing me money. Some of my former customers and fellow old car freaks told me about this place called Jimay's that was located in Conklin, New York. It covered all the bases. Vending at Jimay's was cheap and you could sell anything except drugs and pornography. Plus, it was a hell of a lot of fun. It went something like this...

"Put it here! Yeah, right here! Nope! Over more, overrrrr...All right! That's good. Shut 'er down," the mustached man driving the golf cart tells me while puffing on one of those thin little cigars. He reaches up to the truck window and I lay a twenty on him for today's spot. With a cheerful "Good Luck!" he zooms away in his cart to intercept the next vehicle pulling onto the humpy-bumpy field. It is five in the morning on Sunday, but you wouldn't know it. I climb out of my ancient blue pick-up truck and into a noisy little town. There are over a hundred vendors setting up for the day under a thick blanket of river fog that makes things a bit surreal. But I kind of like how it keeps the curtains closed until the show is ready to begin.

Some of the vendors are pros. For them setting up is easy. They just pull the tarps off their tables or unlock the variety of homebuilt booths made of scrap wood and other salvaged materials. Annndd...Presto! They're in business. For the rest of us, it's more of a struggle to get ready. Many of the wobbly old minivans pulling in seem like clown cars. The minute the vehicle comes to a halt, people are leaping out of it from every possible exit. Moving with enviable speed, they slap sheets of plywood on top of sawhorses. "Bang! Slam!" and just like that, they've got four big tables to display their wares on. Ten minutes later, they've piled each one high with comic books, video games, fishing tackle, tools, dolls, belts, and homemade quilts. You name it and there's a booth selling it. Maple sugar, vitamins, water filters, blue plastic tarps...

"Hurry up! HURRY UP!" yells one man to his family. He knows they have to rush because...

"Hey! Whatcha got? Whatcha got?"

"Lemee get in here and look!"

"What you selling over here young man?"

Yay! It's the early birds! Vultures in a hurry to start shopping before you even get your shit unloaded. These are people who have never spent more than twenty bucks for anything in their entire lives and they aren't

about to start now. Plus, for them it's all about the haggle, the dance, basically getting what they want for the lowest price possible. They're not a bit shy about it either.

"Fifty bucks for a guitar? You gotta be kidding me, son! Is it made out of solid gold or somethin'?"

"This all ya got? Jeezus! It's a flea market, ya know!"

"I'll give you a hundred bucks for the entire truckload! Haw-haw-haw!"

"What's this thing do?"

"Yer truck fer sale? No? How 'bout just the front bumper then? Mine's shot!"

"You wanna sell this thing or not?"

While it might look or sound random, there's a whole science to their approach. Pretty soon you get so rattled and confused by their constant barrage that you accidentally sell things for much less than you would have in a calmer situation. It's a tough game. Either you learn to play it, or just be happy with whatever cash you get. At least you won't be putting that stuff back in the truck again at closing time! Don't be hard on yourself about it. These people have been doing this forever. Many of them run really classy (as in expensive) art galleries and antique stores in nearby cities. Forget Donald Trump! This is the real "Art of the Deal" right here!

After selling the best of my stuff for nothing, I finish unloading my truck. At least I know that my old guitar will probably be hanging out on 48<sup>th</sup> street in Manhattan soon. I'm feeling kind of bummed, but the woman in the spot next to me changes that when she throws open the doors of her battered minivan. Creedence Clearwater Revival blasts out "Born on the Bayou" at concert volume. I can feel the bass and drums deep in my chest as John Fogarty wails, "Lawd, Lawd-a-Lawdyeeeeee!" followed by a feedback laced guitar solo. Yeah, that's the good stuff. I'm standing there soaking up the groovy vibes, when suddenly the woman's sweaty face is inches from mine.

"HEY!" She bellows. "That too loud for ya?"

Knowing that it's not really going to make a difference either way, I shout back, "Nah! That's fine!" Which seems to be the signal phrase for "Turn that shit UP!" Because she does until that's all I can hear.

Lucky for me, I wasn't out drinking the night before, because this level of sound would probably kill me. But the grey-faced hangover victims who slowly stagger past us to the Snak Shak (spelling rules don't apply to flea markets) for giant coffees grimace at her painfully. Some of them even flip her the bird or shout at her to turn the music down. They might as well save their breath. She can't hear them. Steppenwolf is up next roaring about the "heavy metal thunder" when the golf carts make their appearance. One of which is being driven by a solid looking woman in a ball cap. Her name is Betty. She is the Boss.

You do what Betty says or you will be leaving. She'll even help you leave, but you probably won't like it. So the music comes down from a blare to a semi-tolerable boogie. That's actually a good thing, because it looks like I might have my first non-vulture customer of the day. A tiny old woman in a well-worn calico dress drifts up to my table and looks things over with interest. She has bright blue eyes and her hair is tied up



nicely with a ribbon that matches her dress. Very classic! I also notice that she has an impressive mustache that puts mine to shame. But she wears it well, and the only person who should feel embarrassed is me. Who am I to say what looks good? So I stand there and smile, trying not to look desperate for a sale. The woman turns and fixes me with a hard stare that makes me feel bad for thinking about her mustache. It bristles at me as she points her head at something on the ground.

“This here weed whacker work?”

“It sure does.” I reply. “And at fifteen bucks, it’s a steal!”

She gets me down to twelve and gives my offer to help her carry it a hearty “No thanks!” Sounds good to me. The customer is always right at my booth! She picks up the heavy machine with one hand and walks off. Wow! Talk about not judging a book by its cover...

As she disappears, the big crowd roars in. The rumble of motorcycles, trucks, buses, and cars fills the air heralding their arrival. It’s like a flood. One minute you’re sipping your coffee, thirty minutes later it’s cold because you’ve been so damn busy. But we didn’t come here to stand around or bird watch. These people start shopping early and they don’t fool around. They want to buy and they want to buy cheap. As long as the stuff is selling, life is good. I sell garlic presses for fifty cents, copies of MAD Magazine, pocket knives, a lug wrench, an Elvis doll, and a dirty poncho from the back of the truck that I put on the table by mistake. But, what the hell, they insisted, and a buck is a buck!

My truck is parked right behind the Snak-Shak and from the fumes alone, I figure I’ve absorbed a couple of cheeseburgers and maybe a pack of cigarettes. Nobody ever said that flea marketing was a healthy pursuit. Everyone told me that I was in the “suck-ass” spot because I was in between the Snak Shak and the Porta-Potties (yum!). “Nobody’ll even stop to look at your stuff!” they chuckled. Well so far I’ve made about two hundred bucks, so let ‘em laugh. I’d park here anytime!

Speaking of food, the Hard Rock mom brought her eleven-year-old daughter along to help out. Well, I assume that was the plan. Reality is something else. The daughter seems to be taking on the tasks of eating and wearing all the food they have in the van. She is also an excellent pouter. This comes in handy when her mother yells at her because they have no lunch. The other helpful thing the daughter does is change her clothes every twenty minutes or so. Especially when her mother asks for help. That’s the signal for the girl to disappear inside the van and re-emerge in a fresh outfit after everyone is gone. So tempers are running a bit hot over there.

“Hey Chief!” Ah-ha! Time to be accosted by the wild man of the whole market, Dirty Dick Dangle! He’s interesting and a little crude, but I can’t help but like him. Age-wise, I wouldn’t even try to guess how old he is. It’s kind of like he’s stuck in 1974 forever with his long, greased back, salt and pepper hair, crazy beard and nicotine-stained mustache. He always has a cigarette smoldering between his lips that sprinkles ash all over your stuff as he talks to you in his road gravel voice. Dick gets right to the point.

“So, errr...ahhh...What’s yer best price on this here ummm...fensterwender?” Dick’s pointing at an area on the table consisting of my uncle’s old motorcycle trophy, a mirrored picture of Elvis (there is a LOT of Elvis at flea markets) and some old rusty thing I found in my garage. When he realizes that I can see how excited he is about it though, he leans back. “Not real interested. Buttt...uhh-ahhh, well you know how it

is...I might want it fer the wife or somethin'. You know what I mean?"

Yeah, I know what he means all right. He's really damn interested in that thing I just tossed into the truck as a space-filler for the table. I look up at him from my folding chair and try to get a reading off him, but I can't. His grey, expressionless eyes try to stare me down from behind a thick pair of glasses with black frames. This guy is probably one hell of a good poker player. I break the silence. "How about five bucks?"

"OH! Ahhh! Errr, ah-ha! That much hey?" He replies, looking like I just shot him in the ass with a load of buckshot. "Weeeellll...Pwahhhh...Hum! I'm gonna have to think on that." Then just like that he's gone.

Dirty Dick disappears as quickly as he arrived. Which turns out to be a wise decision on his part, because things get kind of exciting for a bit. There's another rush of customers. But these people don't know what they want or how much they want to pay for it. This leads to a lot of talking and not much buying. Kind of violates my whole idea of flea marketing for fun, so I back off and sit down for a minute. Just as I do, calamity strikes! A Pink Lady tries to walk across the slurpy field in four-inch stiletto heels while attempting to carry a foot-long chili dog with everything on it in a slippery waxed paper boat.

"Eeek!" She screeches as one of her stilettos lodges itself in the mud, causing the pink lady to do some very interesting dance steps and nearly fall onto my table. Not only that, but her loaded foot long becomes airborne and is heading right for my lap. Yag!

Lucky for me, Big Herbie Stockman, the guy that runs the dollar tool stalls, comes steaming through at about seventy miles per hour smoking a stinky stogie and yelling into his phone, "NO! I CAN'T take another buck off, you lousy son of a bitch! What the hell do you think this is, Walmart? I got your low price guarantee right here!"

People scatter to let him by, and the Stockman Express is right on time to intercept the foot long with everything. It rebounds off Herbie's shoulder, boinks into the corner of the rock n roll minivan, and lands square on... You guessed it! The pouty, no help daughter, who shrieks and dives back into the van to change her clothes one more time. Touchdown!

The sun beats down as the crowd picks up, and while I'm definitely not making huge profits, I've got money in my pocket and a smile on my face. A couple of kids pop by with a roll of tickets and a plastic jar. "Hey! We're having a fifty-fifty raffle! Wanna buy a ticket?"

"Sure! Why not?" I buy three tickets for five bucks. Probably won't win, but what the hey. It's for the junior softball league and if that's not a good cause, I don't know what is. Plus there'll be another chance in an hour or next week.

Behind me, more French fries hit the grease with a roar and a hiss. The air is filled with their appetizing smell as the mist is blown directly onto me by the shack's gigantic exhaust fan. A couple of kids are dumping cups of soda down each other's pants and laughing like hyenas while a freaky voice keeps squawking, "I wanna gurger! I wanna gurger!"

Wondering who the hell is talking like that, I peek around the corner and nearly fall over. There's a lady in a wheelchair feeding the huge green parrot on her shoulder pieces of her hamburger. The parrot also smokes

a cigarette with her when they're done eating. Nice!

A guy and a girl are walking towards the Snak-Shak holding hands. It looks like the usual teen romance until I can see them better. The guy is thirty if he's a day and looks like he's been run over more than once. Maybe he's a stock car racer at the local dirt track. His girlfriend is young, young, young. Maybe sixteen, and the way they're locking lips and bodies every few steps, I can tell this ain't her first rodeo. But they look happy and nobody is complaining, so love on lovers, love on.

I grab a "gurger" and a Coke for myself, then stroll back to my folding chair to have a relaxing meal. But the peace is suddenly disturbed when a group of rural tough guy wannabes who are dipping snuff and spitting come barging through the market with their girlfriends. They're all screaming and hollering at each other, kicking the dust up. Apparently this group didn't make it much past the letter "A" in grade school, because their favorite word of the day is asshole.

"Hey! That guy is an asshole!"

"Well you're an asshole!"

"Stop calling me asshole, asshole!"

The performance is kind of funny until the kids start fighting for real, pushing people around and scaring off the trade. Even their girls are wading right into battle and throwing punches harder than the guys. A few of the vendors try to speak up, but things are going downhill fast and their voices are drowned out. Just as it's about to get even uglier, the golf cart cavalry comes to the rescue!

In a few quick minutes, they round up the bad guys just like a posse in the Wild West movies. Yee-Haw! Instead of a Sheriff, Big Bad Betty is in charge of this rodeo and she doesn't want to listen to excuses or talk it over. Nope! What Betty wants to do is kick some ass, unless the varmints get theirs off the property. She lights a cigar and with a steely glint in her eye, steps on the gas. The evil-doers bow to her superiority and horsepower, fleeing the property in a highly ungraceful fashion. One dude keeps claiming loudly that he's "the good guy!" Yeah, whatever. Betty chases him with her cart until he runs himself smack into a tree. "Have a nice day! Don't come back, now!"

As that exciting scene dissipates, a slightly tipsy, leering man arrives carrying a large paint roller. For some reason, he's got the ungainly handle tucked into the belt loop of his faded blue jeans so that as he walks everything drags and bounces. He grins at me as he passes and shouts, "Hey! They're making me go put this in the car because I keep bumping into my daughter-in-law's ass with it! Ah har-har-har! Y'know what she told me? She said, stop bumpin' into me with your THING! Fwaahhh! Haw-haa! And I said...Ha! I said, you WISH you had that THING! Whooo! Yeah!" Off he staggers to put his thing away. I hope that he also finds a shirt to put over his quickly lobstering upper body. It's painful just to look at. He won't be laughing tomorrow!

The last wave of shoppers for the day blows through the flea market like a refreshing breeze and put a little life back into it. Some of them are the ultra-hardcore bargainers who pull stuff like offering vendors two bucks for a sofa. They often get away with it, too. Because nobody wants to heave a big, heavy piece of furniture back into their truck. I watch amazing things leave the market quickly. There are also decent



people who just want to shop a little and enjoy the weather. I get two such guys looking over my belt buckle display with interest.

One of them is wearing a Lynrd Skynrd tee shirt and making himself sick trying to smoke a cigar. His buddy has a mouthful of snuff so large that he looks like a coffee maker. But both of them are super polite and pay the asking price of three dollars each for their choices of “Southern by the Grace of God” and a reclining trucker girl buckle. I’m glad for the six bucks, so we’re all happy. The guys are trying to tell me a story about the best Southern rock concert they ever attended. But we get interrupted by a fighting couple trying to use a stroller as a hand truck to move a good-sized TV.

“Gary! You are gonna break that damn baby carriage!”

“No I’m NOT! And it ain’t a baby carriage! It’s a stroller!”

“CRASH!” Says the television as it plummets through the stroller and onto the ground, breaking them both.

“See Gary? You don’t listen! You can’t put a 75 pound TV on top of a baby carriage!”

“Hey! Why don’t YOU...Shut your friggin’ mouth! Aw-rite?”

Ahh...Nothing like seeing a pair of customers so pleased with their purchases!

Things are winding down and pretty soon it’s time to start packing up like the rock n roll mom next to me is already doing while her daughter sulks in the passenger seat of the van. No major worries, she’s just mad that she’s out of fresh outfits to change into. Those with perishable items, like the green grocer’s produce truck that’s six spaces down, are doing clearance sales.

“Hey, hey, HEY! Flea Market Special here! We got your flea market SPECIAL! I got four rutabagas left! FOUR! Just a buck a piece! Blowin’ ‘em out!” There are no takers, so Joe ups the ante. “Alilll Rightttt! Flea Market Special! FOUR rutabagas for THREEE BUCKS! C’mon people! Blowin’ ‘em out!” Still no...

“Okay! Last Chance! Flea Market Special! All FOUR rutabagas...ONE dollar!”

Somebody snaps up the deal of a lifetime and I slam my truck’s tailgate shut. I’m just pulling the cap door down, when I see a movement out of the corner of my eye:

“Hey Chief, ummm...About that ahhh, fensterwender...” Dirty Dick is back! He’s serious this time and reaches into the grease-stained pocket of his jeans, producing some crumpled singles. We agree on four, the item changes hands and we shake on it. Then it’s time to close up shop and hit the road. As I slowly drive away, I pass the produce truck, which now has a little crowd around it. The owner is standing on a crate and working to sell the next lot.

“I got six eggplants left! Blowin’ ‘em out! Flea Market Special!”

## *Imagining Shakespeare Imagining*

I see his gaze. The feather flit of his pen. His eyes not in the room. It's the making that reveals what may be found, as that land opens to the seeing eye. Our landmarks are there, like the bodies of soldiers floating down a silver river, or a woman's pale wrist on a bed of moss. Yoric moments compounding until ghosts look over our shoulders.

Here lie sentences beneath listed plays—one sentence for each play in this order, and each synoptic. One voice shaped here to body forth bear or bush, or the entangled atoms from a lost brain's fire.

1) *The Tragedy of Timon of Athens* 2) *Love's Labor's Lost* 3) *The Taming of the Shrew* 4) *As You Like It*  
 5) *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* 6) *The Tragedy of King Lear* 7) *The Tempest* 8) *The First Part of Henry the Fourth* 9) *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth* 10) *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth*  
 11) *The Tragedy of Richard the Third* 12) *Measure for Measure* 13) *The Life of Henry the Fifth* 14) *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 15) *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* 16) *The Life and Death of King John*  
 17) *The Winter's Tale* 18) *Cymbeline* 19) *The Two Noble Kinsmen* 20) *Much Ado about Nothing* 21) *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* 22) *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* 23) *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* 24) *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* 25) *The Tragedy of Macbeth* 26) *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth* 27) *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 28) *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* 29) *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second* 30) *The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus* 31) *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* 32) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 33) *The Comedy of Errors* 34) *The Famous History of the Life of Henry the Eighth* 35) *The Merchant of Venice* 36) *All's Well That Ends Well* 37) *The History of Troilus and Cressida* 38) *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*



Still in rags I have uprooted gold, and the fair-weather hucksters—former friends all—have returned, wanting my cave. And now, having renounced women (except, perhaps, for those lovelies there), they are all around, enough to unhinge any hermit's mind. I wager I could quell the harshness of that sharp tongue there and be paid twice. Christ, what friends I have, that travel en masse from court to forest court, pairing up to knit all. Even so, with a word—a few words—I could insinuate an infidelity that would bring a shortening of breath to the highest of them. I am attended by fools even in my own wilderness, having too early trusted whelps to parse out care as reason claimed the need. Better to wash up on an island with little but books and the good daughter, where storms might be conjured as required.

If I had held to their way, who knows: I might have risen from wastrel to ruler with but a bit of warring and the help of drink-mates. And once sobered into high places, I could have sent old friends packing. Then, wandering in and out of desire, I could have put in appearances at the Tower until pinned there, reading. I could have cleaned house until the air was heavy with what lingers when swept, slumping visibly in the dying light. And tiring of this, I could have feigned a trip abroad and stayed close, to watch the harshness of the seeming kind unfold. Or I could have fought in France, philosophizing my way to a bride to be brought to the old home, or some other.

Oh, surely, I miss friends—especially one friend held close, to a fault, with all love's follies forgiven. The right one and I would disappear, head for Egypt and cover my trail with reports of war and death and

the bite of an adder's fangs. But is there any escape from a bastard's machinations and bad blood joined to bad blood? Even old friends may be revealed to be adulterers, though they come round the long way to show they are not. How often have wagers as to infidelity led to sudden travel, with only chance heroics saving the day? Such rivalries in love are as likely settled by favors granted by gods.

How are things better, though, with success, when lies about unfaithfulness are judged by bumbling examiners? How better, when a man escapes with knowledge of incest in high places, only to build a kingdom plagued by hardship and storms? I will not flatter crowds for the sake of rule, and banished, I would sooner return and face doom. This—knowing that assassins stir what is then stirred against them, until suicide rights the score. God knows if I were bound by honor to kill, I would likely ponder the ripest moment overmuch and to the detriment of all. Or advised by the likes of witches I would do the deed, and cutting, find only madness.

What is there then but fearful agitation, fed by prophecies of death by water, or death near castles—a ready suspicion in the midst of riots. Always by twos doom comes riding in: like one love letter sent to two women who meet and foment trouble. Roses red and roses white, with fathers holding dying sons, and marriages undoing homes. Or two nobles, feuding, are sent away to return in force. A sacrificed son calls for a stripped and savaged daughter—and later, feasting for all. What might shock monstrous fate, then, when even a union of lovers from warring families funnels all to grave matters? I should content myself with the thought that lovers crossed and lost in woods are often aided by fairies. And that twins, separated, often come twinning back together, like weighted ends of a flying rope, wrapped 'round a pole. If not by two then by three—as in a prophecy of three deaths woven into a prophecy of a new age (new, but filled with foretelling of death).

So it is that I have no interest in mercy and am doomed to indignities of forced conversion. And as for love—even if I were directly chosen it would surely end as some trick with a ring, emptied of intent. When I lift myself, I see only war drained of what it might have been fought for. And when I settle, I am like a beleaguered puritan, alone and forlorn amid merriment, where all love's wisdom is belied—and I, mere provender, may only rage.

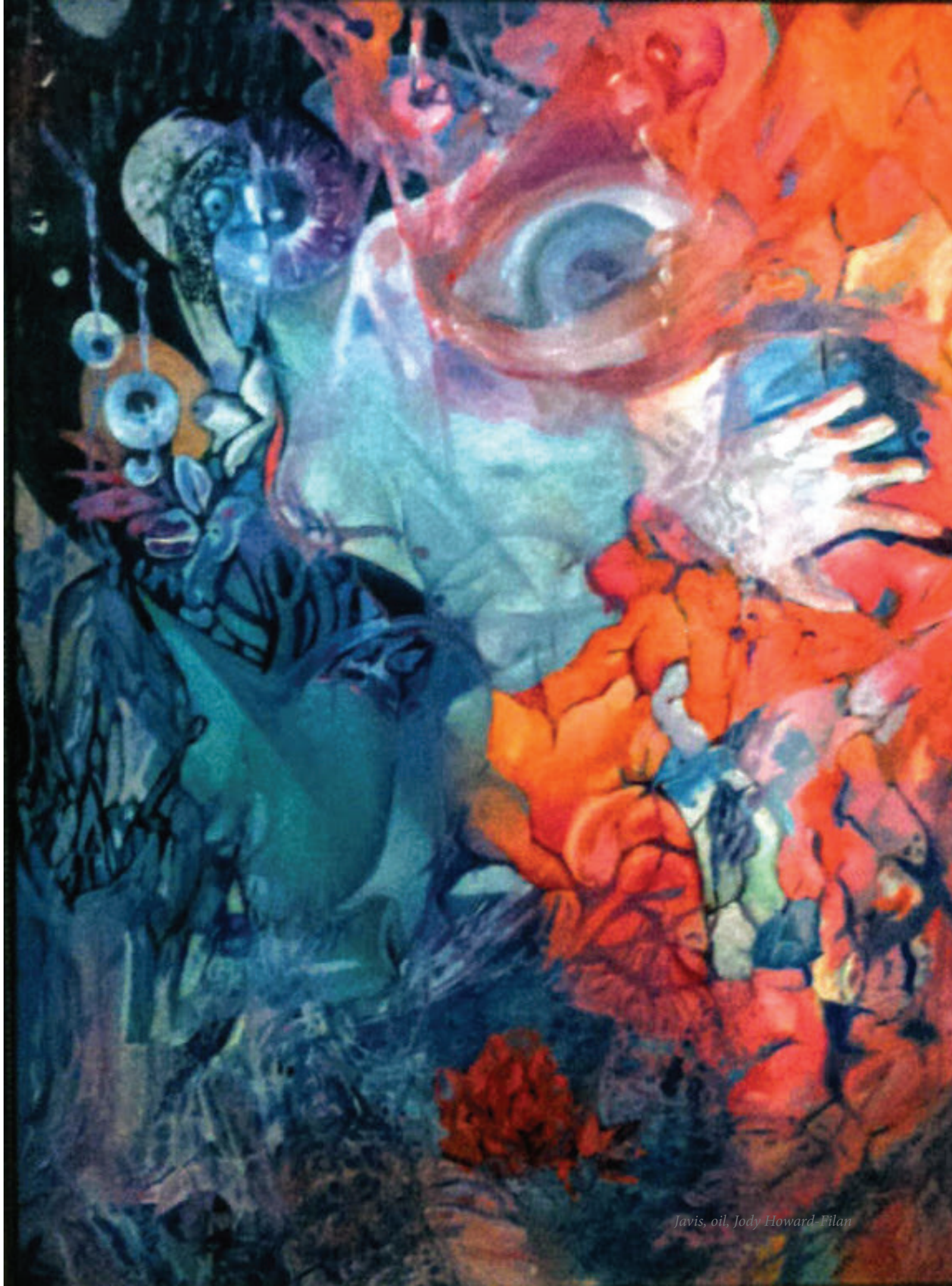


## ***Renovations and the Sky Beneath***

An old story: workers doing foundation work in a villa push earth aside to find a face looking up, and then a table set with platters of fruit. The hem of a robe worn by a person not yet revealed. Other workers gather, looking down. The new owners are summoned. And even as they all stand in awe, thoughts of work delays hover near. Soon experts are called in. Work stops. The owners opt for a noble strategy of inviting locals to view the past of their own place.

A mosaic is built up from the humility of individual pieces. Viewers, granted a moment before such work, see how each small tile plays a part in the making of a thing of beauty. No space blank of purpose. Each tile set to the play of a mind's fitting.

Then the owners return, stepping into the tableau. Smiling, they signal it's time for a return to privacy, their arms outstretched in gestures common to the herders of geese.



*Javis, oil, Jody Howard-Filan*

## *Rain Fish*

Rain fish look just like the ones  
you've caught in sunlight  
or on a clear night—  
yellow perch and brookies,  
brown trout decked out in red dots  
and the bony pike that give you  
the evil-eye in any weather  
for having dared to catch them  
where they lie.

Rain fish are the ones that pass  
beneath the wooden bridge  
on which you stand while they  
run beneath the pelted surface  
of a rained-on river flowing out  
of better times. Rain fish fry up  
sweet and firm as former days,  
not like sadness cooked in butter  
nor in need of cracked pepper  
and coarse salt or slivered almond  
to hide the taste of sorrow.

The rain fish that I stalk tomorrow,  
if there is at least a drizzle,  
will be, by then, quite far inland,  
maybe up in the headwaters  
of the Pine, well past those guys  
that fish beneath the highway  
by the cut bank who hate me just  
for what they think I am and what  
they believe I'll take from them  
while stumbling up a mud-slick path  
past places where the banks are much  
too steep to climb up in chest-waders,  
stretches where the only one I've known  
to fish them down-and-dirty is my son.



Chasing rain fish is a slow affair for me,  
picking my way, as far as I can get,  
along the gray and glistening eel  
which is the trail on which I seek  
the tiny rainbow trout, just so I can  
hold one of those little and apolitical  
creatures in my palm for one brief  
moment before I let it go, likewise  
if I should haul out a plodding red  
horse or a carp from where they graze  
down in deeper holes. I've never kept  
a single one of those to smoke, so they  
will have no axe to grind with me, and  
therefore we can all go home in peace  
beneath a dark and weepy sky and slip  
unhurried and un-harried, back under our  
respective logs, beneath the dripping  
canopy where the rain fish keep—  
unmolested, undetected, uncontested,  
unelected, home safe below submerged  
brush piles, voting absentee, hidden  
from the beady-eyed and predatory gaze  
of wicked pike who hate all of us  
equally, good times or bad.

*9/29-10/22/2020*

## *Bird of Paradise*

After 140 years one went back to Iowa where half our family came from. One remained on a small island in the green lake of farm after the bank refused the final loan. Another became quite famous, an expert on TV explaining he was always right. The last wandered several years from home and landed westerly where he remembered the child on the summer pier. Red-brown crabs panicked in the pyramid's unfolding mesh, a rare rainbow perch whispered with its stripes. There's a second kingdom from the silver pail. Sapphire Pacific eight miles away I haven't seen for seven months since the virus reached California. Nobody has an easy time, most have it hard as they say, unspooled hours on your hands recalling the million things, who you are or were, still might be, what tomorrow brings. Yesterday five minutes I stared at a Bird of Paradise's elaborate waxy blossom, rainbow heron's plumed sharp profile or Mayan feathered warrior. Below a sky still amber from a dozen fires I numbered each color and shade: Canary yellow, the scarlet, navy-royal blue, a teal, subtle bruised rose all along an emerald cheek.

## ~ *e Shadow of Words*

That mockingbird flickering, chortling in looping flight draws a wagon, its shadow across autumn grass as every word leaves its wake stirring 10,000 blades. A passing stranger on a city street murmurs barn and your polished step wears boots, you recall iodine sting of hay, hook, glove, bluebirds chipped off blue quartz lighting at a loft's gold door, yellowhammer's steady knock drilling fresh hole. Cracked harness hangs years from the rafter, shoes lost down 100 furrows. Two plow horses still with names blink slowly tasting a trough's dark water, darting silver fish where mosquitoes settle on spiders' legs. Checking vineyard's wire or cutting April's sucker shoots you'll find them rusted orange in softest loam and nail heel-up to a rough cedar wall and luck like scarce rains won't run out. Say any word, pond, tree, tractor, pump. In the quiet sky after thunder you can hear what the flash of lightning only whispered. At the end of a long harvest walk the empty farm supply, last 50 chicks sold last week, so the fallen rivet for pruning shears rings and rings on a cement swept floor. Listen, now breathe in clean dusty breath of barleys, oats, soy, tall burlap stacks of all the gathered corn.



## *Vote or Die*

Discrimination is what blacks've been facing for years.  
Taking the lives of young black men  
Has us all in tears; recidivism is at an all- time high  
For a black man.

The government doesn't insist on designing  
A rehabilitative plan. They want to continue to enforce  
Jim Crow laws to keep us bound.

We have to show unity with Black Power,  
And be determined to stand our ground.

We've faced all types of obstacles in the Land of the Free,  
Black women being raped by their slave owners,  
Who sabotaged the black race.

Then for them to say we're not part of America—  
Is a disgrace.

We have to rise above all the assassinations  
And continue to strive to give our kids the best education,  
Teach them about the laws and the government that's political.

That way they can maneuver through situations  
That get critical—*Vote or Die*, Puff Daddy said it  
A long time ago. If we don't come together,  
How will we continue to grow?

We must vote for the one that will increase  
Our chances for success rather than vote for the ones  
That get into office only to finesse. We need a leader  
That can lead us in this promised land,

One that could provide a way for every woman,  
Child, and man, black America, white America,  
Brown America, we all need to come together

And show humanity. God sees us all as one  
Regardless of our nationality. Government  
And police shouldn't show racism and brutality.

We the people have the voice to vote  
Or face reality; I believe voting can make a change.  
If we choose not to, it will only stay the same.

Our ancestors shed blood, sweat, and tears  
Denied the vote year after year.

See me, I'm fed up with this one-sidedness.  
This I must confess, as blacks are still being oppressed.

Black America—*Vote or Die*.

## ***How Can We Overcome Racism***

What will it take to impose justice for all,  
Equality for all races, and civil rights?

How can America be unified as one?  
How can we receive equal treatment?

We tried protesting.  
We showed patience;

We showed patience.

And still we're faced with oppression.  
Still we're faced with injustice.

We still face unequal treatment  
Here in America (Land of the Free)

Where everyone is supposed to be entitled to freedom, justice, equality,  
And a long list of other things.

What does the American dream consist of?  
What is unity?

As a black man I feel divided from America.  
Is that the reason why I fell?

They say divided you'll fall.  
Being judged by a white man  
And prosecuted by another,

53 years for a drug offense,  
9 grams, to be exact.

I've seen whites charged  
With ten times more than that

Receive probation for their crimes.

It's plain to see that being black  
Will have you doomed in America.

So I pose this question to *you*:

How can we overcome racism?

## Totenpass

*Inscribed tablets placed next to the dead giving instructions on how to navigate the afterlife*

A sort of GPS for the next world.  
Flick on your iPhone and select the *Afterlife* app,  
press the arrow and you will hear:

Turn left by the first cypress tree, ignore the boy  
hawking cell phones, there is no WiFi down here,  
walk swiftly past the snarling three-headed hound  
staying clear of his serpent tail and proceed two tenths  
of a mile until you see a man with an unkempt beard  
and a seaweed oar. Give him the coin under your tongue,  
but don't step into his boat, don't cross the river or you  
will lose your memories of Schubert sonatas, of skiing  
in Vale, of Iris in the spring.

Bear right for fifteen feet until you come to  
a crystal ballroom with gleaming chandeliers.  
There is your good friend Amy from junior high  
jitterbugging with your first love, who still has cowlicks  
and crooked teeth. And there is your mother slow-waltzing  
with the next door neighbor. Here is your beloved sister,  
swing dancing across the floor, dipping and spinning,  
wildly dancing with every willing person.  
Off in the corner on a folding chair, head down,  
is the man who lit up your life for fifty years.  
Turn off your GPS. You are home.





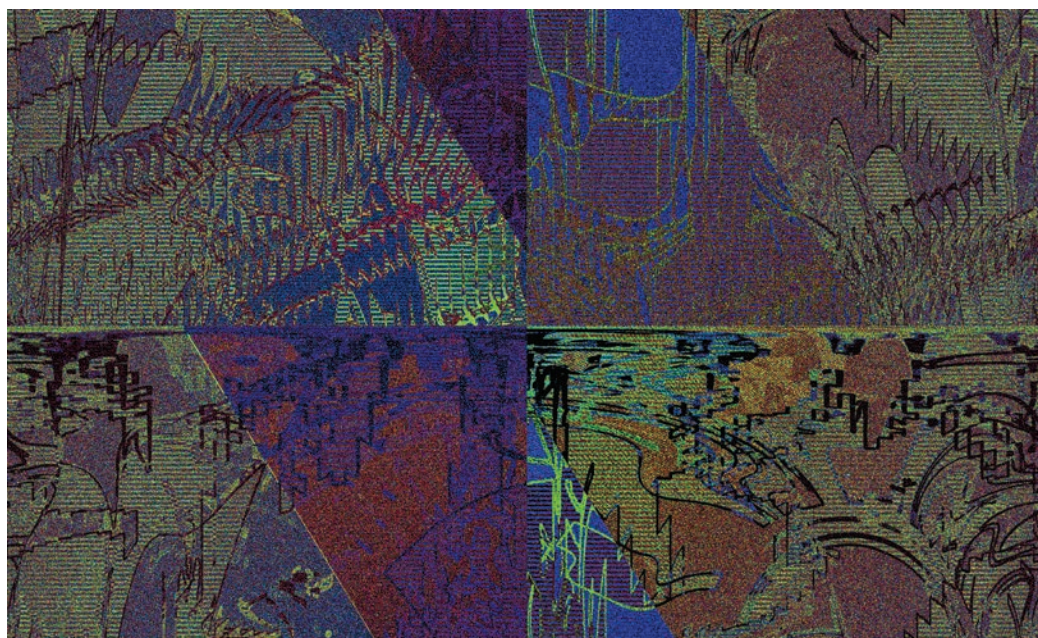
*Blue Lady in the Garden, by Monique Harris*



## *How Do You Unbelieve*

How do you unbelieve a God who has walked with you  
your whole life, who was there when you pasted  
Jesus pictures into your Sunday school scrapbook,  
who was there when you knelt to *Now I lay me*,  
who smiled at your white lace confirmation dress  
and you ate of His body for the first time,  
feeling very grown up, although a bit disappointed  
in the flat taste, hoping for something much sweeter,  
who gave us His only son in an adorable scene  
with lambs and wise men and shepherds  
and you played Mary in the third grade.

Lord knows I have tried, shoved God out the door  
again and again, yet He keeps coming back and back,  
even when I know better than to believe in an invisible God,  
even when I know there is no hereafter with haloes  
and white robes, no heaven where we sing hallelujahs  
and jitterbug with lost loved ones. But here I am  
again writing about God, I can't stop myself.  
When my son was hit by a car, I prayed to a God  
I no longer believed in. And he got better.



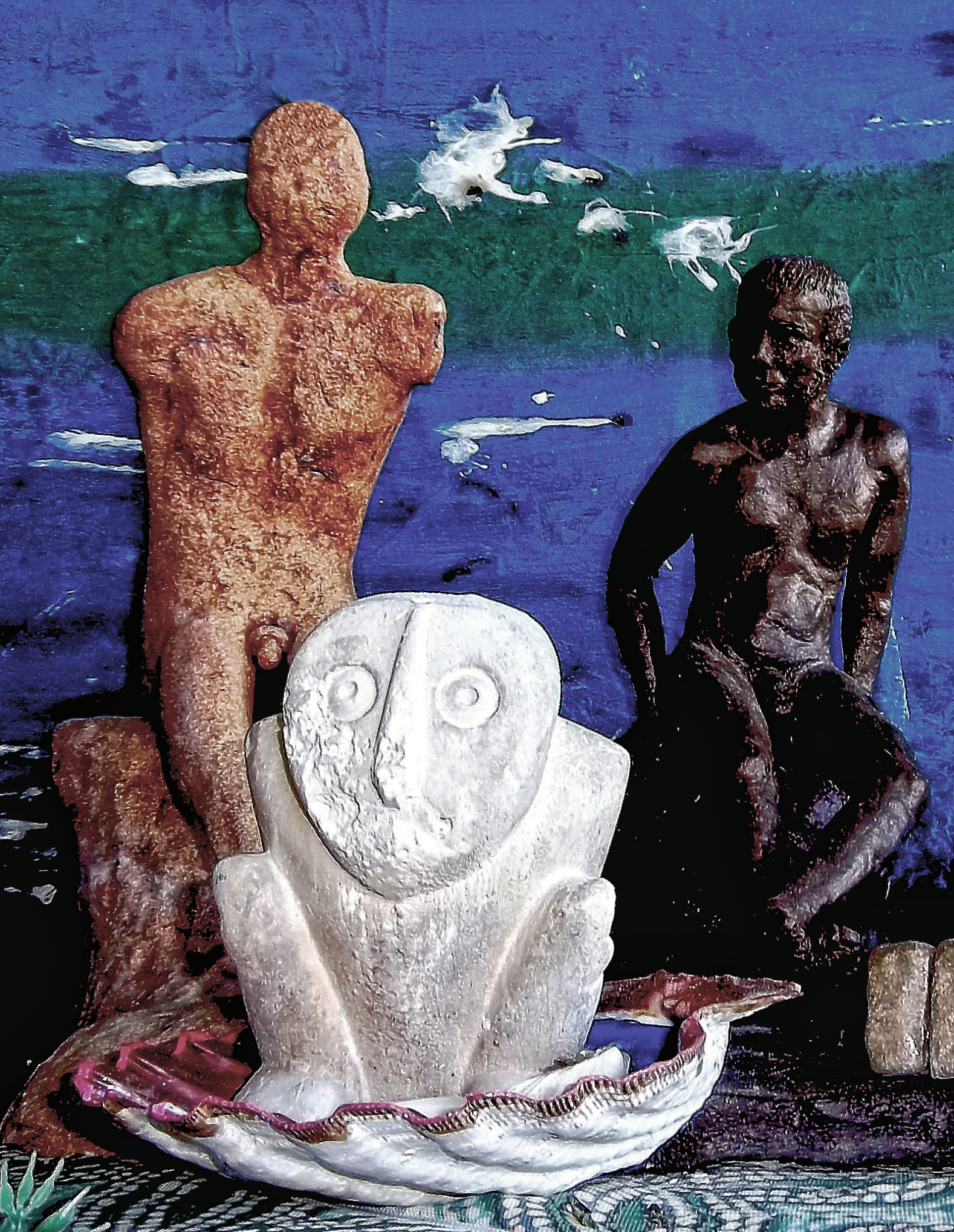
*Soft Harmony, Edward Supranowicz*

## *Before*

Some people want to go back to being six,  
riding a bike for the first time, feeling the thrill of taking  
off, flying into a future where the world waits.  
Others want college days again, freedom to skip classes,  
slug beer and hook up on Saturday nights.  
Some want to start over when their first child  
howled into their lives, all innocence and joy,  
despite sleepless nights and stacks of Pampers.

But all I ask is to go back one month,  
actually only twenty seven and a half days, before  
the church filled with purple and white gladiolas,  
before the doctor said *I'm sorry*, her eyes moist,  
before the shriek of the siren split the night,  
before the car that didn't see the light,  
to just before you woke up that Sunday,  
your heart beating next to mine.





*My Sculptures, by Alex Nodopaka*







## Orphans

I would gladly fetch your shoes  
if I knew where you left them. I feel  
some remorse for their loss, but the beach  
is no place for high heels.

Who knows where shoes go on a night like  
this when they feel discarded so thoughtlessly.  
Perhaps they slipped away in search of a  
dance floor where they would be worshiped

or headed to the train station for the  
kind of shine that puts air under  
the steps of the chic.

Perhaps they went wilding, the heels  
viewing themselves as weapons,  
strutting through dangerous turf  
with an attitude or

maybe they feared the world has forgotten  
the glamor of red patent leather and left  
in search of a spotlight.

My best guess, however, is they are seeking  
better feet, ones that will never abandon them  
on a beach or, as fashions change,

leave them boxed and stacked with their like  
in a dusty closet, lacking only a headstone  
to mark those shoes that will never walk again.



## ***It Ain't a Choir #38***

it takes eight hands to lower a body it takes one to make a body it takes permission from god to turn a person into a body let us focus on the parts of the parts we most admire we are all so gentle with the concept of humanness that is overlooked the abstraction we are not diluted nor are we finished ask out loud to be finished nothing will happen to our humanness if we learn the names of our neighbors the abstraction can crumble into the origin of shapes my name is darren i have given up on many philosophies so that i would have room to carry your name with me i will be gentle can i carry your name

## *A Musician Father Advises*

There's a head shaking in the front room.  
It's Beatrice, and it's Bartók playing.  
I want to warn her 7½ month brain as she  
crouches, laughing, lunging just to fall:  
Beware.  
Love music as you would a  
trashcan of cabbage left in the summer sun.  
It nourishes. It's rich. And it permeates, but it can  
cut you in half, and  
crucify you in the daily practice room.  
You will set up banquets in your mind,  
halls of feasting, song, revelry, and delight.  
But when you open the door to the great room  
you had supposed in your baby Bartók brain  
and it's 8 by 8 with a beaten piano in the corner and a  
grey folding chair for a bench, a gaping vent above it  
reeking softly with the sweet smell of aged trash,  
you, too, will shake your head  
not in rhythm  
but in the wonder of dismay:  
this is my life  
this room and the sounds I make, are  
my feast of delight  
my meal of bread, vinegar, and bones, in  
this the great hall of my necessary undoing.  
I will halve my ears and cut them in pieces  
and nail the pieces to these dirty brown walls  
and  
listen to what sounds I'm hearing as I  
play for myself,  
myself, myself.  
And someday, you might hear what I've heard, too,  
and it just might be  
in a great room, followed, perhaps, by a  
delight-filled feast of bread and old, red wine, on bone china.  
But only perhaps, and absolutely only after  
hours of days and weeks full of years in the room with the ears on the dirty brown walls.  
So be it, if the music calls.  
But be sure it's the music.  
Be sure it is the music that  
calls you there to the room with the sweet, rotting air.

## *~ e Ivy of My Life*

I stand  
as a window  
opened  
breathing up  
the space  
chaste and  
framed as if  
my hair might  
be climbed or  
petals strewn  
along my sill

and the  
spirit circles  
left by the  
ivy of my life  
neumes of an  
unholy psalm  
jammed together  
in alphabetic  
terror  
tumbling from my  
lips  
like a child  
pushed quietly  
from a  
high building  
alleluia



## ***Mariana***

Nights I am lucky  
enough to be in the country,  
darkness dense as blankets  
on the bed, all I sense  
of the room, same eyes open or shut;  
and silence as thick and binding:  
Sometimes a noise—the snuffle  
of a boar in the woods  
or my husband's snore into my ear—  
breaks through, and I slip out  
to the porch, lawn or gravel road,  
depending on where we are,  
and go far as I dare go,  
plant my bare feet on the cold damp  
and thrill to the sky, stars beyond stars,  
seductive deep, like the Mariana Trench  
I imagine if I were on some Pacific atoll  
on its edge, I would consider entering.

## ***Smoked***

Hunter's moon, fat-cheeked,  
Already fed and full;  
Saucy Venus, bloody Mars;  
Cloud fingers grasping  
At me, at you,  
Blinking day-birds.

The wind's wolf whistle  
Dogs us into a corner.  
My mouth has my mind.  
I turn and bite cheek and shoulder,  
Flesh pulled from the pit,  
Tasting human near the bone.

Afterwards, at the clearing  
Of the scraps of night,  
I smell the tossed green  
Of everything better for me.



ondeckmail@gmail.com





## *Skunk Key*

It's an island, of course.  
A very little one.  
No bones were found there,  
no sign of burials, wars.  
Tourists don't even know it exists;  
like Neverland, *it calls you*.

Once a blue-shirted boy was lost  
when a tiger swallowed his ship.  
You guessed it: only a telescope left,  
the hand of God smiling down.  
The boy changed his name to a star  
and grew a stripe down his back.

Oh, yes, a poet's buried there.  
She was made of foxes, raccoons.  
Sometimes at night an old lover dreams  
of the weight of her feet on their stairs.  
She wrote a sonnet about their son—  
the sheen of sea on his hair.

*after a collage by nicole v basta*

## *Estate Sale*

The old-fashioned lilac bushes went first.  
Dug up, they looked like age-pocked hands  
a giant might have used to tear  
flesh from gangly human bones  
with a belch, with a snort, with a grin.

Rain gutters next, curved exactly  
to fit the roof where red squirrels ran  
and cowbirds perched with their morning shriek  
of rusty scissors in a witch's hands  
as she harvested mugwort, rampion.

Brick by brick the dragon patio  
where poems once rose in quiet flame  
beyond three statues of ivied stone  
that always listened, spent hours listening  
with the same small smile on their lips.

A single garden rake left standing.  
A broken wind chime that glowed from sun.  
And as the line left for the street  
what could only be a golden chicken  
that once made a princess laugh.

*after Corey D. Cook*



## ~ *e Girl Who Swam in a Fish-Bowl*

All mermaids should wear  
belts of shipwreck gold.  
Medallion-armored scales,  
battle-worn.

If the best words  
are stolen from the lips,  
tongue like sunset  
against black glass,

you will never find me,  
mannequin  
in your aquarium,  
winking under fluorescent beams.

I am green-finned, salt-stung,  
whirlpool-eyed and sinking,  
tooth and nail of sea foam  
and pearl.

If the best dreams  
are netted at midnight,  
moon like a silver shield  
carried away by dawn,

you will never find me,  
madman,  
shedding selkie skin  
to don your white veil.

All mermaids should have  
hair like a smokescreen:  
each inky strand can  
poison an ocean.

If the best treasures  
are always stolen,  
stars like rubies  
set in baited line,

if you try to hook me,  
in a tempest  
I will be swallowed by the sea.  
You will never find me.



*Koi Fish, colored pencil, Jody Howard-Filan*

## ***Moon 9 Degrees Cancer***

*You no longer want to be what others are.*  
When we touch you say  
it's best not to expect too much.  
Lights flicker in distant windows.  
The sky is liquid and it stains your skin.

This is depth, this atmosphere,  
aligning the skeleton of our house  
to catch the sun at the peak  
of its celestial metaphor  
*inclined to wide mood swings.*

The angles at which we approach each other  
lead only away, never towards,  
the conjunction of one to another—  
*Venus 22 degrees Capricorn:*  
*You do not have to be the best at everything.*

You no longer want to be a body of light.  
You are waiting for me to be born  
under the right sign, to finally match up.  
All that's left is a sky full of stars  
and you gazing upwards expectantly.





*Breathless as a Pearl Touched by Fire, by Bill Wolak*

## *Amalgamated Culture Works*

Take all the rot you scrape from Rotterdam,  
and all the frothy dumb of Amstel light,  
and all the damned that wed in Amsterdam,  
and bring them all to dinner Sunday night,

and send them floating on a watered bier,  
and bed them in the tulips where they kiss,  
and let the kings of Congo stoop to leer--  
and tell me, Plato, what is it you'd miss?

Oh, just America: this new-found land  
where we compete in spikes and swimming-wear,  
where Irish ex-tuberculars can band  
together, puffing tubas in the square,

and where Socratic Methodists can seek  
the words of Hebrew saviors, penned in Greek.

## *~ e Spectator as Screen*

I edge between the rows of seats,  
Fabric chosen for wear and tear,  
Trying not to disturb anyone.  
A vision of life as it should be  
Plays on the surfaces of me,  
Faded and comically convex.  
“Down in front” say the college boys,  
Nearly men, only half joking.

I depart the same way –  
Soles smacking the tacky floor  
Like ironic sickly-sweet kisses –  
Skipping the endless pointless credits  
Projected onto me that the boys  
Hope will be jollied up with bloopers.

## *My Weekend with Emilia*

I flew up to an asking face—  
A white moth—fringing fire—  
So precious—in a crystal case—  
A mirror of desire—

Something met me—at my height—  
I thought the ice might—melt—  
Limbs were bearing weight—and light—  
I knew what falling—felt—

Crystal melted—was it ice—  
Desire was looking through—  
Mountains stole the sunlight—twice—  
It flickered—and I—flew—



## ***Still Life with Peonies***

Five snowy egrets and one magnificent  
rose-blush flamingo, that's how they look  
bunched in the heavy blue pitcher. The same  
dipping and wading, wading and dipping.  
The same preening. Same lavish fragrance.  
That glorious liftoff which makes me gasp  
every time—one feathery petal which seems  
to drop at my feet just at the very last second  
before I turn to shut the light off, to leave the room  
as the furnace hums on. Sometimes that  
pitcher tips right over and water spills out.

## ***Where the Ground is Uneven I Stumble***

*after listening to Layli Long Soldier*

It takes days to traverse.

She is beautiful her black hair short  
wavy in back. Her eyes dark eyeliner and her  
wine lips, rectangular frames.

The lecture is stunning is history not dead  
serious her delivery of each line.  
The poem was long. They were hungry.

The men rode their horses days sometimes  
in blizzard. I am stumbling and it is justice.  
The lines a slow drip of truth direct to the veins.

The patient is almost dead.

Her book short-listed for a National Book  
Award, as it should have been.  
She has a cold. I watch her mouth.

The money never got there so they starved.  
They starved. There are over five hundred  
sixty recognized tribes in this nation.

Poems don't have to be finished.

No one wants the pink bows. Bows feed  
not one belly. Slow like a knife and she  
watches the audience after each stop.

A swirl of black with white chiffon I think  
wrapped around her shoulders  
her upper torso is hidden. There is the podium.

Excuse me she says after a delicate cough

## *Raven*

Occasionally  
nothing at all will  
come and I rely  
on an old bird  
to fly out to the ledge  
where I'm perched  
and drop it.  
He sidles up with that  
oily black head,  
that intelligent—eye blink—  
not mine—lays it  
down at my feet.  
O Raven you are great.  
*O Raven you are great,*  
I chant—  
this done in silence  
for I don't want to break  
up the rhythm  
he has brought.  
I pour water—  
a small depression in  
slickrock—  
to make a puddle.  
Water for a charm—we  
are square.  
All along he watches—  
he cocks his  
legs ready for  
liftoff.  
*O great sly bird, I sing.*



## Concrete

Straight lace curtains closed  
Losing frequently,  
Licking the floor.  
Good catholic boy ruins neighborhood with fruitless claims.  
This is the only simulation,  
The real game is under topsoil.  
Remember when we went to the beach and had the yellow boombox?  
Loudly proclaiming our youth?  
What fools.  
What hubris,  
What armor piercing deadliness did we think we held?  
Well, I remain that boombox.  
To let you all know,  
You go to this place where they all hate you  
You come home and cook a dinner for misrepresentation  
You didn't want those four walls,  
Those two kids  
The three hairs left on your head,  
All you wanted was to do well  
Well...Here's well.  
I love that I know you are scoffing at this, right here.  
It'll wash over you soon enough  
Probably while making sandwiches with messages to be tossed away.

## ***Not Pity***

She was young, beautiful, alone,  
in sandals, and hobbling on well-  
worn crutches over hard packed  
dirt and gravel in the granary  
section of an ancient villa south  
of Rome on a day of clouds and sun.  
My focus shifted from the antiquities.

Against honeycomb pattern of ruined  
brick walls she maneuvered slowly  
on the rough surface where stray  
grass grew and the wind would not relent.  
She could have been the wounded mortal  
form of a Roman goddess, hair backswept.  
The sun stepped out to cast her shadow

behind her like a proud flowing cloak,  
and brighten a patch of ground under her.  
Wanting but unable to bend down she slipped  
her right foot out of a sandal to feel  
the mosaic of leaping dolphins and sea foam.  
Her eyes closed ever so slowly.  
I was free to look without awkwardness.

Her foot rubbed mostly the dolphins' faces  
where the gray tile was still smooth.  
Except for that swaying leg the rest  
of her body limply rested on the crutches.  
She hadn't noticed me before but opening  
her eyes it was clear she saw my own  
long shadow overlapping her bare toes.

## ~ *e Medical Editor, to a Friend*

Your biology, the stirred soup of hormones  
and cells, receptors and chemicals  
and gray matter, is not you.

A good mother is not  
a mother who is free of problems.  
Trust me on this one, the nurse  
who told you *you are broken*  
was not only inaccurate, but unprofessional.  
Every first-year nursing book agrees.  
That bitch thief stole from you as bad  
as if she snatched your purse on the subway.

There may be parts of you that you have glued together,  
but the way a mosaic is, with sparkly bits of glass  
that catch the light. You've taken what biology gave  
and from it formed beauty, forged  
armor. There has never once been a time  
when you have not been a good mother.  
No diagnosis defines you:

you have survived, thrived, loved,  
grown, made art, made life, made the world  
undeniably better. A good mother navigates a path  
through her problems, hopes for a fraction  
of your strength, pushes to be as determined  
as you are. So when the wave crashes down,

may that strength hold you. May you have hands  
and trees and cats to cling to, may you weather  
that storm. And when it passes, may it wash away  
the rage, fear, doubt, guilt, and that judging voice  
from your mind. May it leave behind  
only you, your red and pounding heart,  
raw maybe, and tired, but pure  
and quiet, worthy and whole.



## ~ *e Editor Unexpectedly Considers Pergolas*

*I've been thinking a lot about pergolas*, he says,  
just when I thought we'd run out of things  
to talk about, that we'd spend the next 40 years  
telling the same stories over and over. He's  
wondering why people like them--pergolas--  
himself included--when they serve no purpose,  
I mean you can grow things up them but most people  
don't, and they don't even give any shade--

*I think it's because they're pretty*, I say, and we  
philosophize on the meaning of pergolas, ponder  
the class and wealth implications, historically speaking,  
of having one in your yard, toss around adjectives  
like *decorative, functional, ornamental*. I feel grateful,  
oddly giddy, to recall that no matter how deeply  
latticed we've become, only so much can be known,  
the rest in shadow as sun slants through the beams.



*A Point of Contention, by Brandon Pierce*

## Cycle

As a boy, I was fascinated by the entry for “The Diesel Engine” in the 1966 edition of *The American Peoples Encyclopedia*. It’s a work of art, a masterpiece, an illuminated manuscript of the 20th Century sandwiched in *COST OF LIVING TO DYNAMOMETER*. Four transparencies in the middle of the book detail the inner workings of a Fairbanks-Morse diesel engine. It’s something to get lost in, a proverbial rabbit hole, the pages overlay to show in color-coded depictions an opulent maze of chambers and pistons meant solely to channel the power of something like hellfire. Among the dozens of mechanics I’ve come to trust, I know I’ve met a man with the word “Virgil” stitched over his heart, willing to lead me through the layers of another derelict engine. But I first learned from the A.P.E.: “The principal of compression ignition is reported to have been used through the centuries by South Pacific natives to light fires. They devised bamboo cylinders in which they placed some dry tinder and then a close-fitting plug. By holding the cylinder in one hand and driving the plug down sharply with the other, the entrapped air was compressed and heated to the point that the tinder ignited spontaneously.” When my young eyes first plunged down this near perfect paragraph, I half expected the page to be aglow. And of course, reading it then I had to know how we go from islanders probing dirt with sticks to elephantine engines capable of floating a town’s worth of people across any sea or dragging a circus of animals through tumultuous mountains. Two ingredients: time and pressure with a few explosions here and there. “Rudolph Diesel’s first engine blew apart upon the initial cylinder explosion, nearly killing its inventor. The force of the explosion was an omen of the power which could be developed.” Seven sentences are devoted to this man in the A.P.E. (*Encyclopedia Britannica* only lends him six.) He disappears from the entry the way he disappeared from the world: swiftly and without resolution, more whimper than bang. He embarked on a steamship across the English Channel and when the boat made Harwich, Diesel wasn’t aboard. The entry runs for eleven pages after divulging his disappearance and in every other instance, “diesel” is lowercase. This big book, like the world, goes on without him. But eleven pages! The entry for the “Heart” in *GILA TRAIL TO HORSES* runs only four, the diagrams nothing more than a few black and white sketches with a confusion of arrows meant to trace the flow of blood, which itself is documented as “Circulation of the Blood” in *CHILE TO COSTIGAN*. This runs just two-and-a-half pages before deadheading at a full-color spread devoted to the circus. “The smell of sawdust, a brass band blaring, and a tooting calliope means ‘circus’...” Painted clowns with oversized rumps tie balloon animals; a thick-thighed equestrian stands upright on a white horse; a seal balances a ball on its nose; a haunched lion roars. “In 1871 P.T. Barnum formed a partnership with W.C. Coup, who bought 61 railroad cars to form the first circus-owned railroad train.” It was a steam-powered affair no doubt (Diesel didn’t patent his engine until 1892), but steam would eventually go the way of the Dodo. (See: “Dodge-Dog” in *COST OF LIVING TO DYNAMOMETER* for speculations of the bird’s “...long, petulant, wailing note...” which I hear as a mawkish steam engine leaving town each time I read it and though there’s an illustration of the *Didus Ineptus*’s likely semblance, nothing compares to that layered rendering of a typical heavy-duty diesel engine.) “The injection pump is the heart of the diesel engine. The fuel lines are the arteries. The fuel is the lifeblood of the engine. The pistons are the working members.” Each turn reveals a new layer, a deeper dive, illustrious and illuminating, a world of fire and water, carbon and oxygen, fuel and fumes. The complicated air-starting system sends a confusion of lines to each individual cylinder. (I can follow them with my pen the same way a young Virgil once did, back when he hoped a diesel-mechanic program would save him from the draft.) Every spline on the camshaft



gear is a ruler-straight line like knurls on a coin. The leaf-type valves in the air-scavenger make the center of the engine a tiny prison. Often, I squint into the page, praying I'll see a tiny set of hands hanging between the bars.) The scavenging ports are shown with and without their water-jackets. Naked, they look like hourglasses, except instead of falling sand the crankcase forces oil up drilled passages, irreverent of time, working against it in fact. For time is nothing but rust and wear in a diesel engine: a bad manifold gasket allowing moisture into the guts, old oil causing friction in the wristpins, a dry O-ring on a filter sucking air into the fuel supply. When time is reduced to such things, it is easy to overcome. Enter Virgil with a socket set and impact wrench. He dismantles the motor, piece for piece, smoking Pall Malls and cursing each time he scuffs the knuckles on the hand he didn't lose in 'Nam. But when he gets the thing overhauled, it will likely run another 5000 hours. I could call him the conductor of this harrowing symphony but few orchestras contain such efficiency. (See: "Orchestra" in NORMON TO PHOTOELECTRICITY: "In Claudio Monteverdi's first opera, 'Orfeo,' an orchestra of 36 players was prescribed; but the composer's prescriptions were rather general—his score did not show precisely what each instrument was to play or where each was to enter or pause.") Naturally, a diesel engine allows for no such ambiguity. Everything plays its own role while aiding in the next function. One piece is the thing itself but fully dependent on prior components and simultaneously setting the stage for each mechanism down the line. For a better understanding see "Encyclopedia" in DYNE TO FINK: "...a book or set of books treating the various fields of knowledge in separate articles." The name comes from two Greek words which combined mean, 'the complete circle of learning.' " This idea, like the diesel engine, is inexhaustible (no pun intended), for at the end of "The Diesel Engine" we're told to "See Power." The entry is paltry at best, around 250 words. It opens with a quote from Plato: "I hold the definition of being is simply power."

## *See*

your current arguments with God  
exist with ink and fiber handling

magician or good lover, you say.

Which one sleeps with the lights on

## *Germana*

the german girl  
with the name written  
in obscure trees  
we were skeletons  
swinging among green backyard patches  
my land on her tongue  
Her mother, brunette, angular, tough skin  
brought us potatoes to thicken our bones  
but the wind caught her  
caught us borrowing the time  
which never went anywhere  
but half past

Das gal came from the sky  
Das gal made me clay pies

Inasmuch alien breath as alien wurd,  
das germana made holes in the basement to slip through.

## *Vessels*

arcane vessels grace our abodes  
the sleek, the primal, the curious  
each with its own unique character

of clay, stone, porcelain, glass,  
bamboo, gourd skin, fibers, brass  
molded, fired, hammered, weaved

on tables, mantles, window sills  
a horizontal plane  
its only essential need

from homelands far and wide  
artisans' hands spoke and toiled  
allowing these forms to be born

stories of generations past  
dwell inside and upon their walls  
in wait of listening ears.



## ***Obese Woman with Bad Teeth***

is what they called her,  
anonymous in a common  
tomb among geese and a wet  
nurse, cloistered like a scandal.  
Like so many others, she lay  
unceremoniously chiseled  
from history, name and face  
scratched from the walls,  
statues smashed and buried.  
Like so many others, she knew  
what she deserved, this merciless  
expanse of light, stone flayed  
from the cliff's orange brow,  
white like a cooked river fish.  
Tourists may not worship, but still  
they cower beneath the scalding palm  
of sky, slump their garish backs wet  
against her columns. She remains,

a crowned silhouette of gouges  
and pocks, tall and proud before  
the gods, sipping holy milk  
straight from the buffalo, surveying  
a bounty of fowl and beast,  
hiding a lover behind her  
enormous calves. She remains,  
a legacy of wealth, of building,  
of military fist and exploration,  
in imaginations unearthed  
from scars and gashes, she-king  
in beard and male trappings,  
firm on a lioness's throne.

What it took to reinstate her:  
a molar, a hidden stamp  
on a jar of liver.

Hatshepsut.  
Cool and far from her sun-drunk temple,  
in a room of shriveled pharaohs,  
including the stepson that erased her,  
she again is missing, a typed excuse  
in an empty glass case.



*Salesman in the Village, oil on wood 120 cm x 80 cm, by Osama Afify*

## *Guestbook in the Zombie Apocalypse*

Without electricity I lit up the boat  
like a quinceañera: garlands of can lids,  
enough foiled beads to honor  
a topless weekend, a laminated delivery  
day banner with *welcome* held  
by an indifferent stork, flattened gift  
bows flashing their matte undersides  
taped along the cabin siding. I stole  
front door mats from beach houses  
and made a path as if the pier was lava:  
*welcome home sweet home the delgados*  
*life's a beach welcome home*  
*welcome welcome to paradise*  
After two new moons, they began  
to come, first a desolate trickle,  
then a regular procession. Some come  
nude, pearled strings of spines, the deep  
corduroy of ribs. Some come with trunks  
or briefcases or backpacks or coolers or boxes  
or trash bags or tied bundles of sheets slung  
on a broomstick. One came with a fleet  
of racoons squirreled away in a sleeping bag.  
We cannot help but accumulate. Some keep  
watch on deck all night. Some accept mugs  
of recycled tea. Some teach me constellations  
or complicated knots. Some tell me  
about topplings: Japan, the military, a home.  
Some tell me of a fortified ranch in Wyoming  
or a convention center sanctuary in Quebec.  
I ask everyone whether they've seen dogs.  
Many sleep with names in their mouths that roll  
out scared like marbles. *Mama. Gary. Allah.*  
Some of us give each other our names  
for safekeeping or just to hear them. Some of us  
hold hands. The first child I met had hair  
like a lumpy pillow. She said nice to meet you  
and held out a fruit sticky palm. This shred  
of trust undid me, blew gentle under the hope  
I didn't know I carried, a ripe ember winking smoke.





Mother, oil, Jody Howard 1998



## ***Untitled Poem #1***

One cup kept empty and side by side  
as if forgiveness is a service  
due when you shake the dust off

and the other overflows with coffee  
heats your mouth with lips  
that blacken when one hand

is grasped by the other and the spill  
towed to where the dead overflow  
as evenings :an entitlement

that returns the darkness  
before the sun comes back  
brings the light that once was water

fills this small cup with a morning  
you will clear with a soft rag  
holding it close to the wooden table.

## ***Untitled Poem #2***

You cup your hands around the rim  
as if time no longer wants you  
though the mountain spring that died

couldn't have weighed much more itself  
still smells from side to side  
and reaching out as waves —you drink

over and over empty the water  
so wherever it shows up it's cold  
will hide you now that death

is so thirsty, fits into a glass  
can be seen still gathering  
has your eyes, owes you nothing.

## *Extremely Online*

Each Monday I google my name  
*They say it is a strong name*  
A bed pan of headshots  
My results are negative

I will waltz out of the public domain  
You will have to pay to see me  
Buried in mud

Next to the lilies, azaleas  
The sublime weed

I sprout apples  
My armpits, small gingers of blasphemy

Eleanor found six cherries in my bush  
Elegies of an open affair  
With Autumn

The rain comes when I need it most  
Tickling my roots  
In doors I cannot seed  
How good it is to green



## *An Old Man's Memory of a Young Man's Heartache*

She sat up in bed,  
(but there was no bed,  
just a soft warm exhale  
that held her aloft),

and she followed the hallway  
(but there was no hallway,  
just a vague sense of direction,  
north, south, east, west),

and she walked down the stairs,  
(but there were no stairs,  
just the graceful, bobbing illusion  
of rippling downstream),

and she reached for the door  
(but there was no door,  
just a subtle change in temperature,  
and a glint in the distance),

and other voices called her,  
(but there were no voices,  
only a flutter and hum,  
and the swish of her feet inching forward),

and she moved to the end of the block,  
(but there was no block  
only a limit to what she could bear,  
and a constant desire to forget),

and I reached for her –  
(but there was no woman,  
just the slow, stubborn memory  
of satin and sunset).

In hindsight, it was a typical romance.  
I never should have wanted more.  
I never should have loved so freely.  
She never should have turned away.

## *Family Getaway*

I knew where the memory would end  
before it became a memory.

The anger in the back seat  
flashed and stretched impatiently.

The knuckles on the steering wheel  
were white as teeth.

Gravel snapped  
at the minivan's rusted bones.

The headlights hung a nervous curtain  
on the ominous branches of pines.

We were lost.

We climbed the mountain slowly,  
just before midnight.

Our mouths split our faces  
like cracks in granite.

The map lay crumpled between us –  
a list of broken promises.

When a sudden wind erupted from the potholes,  
we could feel it inside.

My hands flew open.  
There. Then,

with the road escaping into darkness and dust,  
I knew where the memory would end.

## Joycean

*"I always had a lingering doubt whether what I was defending was supreme artistry or plain associative mania." —Frank O'Connor on James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*.*

*"[Joyce's] style is definitely schizophrenic, with the difference, however, that the ordinary patient cannot help himself talking and thinking in such a way, while Joyce willed it and moreover developed it by all his creative forces". —Carl Gustav Jung*

When we find a screw in the back tire, the message is screw you, and it reminds him  
when his nephew called him a fag, the boy's father must have prompted it, and it reminds him  
when he heard the rattle his cousin left in the car when he returned it, and it reminds him  
when a trumpet played across a field to make fun of his singing, and it reminds him  
when the workers drilled next door, knowing his sensitivity to noise, and it reminds him  
when the janitor left a mop next to his racquet at the tennis court, and it reminds him  
when the maid left a sponge in a pail of dirty water in our motel room, and it reminds him  
when he saw loose staples on the floor of the Airbnb, and it reminds him  
when we find a screw in the back tire, the message is screw you.

When a cat on the roof cries all night, he asks if I am sure someone has not put it there.

Who? I dare not ask again.

The ones who drive me mad he would answer.

The scenarios drive me mad too,  
but I separate myself  
from them in the words  
of a tale or poem.

He could but cannot. He  
has no patience for memoir.

And even though he is here—  
right here!—in these lines,  
I cannot separate myself  
from him.



## *Dispatches from the Memory Care Museum*

*What did we know  
and when did we know it?*

Imagine all the metal  
cabinets of a mind  
filled with fragments  
of missing hours and days.  
Each locked away from visitors –  
a dull gemstone that might  
still glow in certain light,  
a furred paw, some browned  
teeth, a catfish carcass,  
trading beads that sealed  
some ancient land deal,  
baskets of braided  
sweetgrass, an ink drawing  
of a long extinct bird,  
soft rustle of feathers  
almost audible, a map  
of ancient alleyways,  
an abacus, a rusted hourglass.

Someone misplaced the keys.  
We open a new drawer.

## ~ *e Panorama of the Road Opens*

*from Windows by Dennis Maloney*

The panorama of the road opens  
through the dirty windshield  
driving west covering miles

In east Iowa during the night  
a freezing rain turns the road  
into a glass surface and  
The bodies of cars and semi's  
litter the shoulders and ditches

The sprawling Sinclair oil refinery  
spews fumes and flames in the air  
And the tight curves on the road  
from Park City to Salt Lake  
in the snow are dicy

A blanket of clouds hugs  
the tops of the mountains  
on the horizon tinged  
in shades of pink  
as the sun sets

The car plunges into the dark  
we follow the white  
lines of the highway  
mile after mile after mile

## *Before the Ramparts*

The women at the baby shower  
do not tell you how children are forever,  
how your love may knot and tangle,  
stretch to breaking, maybe snap;  
how you will learn to splice it  
word by word, or maybe  
silence by silence,  
how fifty years later if you're lucky  
those children will be the strongest arrows  
in your quiver, fit exactly  
on your bowstring  
when you take aim  
against time.



## *A Soprano In ~ e Shower*

a naked soprano  
alone in the shower

is she singing  
or screaming?

the water must be cold  
and it is snowing

Christmas is coming  
soon



