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by Gabrielle Giffords, U.S. Representative, Arizona's 8th Congressional District

Solar is the Bridge to Our Future

The Middle East is synonymous with oil—a critical natural resource that has transformed the nations of that region into some of the wealthiest on Earth.

My home state of Arizona has no oil to speak of but is blessed with a natural resource that in my opinion is even better: abundant sunshine.

Just as oil was a passport to wealth in the 20th century, I believe the sun will be a gateway to prosperity in the 21st.

With more than 300 days of sunshine every year, Arizona and the neighboring states straddle some of the best areas in the world for solar power. We have the potential to be a global center for the production of clean, renewable electricity—a commodity that is certain to be in high demand in the decades to come.

As a member of Congress, I wake up every morning and go to sleep every night thinking about the significant challenges facing our country. Among the greatest of these are:

- How do we create good jobs and strengthen our economic competitiveness?
- How do we ensure our national security in a dangerous world?
- How do we protect our natural environment—especially from the threat of catastrophic climate change?

Congresswoman Giffords participates in a rooftop solar consultation.
Photo courtesy U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

The reason I get so excited about solar power is that it offers a viable solution, at least in part, to all of these major challenges: economic competitiveness, energy independence, and climate change. Indeed, my support for the *American Clean Energy and Security Act* is rooted in the need to address these critical issues.

Because of its tremendous potential, promoting solar power has been a top priority for me ever since I arrived in Congress in 2007. I never miss an opportunity to advance this issue,

whether through legislation, public education or personal advocacy.

But what would it take for solar to really become a major power source in the United States? Last year, the U.S. Department of Energy issued a report outlining how we could generate 20 percent of our power from wind by 2030. What if we were to adopt a comparable target for solar? What would it take to achieve that?

Well, over the next two decades we would need to install at least 2,200 times as much solar power capacity as we did last year! The industry would have to sustain an annual growth rate of 33 percent for the next 20 years.

In other words, our future growth would have to dwarf our past accomplishments. That's a significant challenge in its own right.

But significant solar expansion also would challenge us to increase our grid integration capabilities, develop new energy storage systems and upgrade solar financing mechanisms. And we would need to train a solar workforce that can deploy and integrate solar into existing and new infrastructure.

While solar hot water heating is standard on most homes in the Tucson, Arizona, community of Civano, many homes also feature solar photovoltaic panels.
Photo courtesy Community of Civano, LLC.

Meeting such enormous logistical challenges is difficult, but not impossible. Our nation has risen to incredible challenges before. But it will require more than just effective individual companies. It will require coordination across the entire solar community, including private companies, academia, non-profits, and government. We must take our collaborative efforts to a new level.

The good news is that solar policy has made some remarkable advances in recent years, despite the industry's limited resources. This has happened because solar offers a real solution that speaks to today's needs in a uniquely effective way. Nevertheless, from my vantage point in Congress, I can see that continued forward momentum will require a substantial and coordinated advocacy effort. Thankfully, solar supporters are passionate about their cause.

We must draw on that passion to overcome some significant hurdles. First among these is raising awareness of the true potential of solar power. Few of my congressional colleagues really believe that solar is capable of making a substantial contribution to our energy needs anytime in the near future. This must change.

People need to understand that solar technology works, it is affordable, and it is in our national interest. They also need to understand that without supportive policy, our nation will fall behind foreign competitors in what is poised to be a major 21st century industry, just as we have in so many others, such as textiles, automobiles, flat-panel displays, and nuclear technology.

My staff and I are working hard to spread the news about solar:

- Since 2007 I have introduced or cosponsored numerous pieces of solar legislation, including workforce training, grid-integration studies, and incentive tax credits for manufacturing and deployment.
- My district office gives free "Solar 101" seminars across southern Arizona to help people understand how to take advantage of the new incentives and go solar themselves.
- I talk almost weekly with solar leaders across our state to coordinate efforts with them to educate Arizona business and community leaders.

And Arizona is an example of a state moving forward with solar:

- Applications have been submitted to develop solar projects on more than half a million acres of federal land in Arizona.
- The governor recently signed a manufacturing tax credit into law, prompting numerous companies to explore locating in the state.
- The statewide Renewable Energy Tariff is generating millions of dollars for utilities to use in developing solar projects to meet their renewable energy requirements.

The solar field at Nellis Air Force Base is comprised of more than 72,000 photovoltaic panels. The array is expected to produce more than 25 percent of the base's electricity.
Photo by Robert Valenca, courtesy U.S. Air Force.

President Obama recently visited the Southwest and toured the vast photovoltaic array at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. The base is home to the largest PV installation in the western hemisphere: 72,000 panels on 140 acres generating 14 megawatts of clean, sustainable power. After his tour, the President spoke of the "power of clean, renewable energy to build a new, firmer foundation for economic growth."

He is absolutely right. Solar power has the potential to be a core solution to many of our largest policy challenges and increase our prosperity in the process. But to realize this potential, solar needs

a coordinated advocacy effort. It is time for this fragmented industry, and those who support solar energy, to come together and speak with one voice: “Solar is ready. The time for solar is now.”

U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords is in her second term representing southern Arizona's District 8 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Column: The Literal Landscape

by Simmons B. Buntin, Editor/Publisher, *Terrain.org*

My Neighbor's Bird

"The object of art is to give life a shape."
— *Jean Anouilh*

The sculpture that is my neighbor's bird perches on the wall outside my window. It is black like the buzzard, still as a heron, slick as kestrel. In the quick corridor of afternoon light the bird's shoulders shine through the thin window and into my eyes. At night its silhouette absorbs the moonlight, half in shadow. In the morning it drinks the dew and tastes the salty air from the ancient seabed upon which our homes are built.

There is a likeness my neighbor Michael and I cannot quite name as we admire the hand-crafted bird in the amber light of his front porch. Glossy bands of metal weave, feather over feather, into streamlined tail. The crested head is of a single conclusion—a sharp yet elegantly curved beak, slightly open as if it could breathe, as if the composition could just now spring to the wall and take flight. Unsatisfied with our first guesses, we have gathered this afternoon to identify the species it represents—the avian inspiration, at least, for its artist-creator deep in the mountains of northcentral Mexico.

Perhaps, I suggest, it is a piñon jay, the raucous bird found not in Old but rather New Mexico, in the north, in the intoxicating juniper scrublands near Santa Fe; or in the thirsty flatlands of central Utah. Here, blueblack jays drink from the briny edge of the Great Salt Lake—a curse, Cochiti legend tells, placed on the children of the Santo Domingo by Old Salt Woman when the people refused to feed her. But Old Salt Woman was soon tricked by her neighbors who, offering to feed her, instead ate her flesh. They called upon Rainmaker, and he poured forth from the sky until she became the Great Salt Lake itself.

But we agree that his bird is not a jay. With its heavy frame and wide stance, it is larger, less flighty.

An iced tea in one hand and an open grapefruit in the other, Michael shares the story of his recent find: "'*Papagayo*,' the Mexican shopkeepers said when I bought the artwork they claimed was a parrot," he explains. "I knew right away they were wrong, but didn't quarrel. The bird remained on its shelf, solitary, even as I haggled the price from half to a quarter its original asking." Tucked awkwardly under his arm, propped tentatively in the back of his car, Michael delivered it from the dusty commercial stall of Nogales, Sonora, to his Tucson, Arizona, home—the plumage an immediate contrast against quartz-white tile.

Its trip, we imagine, had been much farther from the start.

Prior to delivery at the shopkeeper's stall, the bird is loaded with other sculptures, cages, and wooden benches onto a flatbed pickup that drives slowly, carefully, along the shoulderless highway tracking the Río Sonora. The truck pauses to load additional merchandise in dust-rinsed towns like Sinoquepe, Arizpe, and Cananea. At each stop the driver who could be named Eduardo, his brother Cesar, and the brother's young wife Gabriela pry the lid off cold *cervezas* and tip the bottles back to sweep the acrid road away. And at each stop they check their cargo—the furniture and stamped-tin mirrors and stoic birds. The goods are rattled but otherwise unharmed.

By early evening the flatbed arrives in the border town of Nogales, finding its way onto the cobbled lane lined with small shops, painted carts. The local disco plays a noxious song with earth-deep bass and treble far too high. Gabriela, whose long black hair offsets dark and passionate eyes, cannot stand the noise and walks past the stall, through an alley thin with open doors, brightly colored Mexican blankets, the heavy aroma of fried corn—to a place she knows well. Eduardo and Cesar shake hands with the shopkeeper and his son, smile knowing the long day is nearly done, and together unload the truck.

They haul furniture and wrought iron-patio sets to an adjacent courtyard, dimly lit with candled lamps that flicker and flare along the walls. Together, the shopkeeper and his son pull the rolling metal shade that fronts their stall's window, set the locks. The four men then return to the truck to find Gabriela offering *cervezas* wedged with limes. They grin again as they unload the remaining goods. The birds, their most delicate cargo, are unloaded last. With a fledgling balanced on each hand, they make more than a dozen short trips from truck to stall and back.

A few days later, Michael walks the crowded lane of shop fronts, past rows of hand-painted puppets and parrot-colored *sombreros*, until he sees his bird.

The sun dips beneath the roofline as Michael refills my tea. We speculate that the bird is a roadrunner, that lizard-catching linear racer native to our more local haunts. With its raised crest, black skin beneath streaked feathers, and long, rudderlike tail, there is a chance. Cowboy folklore has it that these brave birds seek out fights with rattlesnakes, darting past their striking heads, the trigger-quick fangs. Or, sing the campfire songs, roadrunners wait until morning's first light, after

the rattler has coiled itself into daytime sleep, corralling the snake with ridiculously sharp *cholla* stems.

I lean beyond the porch wall to admire my own yard's cactus, the dazzling spines backlit, glowing. We speculate, but decide otherwise. With its long wings, Michael's bird is not so grounded.

In small, angular homes overlooking the humble village of Soyopa, dark-skinned women preen the stately birds, polish their beaks, and press smooth feathers. The birds are motionless, cold in an otherwise hot world not many kilometers from their mountainous origin. The women with names like Erendira and Pitina help their husbands and brothers load the figures onto another flatbed truck that scrapes its way over a crumbling dirt road out of the terraced hills. Alone, the driver steers through the night to arrive at the sprawling Sonoran capital of Hermosillo as speckled roosters throw their calls against the sun. The groaning truck answers with a quick honk of its own to move them along, and to wake an old man from his bed and distant dreams.

The truck coughs to a stop at a small warehouse, where propped windows and large fanblades stick beneath a sloping roof. Inside, the white-haired man who may go by the name of Sandro pushes himself up and into the morning light. He works completely, rarely pausing, so that by noon row upon row of gleaming bird is placed on the warped but stable shelves fitted into the coolest corner of the building. He then collapses into a frayed lawnchair and pulls a warm Coca-Cola to his grimacing lips.

The birds share quarters with clay *chimineas* and mesquite armchairs, ironwood figurines and leather saddles. Together, they wait unknowingly for their passage north.

"*Aguila*?" Michael suggests. Eagle? The bird's stone manner and sharp eye suggest a raptor. And its ancestry may trace to the Mexica, who around 1300 A.D. were forced from the settlement of Chapultepec, two dozen miles north of current-day Mexico City, to an island in the middle of the region's deepest lake. Tenochtitlan was founded twenty-five years later, on the large island where the Mexica spied an eagle perched atop a towering cactus, consuming a snake. The eagle—embodying spiritual and physical strength, devouring the evil serpent—became a fitting symbol for the powerful and disciplined eagle-warriors and the persevering people themselves.

Centuries ago *exploradores* traced the overgrown trails of the Sierra Madre Occidental not for the elusive gold of El Dorado, but for a richly ferrous ore that was gathered, separated, and heated—then hammered into tools and weapons. In the filtered light of Copper Canyon, southwest of the Chihuahuan village of Cuauhtémoc, dark men chased the darker shadows of birds, spiritual guides to the heavy rocks they mined by hand and carried back to the local *herrero*, who ran his large,

calloused hands over the rock to find its weakest point. Like a jaguar—its terrible force and beautiful grace—he worked the raw material into shape and reshape.

The *herrero's* memory and myth, from childhood stories and tapestry tales, run through a young, muscular man as he caresses his newest bird. Tereso is proud of his work, of the slow and deliberate method of bending the metal by hand. He slides a shield over his face, ignites the torch, and watches the brilliant flame as it cuts shoulder, wing. The artisan lifts his mask and twists the metal slightly, pushing his full weight upon the ironwork and the wooden slab beneath. He steps back to let the bird cool, the sharp fumes quickly subsiding, then removes his gloves so he can feel the smooth, black feathers and sharp, open beak. Yes, this craft pleases him.

A quick knock at the doorframe brings him back. Lucía, a short woman in a once-white dress, smiles at his face— solidly lined like the sculptures he creates—then comments on the elegance of the birds without removing her eyes from his. He blushes, looks to the floor, and walks to an adjacent room. She follows, stroking the unfinished bird on the workbench as she passes.

The room they enter is full of birds perched side by side on a pair of deeply stained plywood shelves. Those on the top will be picked up in a few days, making their way south to Torreon, Aguascalientes, and eventually Mexico City. He points to the lower shelf, finds a cart, and together they load twenty birds. She pulls the cart from the room, smiles quickly, then leaves him. Stepping outside, he looks beyond her to a dark bird in a far pine.

Aided by a half-dozen excited children who have gathered for the chance of gum or other sweets, Lucía maneuvers the birds into a yellow Volkswagen van, then slips a small pack of Chiclets into each eager hand. With a steep rev of the engine, the van lurches forward and she heads north on the only road, a gravel-mud road, through a brief afternoon thunderstorm. She drives west over a quiet pass where the sun burns like torchlight through the clouds, then down the western side of the mountain toward a small shack in Yepachic, where the metalwork flock remains that night. The next day they make the uneven trek through Santa Rosa and, by night again, Soyopa. Michael's bird, though he doesn't yet know it, is halfway to its new home.

We study the bird, lifting it from its roost on the wall as we set down our glasses. Its shape is familiar yet peculiar—not parrot, jay, roadrunner, eagle. "Raven?" we ask in unison. Could it be the darkly iridescent bird that ranges from North to South America and beyond? What, we wonder aloud, is the borderlands myth of that venerable bird?

In the thornscrub highlands of the Sierra Madre, Coyote is trying to capture Raven. Both are tricksters, both clever, which makes Coyote nervous. He cannot fly like Raven, cannot blend into

the shadows as easily, complains to the empty audiences of the night that he is disadvantaged. The problem, as he sees it, is getting food, keeping his caches for himself.

One warm spring evening, Coyote's ears spike at the familiar yawp of Raven. She has just landed on the closest branch of an oak, nearly within leaping distance. "How may I help you," asks Coyote, an air of annoyance in his canine voice.

"The question," croaks Raven, "is how may I help you?"

"Fly a bit lower so I can tell you," suggests Coyote, his sharp teeth shining. Raven doesn't move.

"I have a proposition," says Raven. "I am hungry, like you. It is true that I have berries and beetles and a lizard now and then, but I need more."
"I can provide more? This sounds like a trap."

"It is a trap, my friend," says Raven. "But not for you. How would it be if I called to you when there was prey—prey you otherwise wouldn't know about? If in fact I help guide that antelope or javelina to you?"

"What's in it for you?"

"Share the meal, of course. Don't run me off."

The deal was struck, and from that day on Coyote and Raven shared their meals. Today, ravens call out when prey is nearby, helping to direct animals toward the coyote. In return, the coyote lets the ravens dine on the meal, the resulting carrion, as well.

This is, I tell Michael as we admire the silk black raven we now agree the sculpture must be, no myth. Though the original conversation may have differed, coyotes and ravens often work together for food in the desert Southwest. It is a symbiotic relationship that evolved, perhaps, before myth itself.

It is fitting, says Michael, to settle on the raven—to imagine the artist drawing inspiration from the raven's call, the coyote's answer. Neither of us can think of another raven myth. And neither of us can turn away from the long voyage of this storied bird as we contemplate our own paths on the ancient seabed where my neighbor's bird perches outside the open window.

Simmons B. Buntin is the founding editor of *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments*. His first book of poetry, *Riverfall*, was published in 2005 by Ireland's Salmon Poetry; his next collection is due from Salmon in 2010. Recent work has appeared in *Mid-American Review, Isotope, Orion*, *Hawk & Handsaw*, and *Southwestern American Literature*. Catch up with him at www.SimmonsBuntin.com.

Column: Plein Air
by Deborah Fries, *Terrain.org* Editorial Board Member

Mapping Mary Ann Armstrong

The first time I saw her picture, I wanted to know everything about her.

Mary Ann Armstrong, circa 1859.
Photo courtesy Mark Bateman.

I wanted to know where she'd lived before she married my great, great grandfather in 1859. I wanted to know what her parents, Mariah and William G. Armstrong, looked like; whether William G. had been a planter in Tyrrell County, North Carolina, or a yeoman farmer. I wanted to know which of Mary Ann's six children looked like her, rather than their eagle-featured father, Edward Parisher. I wanted to know why she looked so very serious.

All of that wanting began in 2000, when distant relative and genealogical researcher Mark Bateman sent me a scanned photo of my great, great grandparents, along with a generous amount of his own Parisher family research. And even though I've gathered a little more information, even had my mitochondrial DNA tested, most days I'm sure that I'll never have enough facts to salvage historical certainty out of the shipwreck of fantasy.

Edward Parisher, circa 1859.
Photo courtesy Mark Bateman.

Instead, I'll have a breeches bucket of images: smoke rising from decaying peat in the Great Dismal Swamp; moss hanging from a pecan tree in a sandy yard; dogs sleeping in the shade of a magnolia; the ghosts of torn-down farmhouses and tobacco barns; rows of corn bending under hurricane winds; gold-rimmed English paste ware sitting on a sideboard. A wide-cheek-boned woman in a lace collar frozen in her ante-bellum portrait, a man with a long goatee beside her. I'll be left with mysteries and wish-based assumptions, and an impressionistic synthesis of how my own family illustrates the rich history of the people who have lived on the south shore of the Albemarle Sound for more than 400 years.

Long after I opened the envelope from Mark that contained the photos of Mary Ann Armstrong and Edward Parisher, as well as scanned tintypes of two of their six children, I remained intrigued by the racial ambiguity of my great, great grandmother. In 2008, I ordered a test kit from the research firm with the largest DNA database, sure that my matrilineal line would escort me back to Mary Ann's genes and provide definitive conclusions. Was she biracial? Triracial? In all census

records, she and her parents are listed as *White*, a mono-racial identity the picture seems to belie. Mark had heard she was "part Indian." The molecular test results, I expected, would be oracular.

A cheek scrape later, I learned that I was a member of Haplogroup I—a somewhat sparse anthropological lineage associated with northwestern Europe. Gravettians, Palaeolithic Europeans defined by a set of mutations that gelled between 32,300 and 58,400 years ago, their short arc on the migration map shoots up out of North Africa, follows a route usually associated with Anglo-Saxon and Viking invasions, and lands, chillingly, in Scandinavia.

I studied the migration map that arrived in the mail with my mtDNA results. Unlike the stunted path my earliest relatives took, the five mitochondrial haplogroups associated with Native American ancestry—A, B, C, D, and X—wrap the globe with the bright ribbons of their long journeys. Members of my group had at some point left Europe and made a great voyage in the opposite direction, but I had no map with little boat icons dotted across the Atlantic, no Frenchman winding his way up the Alligator River to land on the swampy North Carolina coast at a place called Frying Pan. And no tribal boundaries, no legend for the coastal Algonquian and Iroquois lands of the Weapemeoc, Maratoc, Tuscarora, or Secotan.

The door to the past that I thought would swing wide open remained stuck. I was not alone: the genetic genealogical chat rooms are filled with female seekers, lacking a reference source of Y-DNA, and chasing family legends that have not been validated by their maternal DNA. Many of those amateur ethnologists are looking for proof of Native American ancestry, and most of those, it seems, are from the South. In one forum I met Helen, another haplo "I" with North Carolina roots who's been looking for the truth—not, she says, another fanciful legend of the white male ancestor who married a Cherokee princess.

Inez Chesson, the author's grandmother, circa 1902.
Photo courtesy Deborah Fries.

And I met Cathy, familiar with Tyrrell County lore, whose grandmother's native ancestry has escaped genetic detection. She told me about the Lost Colony DNA Project. I also met Sharron, a descendant of Edward Parisher's second wife, Sallie Owens, the woman who cared for my great grandmother, Sarah, after Mary Ann Armstrong Parisher had slipped off of everyone's maps. Like the other women, I took what I could get, gathering online census, tax, and marriage documents, reading between the lines until a narrative emerged.

In 1850, Mary Ann Armstrong was 13, and lived with her family in Columbia Township, Tyrrell County, North Carolina. Edward Parisher, age 20, lived on what appears to be the adjacent property along Rider's Creek with his family, headed by Thoroghgood Parisher. The Armstrong's net worth was listed as twice that of the Parishers' holdings, although Mary Ann's father, William G. Armstrong, was only 36.

Mary Ann and Edward did not marry until she was 22. In the 1860 census, however, a year after she was married, she had both a baby boy and a five-year-old girl living with her and Edward. It is noted that she could not read or write. Edward then was listed as a carriage maker. By the time she was 33, she and Edward had three sons and three daughters. She died before reaching 40, and by 1870, Edward had remarried and fathered the seventh of his eight children.

Map of eastern North Carolina, circa 1779.
Graphic courtesy Digital History.

The brief narrative I've been able to assemble does not, however, tell her story or place her life in context. In the 1840 Tyrrell County census, when William G. was only 26, he headed a household that included six slaves, making it likely that he was the son of Holaway Armstrong, a Tyrrell County planter whose will leaves significant holdings to five sons. In that document, sons William and Benjamin are willed "the plantation that once belonged to Franklin Armstrong," along with "one hundred acres of land called White Oak Island" and "three hundred acres of swamp land lying on the east side of the Scuppernong river."

Mary Ann's appearance and information about her planter paternal line raised new questions. Recently, I've been able to pose some of those questions to Dr. Arwin Smallwood, a University of Memphis history professor whose work in eastern North Carolina maps the entwined lives of Native, African, and European Americans from first contact to the present.

Smallwood, author of *Bertie County, An Eastern Carolina History* and *The Atlas of African-American History and Politics: From the Slave Trade to Modern Times*, as well as other scholarly works, grew up about 30 miles northwest of my maternal family's farmstead. Triracial himself, he is currently overseeing additional research projects in eastern North Carolina. If anyone would understand the social permutations that were negotiated over hundreds of years in that region, and reflected in the picture of my great, great grandmother, it would be Dr. Smallwood.

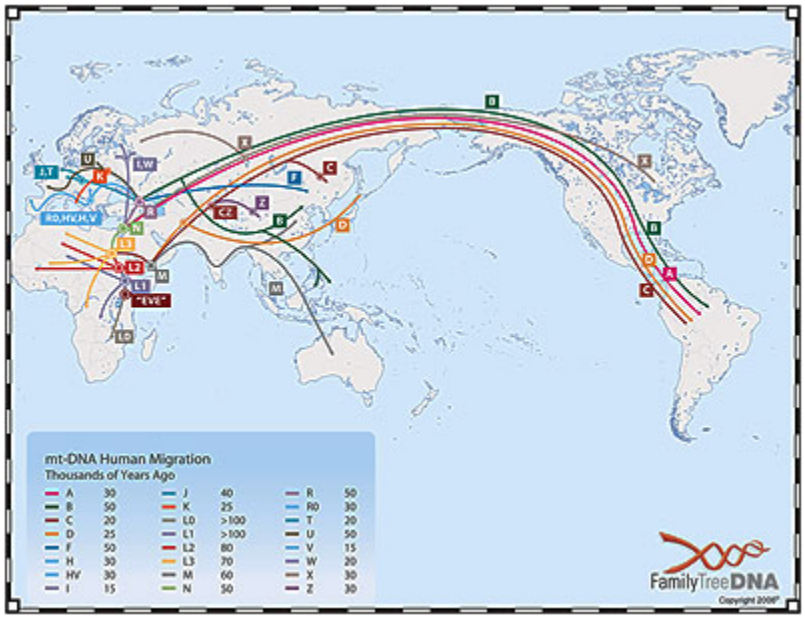
In *Bertie County*, he chronicles the complex patterns of cultural and economic conflict that were intended to drive indigenous people out of the state. Yet, through intermarriage with both blacks and whites, Native Americans remained in the area. It was possible, he notes, but not common, for a slave-owning planter such as Mary Ann's father to have a legal marriage to a racially-mixed wife, especially if she self-identified as white, as did Mariah Armstrong. And, although we do not find the racial designation *Indian* in the Tyrrell or Bertie census records in 1850—all residents were

identified as *White, Black,* or *Mulatto*—we know that native ancestry cohabited with those labels, and that at various times in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, "mulatto" was used to describe Indians of mixed blood, European or African. Or both.

For everyone, life in North Carolina's coastal lowlands was often a brutal struggle. In the Tyrrell County mortality indices for 1850-1870, we read how children and adults of all races succumbed to fatal diagnoses of *whooping cough, croup, pleurisy, pneumonia, congestive chill, consumption, scrofula, brain fever, bilious fever, typhoid fever, diphtheria, cholera, erysipelas, worms* and *fits.* And, of course, there was *child birth.* Genealogical records list second and third wives for many of the county's farmers, with only brief gaps between marriages. The pragmatic need for indigenous wives for the male colonists perhaps morphed into the pragmatic need to replace one 19th century wife with another—and probably with far less consideration for ethnicity than we might imagine.

Dr. Smallwood says that his research in eastern North Carolina increasingly provides him with evidence that in that isolated and geographically inhospitable region, many attitudes about race—which we assume existed for hundreds of years—are actually 20th century constructs. A prime example of a "modern" take on multiracial identity occurred in Virginia, where from 1912 to 1946, Dr. Walker Plecker headed the state's Bureau of Vital Statistics. Plecker made it his mission to locate, identify by surname, and categorize as "colored" members of the multiracial Melungeon people of Virginia, determined to expose their African ancestry, dismiss their Indian identity, and prevent them from contributing to the "ultimate disappearance of the white race in Virginia, and the country" through intermarriage.

From my own limited research, it seems that when we look closely at historic personal relationships—especially during the first 200 years in colonial America—and recognize the high probability of our multiracial heritage, whether we can lay claim to a specific family narrative or are unable to parse it out, we may get a glimpse of post-racial America.



mt-DNA Human Migration timescale map. Click image for larger view in PDF format.
Image courtesy Family Tree DNA.

In my own glimpse, I like to imagine being part of a kind of prelapsarian ancestral past that was unconstrained by the ugliness that would follow. I look at the picture of Mary Ann Armstrong and imagine what it would have been like had she lived long enough to know her beautiful granddaughter, Inez Chesson; and had Inez Chesson lived long enough to have been my living grandmother. It's a new kind of ancestor worship, perhaps, this romanticized longing for conversations with the long-dead, wanting

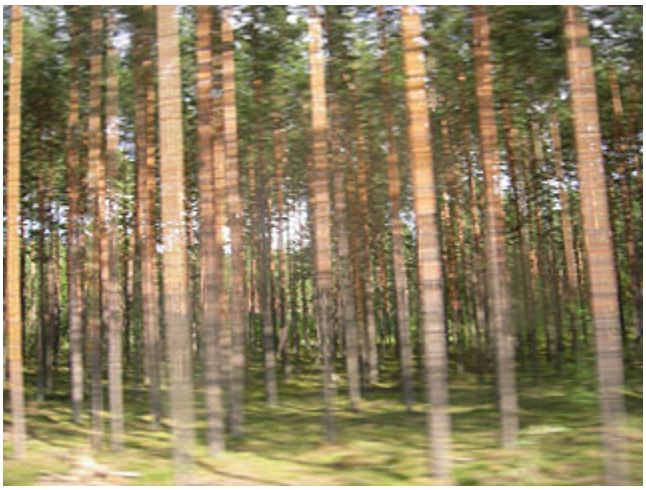
to know about the worlds they inhabited. If either of them had been able to pass along their stories to their granddaughters, I'd know things about family that flat maps and the partial trail of mitochondrial information will never be able to tell me. Without DNA isolation and sequencing, I'd know blood.

Deborah Fries is the author of Various Modes of Departure (Kore Press,Tucson). Her work in the recent Kore Press anthology, *Powder: Writing from Women in the Ranks, Vietnam to Iraq*, was nominated for a 2010 Pushcart Prize and adapted for the one-woman play, *Coming in Hot*. She lives in suburban Philadelphia.

Column: Bull Hill
by David Rothenberg, *Terra Nova* Editor

The Road That Must Be Taken

View online image gallery at www.terrain.org/columns/24/rothenberg.htm.



Whenever I visit my wife's cousins in Kildu, Estonia, I always take the same route on a bicycle, heading west on a straight dirt road that soon leaves the farm lands of potato, rye, mustard, and rapeseed to enter a cool, swampy forest. The road, sometimes wet, other times dry, heads straight as an arrow deeper into the swamp country, called *soomaa* in Estonian. Various roads cross the main one, all fainter, but most equally straight like some perfect grid imposed on the landscape from above. It's easy to confuse one road with another, but I know that to make my circular tour I have to turn right at just one correct path, and each time I approach it I know it is the right one because it is a road that one simply must turn down, it is so inviting.

What's so special about this road, this tiny *sootee* that separates it from all the others? Every time I'm there I just know I have to make the turn, but this time I stopped to study closely what defines this road that I must travel by.

First off it is a road that begins as straight and determinedly as all the others, clearly drawn out with no regard for any curve of landscape, just a set human vision. But a few hundred meters in, at the limits of what one can see, a slight curve begins. The road veers to the right, as if telling us something. I need to go down it to see why that's the way to go. At the beginning, the tall pines on both sides of the track are rigid and regimented, all put in the ground exactly at the same time. Except one, a high sliver of a tree that leans from the left edge arcing over the right, framing the view, making me want to look out that direction further. Past this one gating tree, the tall pines have been thinned. I glimpse a large clearing, but smaller trees have started to grow there. So it's at least 20 years old, back in a whole different time, when the independence of Estonia was hardly recognized. When no one owned their own farms, and no one could speak their mind, and if they did, the language they used was that of the oppressed, the annexed, a whole nation who had to tow the Soviet line.

Yes, I bicycle down the main swamp road to another that I have to turn down. I have no idea if anyone else feels that way but this road eventually takes me back to the Kildu farm. En route I pass about four houses which are always empty, and one at which there is a single barking dog who gets a little older and frailer each time I pedal past. Why all these roads, and no people? It is a once-

managed, slightly human, cut and planted landscape, but it is unusually empty. On the one-hour ride there is at most one car driving by and shaking up the dust in my face; often there is no one at all.

Estonia is the least densely populated country in Europe, less than one person per square kilometer outside of its few cities and towns. Right here that one person is me, cruising down paths over which I have no choice, circling back to the farm that has been in the family for hundreds of years. Those few people left are certainly grounded firmly to these places, but there seem so few of them. What counts as a village could be an assortment of houses where your neighbor is close enough so you can see if his fire is burning, but far enough away so that you can't hear what he is doing. The flat fields and forests, the swamps and limestone rivers, it's all been here for centuries, even thousadns of years, tended by a people who sometimes see themselves as the Indians of Europe, rooted to this terrain for thousands of years.

But like most small nations, it is also a land that has been occupied by larger powers for most of its history: Germans, Swedes, and most recently Russians, who had this land for almost 50 years from World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Amidst the bucolic farms are crumbling, poorly-built drab apartments where Soviet Estonians were supposed to live as all the farmland was collectivized and run by the state. These structures are laughably out of place, and are slowly rotting away into crumbling monuments of a cynical desire to rule oppressively in the name of glorifying the workers.

The Soviet state left Estonia without a drop of blood being shed. Nearly one-third the population of the country, a mass 500,000 strong, came together in 1988 to sing forbidden songs of freedom at the huge Song Grounds in the capitol city of Tallinn. This time when the forbidden blue white black tri-band flag from prewar independent Estonia was flown, nothing could be done—the people had spoken, the enforced lies of Moscow could no longer hold. This is now called "The Singing Revolution," and there are a few books and films about it, though around the world the story of a nation that sang its oppressors away with just the power of music is not so widely known. The louder songs are about guns and war.

The week before this ritual bicycle ride I was at the latest national song festival, now held every four years, with nearly a hundred thousand Estonians and foreign guests, all singing the familiar and

unfamiliar songs of freedom and triumph together. As the many voices resounded as one I felt honored to be part of this one small nation's particular claim to freedom, as well as part of humanity's universal need for the same.

"This is a brief moment," wrote Estonian poet Doris Kareva, "of ecstatic togetherness, rising almost into the air in a mythical ship of joy and hope, a ship that has proved to be capable of carrying one nation over the most dangerous, most difficult rocks of time."

Back in the forest, I recall how so many people came out of their reclusive villages and forest cabins and used music to change the world. They gathered because they had to stand up for their nation, and did it at just the right time. The countryside is empty, even years after freedom was claimed for the nation in the big city. But these tiny forest routes hold onto their stories. The pull of the landscape remains down that special road one cannot pass by.

David Rothenberg, the author of *Why Birds Sing: A Journey through the Mystery of Bird Song* and *Thousand Mile Song: Whale Music in a Sea of Sound*, is working on a book on why nature is beautiful, to be published by Bloomsbury in 2011.

Column: A Stone's Throw
by Lauret Savoy, *Terrain.org* Editorial Board Member

The View from Point Sublime

We entered Grand Canyon National Park before sunrise that July morning and turned onto the primitive road to Point Sublime, in those ancient days when a Cadillac could negotiate the unpaved 17 miles relatively unbattered. My father had driven through the Kaibab Plateau forest from Jacob Lake, momma up front with him. I sat in the back seat with my 18-year-old cousin, Cissie, snapping shots through the rear windows with a Kodak Instamatic. For two hours or more in the cool, brightening dawn we passed through aspen-edged meadows and stands of Ponderosa pine. Up resistant limestone knolls, down around sinks and ravines we drove, then—through small breaks in the trees—we briefly glimpsed a distant level horizon backlit by the low morning Sun. I didn't know what to expect at road's end, and I've never forgotten what was found.

What is it about memory that can hold you and never stale—like this place-moment from childhood—as if it's still formative decades later? More than 40 years have passed since that morning we first stood at the canyon's North Rim. I was just seven years old, yet the memory remains as new as yesterday, indelible. And the need to return to Point Sublime still pulls.

Three-part "Panorama from Point Sublime" by William Henry Holmes, in *Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District* (1882). Left to right: Looking East, Looking South, and Looking West.

The point was named by Clarence Edward Dutton and other members of a geological field team he led from 1875 to 1881, initially as part of John Wesley Powell's Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, then under the new U. S. Geological Survey. It tips a long promontory that juts southward like a pointing finger from the forested Kaibab knuckle into the widest part of the Grand Canyon. For Dutton the view from the point was "the most sublime and awe-inspiring spectacle in the world."

When the Grand Canyon became a national park in 1919, three years after the creation of the National Park Service, North Rim "roads" were the ends of old, rutted wagon tracks used by ranchers and early "tourism entrepreneurs" to Cape Royal and Point Sublime, along with a Forest Service road to Bright Angel Point. In 1924, a rough road replaced the old track to Point Sublime to help crews fight forest fires.

More than 44,000 people visited the Grand Canyon in its first year as a national park, most of them

by railroad. But auto travel quickly became the norm and after 1925, when visiting motorists first outnumbered rail passengers, park administrators began to build real auto roads and campgrounds on both rims to meet demand. Even though the road to Point Sublime was still a narrow, twisting, poorly graded path, it was taken so often by tourists that the park decided to maintain it as a primitive but not main road.

Now nearly five million people visit the park each year. The Point Sublime road is sometimes impassable, and today sane drivers wouldn't dream of risking a two-wheel-drive or low-clearance vehicle on it. Still, the slow, bumpy way draws those who wish to see the canyon far from crowds and pavement—as my father wanted us to do four decades ago.

With no prior perceptual experience of the canyon's immense scale, we were not prepared for the view. Neither were the men of the Spanish Entrada more than 400 years earlier. In 1540 Francisco Vasquez de Coronado ordered García López de Cárdenas and a few soldiers to find the great (and possibly navigable) river described by Hopi people. These first Europeans to march up to the South Rim and look into the Grand Canyon could not see or measure its physical scale in their minds. According to Pedro de Castañeda, a chronicler of the expedition:

> They spent three days on this bank looking for a passage down to the river, which looked from above as if the water was six feet across, although the Indians said it was half a league wide. . . [T]he three lightest and most agile men, made an attempt to go down at the least difficult place. . . They returned about four o'clock in the afternoon, not having succeeded in reaching the bottom on account of the great difficulties which they found, because what seemed to be easy from above was not so, but instead very hard and difficult. They said that they had been down about a third of the way and that the river seemed very large from the place which they reached, and that from what they saw they thought the Indians had given the width correctly. Those who stayed above had estimated that some huge rocks on the sides of cliffs seemed to be about as tall as a man, but those who went down swore that when they reached these rocks they were bigger than the great tower of Seville.

The Spaniards were accustomed to other lands, having no familiarity with a place of such proportion. Writing 300 years later, Clarence Dutton understood how easily one could be tricked at the first views from the canyon rim: "As we contemplate these objects we find it quite impossible to realize their magnitude. Not only are we deceived, but we are conscious that we are deceived, and yet cannot conquer the deception . . . Dimensions mean nothing to the senses, and all that we are conscious of in this respect is a troubled sense of immensity."

Point Sublime has a prominent place in Dutton's *Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District*, the first monograph published by the young U. S. Geological Survey (in 1882). This master synthesis is one of the primary documents to outline a geologic understanding of the canyon and plateau country's origin. Lavishly illustrated with topographic line drawings by William Henry Holmes, Thomas Moran's paintings and drawings, and heliotypes of Jack Hillers's photographs, *Tertiary History* is a literary, evocative, and still vital work that was done before scientific specialization placed constraints on written and visual language. In it Dutton looked out from Point Sublime and described the grand geologic *ensemble*: the immense physical depth and breadth exposing a great slice of Earth history in canyon walls; and the more recent work of uplift and erosion over perhaps a still unimaginable span of time to create the canyon itself. Clarence Dutton also brought the reader to the edge of Point Sublime to behold the layered order and beauty of this eroding land at a time

when those long accustomed to humid eastern landscapes might have spurned southwestern canyons and deserts for their apparent harshness. His words helped change the terms of perception.

> The Grand Cañon of the Colorado is a great innovation in modern ideas of scenery, and in our conceptions of the grandeur, beauty, and power of nature. As with all great innovations it is not to be comprehended in a day or a week, nor even in a month. It must be dwelt upon and studied, and the study must comprise the slow acquisition of the meaning and spirit of that marvelous scenery which characterizes the Plateau Country, and of which the great chasm is the superlative manifestation. The study and slow mastery of the influences of that class of scenery and its full appreciation is a special culture, requiring time, patience, and long familiarity for its consummation. The lover of nature, whose perceptions have been trained in the Alps, in Italy, Germany, or New England, in the Appalachians or Cordilleras, in Scotland or Colorado, would enter this strange region with a shock, and dwell there for a time with a sense of oppression, and perhaps with horror. Whatsoever things he had learned to regard as beautiful and noble he would seldom or never see, and whatsoever he might see would appear to him as anything but beautiful and noble. . . The tones and shades, modest and tender, subdued yet rich, in which his fancy had always taken special delight, would be the ones which are conspicuously absent. But time would bring a gradual change. . . Great innovations, whether in art or literature, in science or in nature, seldom take the world by storm. They must be understood before they can be estimated, and they must be cultivated before they can be understood.

For historian Stephen Pyne, *Tertiary History of the Grand Cañon District* "created the view from the rim" and, along with John Wesley Powell's river-centered *Exploration of the Colorado River and its Canyons*, "made the Canyon truly Grand." Writing earlier, Wallace Stegner referred to Clarence Dutton as "almost as much the *genius loci* of the Grand Canyon as Muir is of Yosemite." For, although visiting tourists may not be aware of the debt owed, "it is with Dutton's eyes, as often as not, that they see."

The author's first time at Point Sublime.
Photo courtesy Lauret Savoy.

And what of that long-ago morning when my family reached the canyon rim? What did we bring to that view and how did we see? There *was* little hint or warning where the Kaibab forest ended at the sharp limestone edge, and the suddenness of reaching a point where land fell away at our feet to inconceivable depths did stun. For me, though, coming to Point Sublime was a journey of and to perception, to another measure of the world at a susceptible age.

That world began in coastal California for me, the only child of older parents who had migrated westward, my father searching for opportunity, my mother following without question. They first lived in San Francisco, then moved after my birth to Los Angeles, a continent away from their families. High rugged mountains and the Pacific Ocean rimmed my known world, and they were the

landscapes in which my perceptual habits and self-knowledge formed in the early and mid 1960s. Freeways and buildings had little part of it. As a four- or five-year-old I even believed that sky-light's brilliant depth made my body, just as it illuminated the land and water's edge. When we visited my parents' families, the East I saw was a humid decaying world covered by a faded sky.

As my father neared the age of 50, he decided to move us to his familial home of Washington, D.C., hoping to secure more dignified work and a respectable life for his family. And because I had no choice but to journey east with them; because he decided we'd drive across country in a leased 1966 Coupe de Ville, roomy and comfortable enough for four; because he with my mother chose to visit the Grand Canyon's North Rim on the way—because of all these things I stood, as a little girl with camera in hand, at the edge of immensity.

In hindsight I know that the moments at Point Sublime helped define the terms and frame of my identity, of who I'd become. Geologist. Photographer. Writer. Dreamer. Is a seven-year-old too young to understand what she sees or feels? Still, the raw perceptions were deeply embedded early in my life, and then guided how I understood the world. It was as if that place, so undisguised, asked some untested circuitry to respond to it, and to myself, with all my senses.

I've also long wondered if the frame within which a child begins to make his or her own world is constructed, by chance or on purpose, through the lives of each generation of parents. If so then even a single event or decision can make inevitable a series of others—as if I've arrived at who I am by either random or semi-directed accidents. The transcontinental trip redefined my child-sense and experience of place, and at Point Sublime I understood the land's beyond-human scale as another form of home. With photographs and postcards of coastal California and every light-touched canyon, desert, and mountain that we passed until we reached the plains, and with gathered stones, I thought I could bring my home with me.

The author returns to Point Sublime, minus the original sign.
Photo courtesy Lauret Savoy.

Four decades have passed since The Move. My parents were in their mid- and late forties then, and I am now my father's age, having lived most of my life in the East for reasons that, at moments of decision, seemed right. Yet, that child's sense of home and perception is my baseline—and I've returned all the way to Point Sublime fewer times than I've attempted or felt the need to. Early this summer, though, I camped there with my partner. The sign post remains, but for many years without the carved, wooden viewpoint marker that I stood next to as a child. *Pt. Sublime Elev 7464.* We shared those days with

ravens and white-throated swifts.

The North Rim is a sharp physical edge. There, this summer, I understood how many other edges my family had crossed, too. West to east. Before to after. Leaving my child home for my father's childhood home. We traveled together to stand at a remote canyon viewpoint, but arrived for different reasons at different ages, with different points of view and needs through which our experiences, and their meanings, were then filtered. The move for me was from a self-defined world to an unwanted unknown, for my father it was a return to a place of origins and hope.

What did that early morning at the Grand Canyon mean to my father, when he took a detour from his homeward journey of near desperation? Or to my mother? I can't make 1966 or 1967 or any year return. I can't step into that place in those bright moments when my parents were alive. I can't conjure an intact family full of hope. What I can know or tell of them—or even myself—is fragmented and incomplete. Too few words remain about who we were to each other or to any place.

I am witness from a later time, sorting through pieces. To moments that didn't break the heart. To what always felt elemental to who I am and where I belong on the American land. This sorting may be hindsight and, perhaps, I cannot be completely true to that time and child because I know our future. But Point Sublime remains a gift, and to look out from it even once is to imagine a new kind of possibility.

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Lauret Savoy writes and photographs across threads of cultural identity to explore their shaping by relationship with and dislocation from the land. A woman of African-American, Euro-American, and Native-American heritage, she is a professor of environmental studies and geology at Mount Holyoke College. Her books include *Bedrock: Writers on the Wonders of Geology*, *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World* (second edition due out at the end of 2010), and *Living with the Changing California Coast*.

Interview

Terrain.org interviews poet A. R. Ammons

Introduction from the Editor

The following interview was conducted by Philip Fried, editor of *The Manhattan Review*, for *MR's* Fall 1980 issue.

A. R. Ammons, who passed away in February 2001, was 54 at the time of the interview. The interview includes an introduction and afterword(s) by Fried. This interview, introduction, and afterword(s)—appearing in full for the first time online—are reprinted by permission of Philip Fried.

About A. R. Ammons

A. R. Ammons
Photo by Robert Barker, courtesy Cornell University Photography.

Archie Randolph Ammons was born on a farm near Whiteville, North Carolina, on February 18, 1926, and graduated from Wake Forest University, where he received a bachelor's degree in biology. He began writing poetry while serving onboard a U.S. Naval destroyer during World War II. He attended graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley, with his wife Phyllis (who was his Spanish teacher at Wake Forest), worked as an elementary school principal for a year, as a real estate salesmen, an editor, and a sales executive at his father-in-law's New Jersey biological glass company.

His first book of poetry, *Ommateum, with Doxology*, was published in 1955. It sold a total of 16 copies over five years. He published nearly 30 more

books over the next half-century, two posthumously. Ammons was twice winner of the National Book Award—in 1973 for *Collected Poems, 1951-1971*, and in 1993 for *Garbage*. He has won virtually every other major prize for poetry in the U.S., including the Frost Medal for Distinguished Achievement in Poetry over a Lifetime; the Bollingen Prize for *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*; the National Book Critics Circle Award for *A Coast of Trees*; the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize; as well as a Lannan Foundation Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, and a MacArthur "genius award" fellowship. In 1998 he received the Tanning Prize, a $100,000 award for "outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry." In 1990 he was inducted into the National Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters.

Self-portrait watercolor painting by A. R. Ammons, dated 1977.
Image courtesy Joyner Library Digital Collections, East Carolina University.

Ammons found literary refuge at Cornell University in 1964, where he taught in formal classroom settings and presided over weekly discussions with other poets in a basement campus coffee shop, the Temple of Zeus. He was known as a marvelous conversationalist. He retired as Cornell's Goldwin Smith Professor of Poetry in 1998 and died on February 25, 2001. He was 75.

Yale literary critic Harold Bloom said, "No contemporary poet in America is likelier to become a classic than A. R. Ammons." The 1973 National Book Award citation said, "In the enormous range of his work, from the briefest confrontations with the visual to long powerful visionary poems, he has extended into our present and our future the great American tradition of which Emerson and Whitman were founders." Roald Hoffmann, his friend and a Nobel laureate in chemistry, said, "His search, gentle yet insistent, is for a philosophy of nature—a metaphysics always, an epistemology of openness to the connectedness of things and ideas, its inherent logic, an aesthetics rooted in the wonder of it all and reinforced by the purposive harmony of his poems, an ethics, even an eschatology of the very real world."

Sources: Franklin Crawford, *Cornell Chronicle*, and Doreen Carvajal, *The New York Times*.

Original Interview Introduction

by Philip Fried

A. R. Ammons lives with his wife and son in a comfortable house on Hanshaw Road, a short drive from the center of Ithaca, New York. On this particular Saturday in late June—one of those remarkably clear days that seem to come only several times a year—he was casually dressed, as if ready to mow the lawn or just lounge around. He is tall, about 6'2", with a fair complexion and red

hair that has receded to his temples. His voice is soft and Southern. Although he is obviously a private person, he is an attentive host and displays a great deal of warmth and concern.

The interview took place in his small study upstairs, the room where he writes. Ammons took the less comfortable chair near the door, generously ceding to me a large, padded rocker. I placed the tape recorder on the wooden table between us, near a window overlooking the backyard.

Interview

Philip Fried: Did you say that you met William Carlos Williams?

A. R. Ammons: I did. I used to be in the sales department of this company in south Jersey. On occasion, I would be up in his area and take him for a ride, because something had happened to Flossie's neck. Is Flossie still alive by the way? [William Carlos Williams' wife, Flossie, died in June of 1976 at the age of 86.] He couldn't drive after one or two of his operations.

PF: The strokes?

Ammons: Yes. I would take him out for drives.

PF: I feel Williams' influence strongly in *Tape for the Turn of the Year*. Don't you mention a Williams event there?

Ammons: Oh yes, the reception for Flossie after he had died, the reception for her in New York.

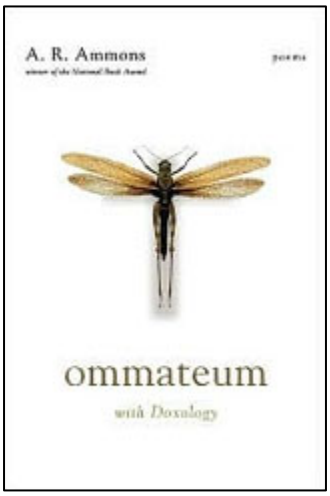
PF: Right. I feel Williams' spirit running through the *Tape*: a sense of persistence, love of the commonplace, and endurance.

Ammons: I didn't begin by liking him that much. I remember when I came back from Berkeley in the early fifties and settled in south Jersey, some of his poems would come out; one called "The Symphony," I think, came out in *Poetry* magazine, and I really didn't care for that sort of poetry at that time.

PF: What were the qualities that turned you off?

Ammons: It seemed to me somewhat an empty idea, somewhat inane to reproduce the sounds of a symphony. It sounded like writing a poem about a picture, which Williams would also do at times and that contains a distressing element in it. That seemed to me very empty, and also the language seemed to lose tension in the freedom of its flow at times. You know, I have been guilty of that myself subsequently, but in those early days, I was writing the Ezra poems myself, which were very highly assimilated symbolically and allegorically and didn't at all lend themselves to that kind of displaying or setting out. I didn't like it.

But Josephine Miles would continue to say to me in a card now and then: Why don't you go see Williams? So, finally, ten years later, I did, and by that time, I had come to like his poems. I think it was a kind of political sociological change because I could see people more then than I could in



those early days, when I was too transcendental to have any transactions with people!

PF: Was Josephine Miles an important influence on your work?

Ammons: It was personal. I don't think that she and I have ever shared very much in regard to the theory of poetry. But I loved her as a person. She seemed to me so majestic. You know she's crippled and had been from the age of five. She so totally rose above that without denying it that I always had a tremendous respect and love for her.

I never did take any classes with her, but when I was out there [Berkeley], I used to show her my poems, and she would read them and comment on them, and that was a very valuable thing to me. By the way, she continued to do it, and she was the one person I chose out of the world to hassle. So I kept sending her poems, having no idea what a drain this was on her. But I would say on the average of two or three times a year, I would send her one or more poems to read and say something about. And it was a lifesaver to me, because in south Jersey I knew absolutely no one else in poetry.

PF: So did you have a sense of isolation when you were working in the business world?

Ammons: It was total isolation. So much so that in 1956, this would be five years after leaving Berkeley—

PF: And a year after your first book.

Ammons: That's right, which was a vanity publication.

PF: Dorrance.

Ammons: That's right. By the way, they've begun to publish again after all these years.

PF: And it's impossible now to get your book anywhere. But there's a more positive aspect to publishing in such a way now; it is more accepted.

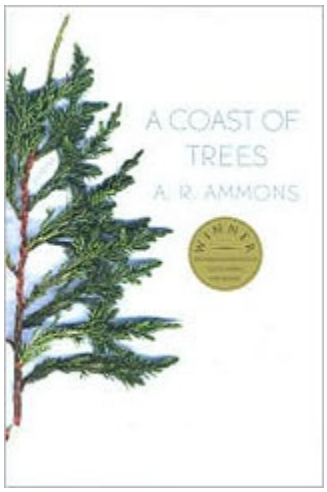
Ammons: Oh, it should be, it is now.

PF: Of course, Whitman was a self-publication.

Ammons: Yes, the trouble with it in those days was that the idea of dignity and credibility was based on this hardbound book. We've moved away from that now, so that a young poet can publish a booklet of his poems and be in just as good company as if MacMillan had done it in gilt-edged leather. That's a wonderful change that's taken place, and so most poetry today is published, if not directly by the person, certainly by the enterprise of the poet himself, working with his friends.

PF: What plan did you have for distribution when you did that?

Ammons: I had no plan whatever. I guess Dorrance must have known that they wouldn't sell, so though they had said they would produce 300 copies, they actually may have printed 300 sheets, but they only bound 100 copies. And I think they eventually threw away the other 200 because they couldn't sell the first 100. In five years, it sold 16 copies.



Then my father-in-law bought about 40 or 50 and sent them to South America, to some of his customers, who couldn't read it.

In south Jersey, though, just to tie off the thread, a year after the publication of this book, I wrote away to the University of Chicago on a home-study thing. As it turned out, John Logan was the reader, and I had seen one or two of his poems which just started to come out in *Poetry* magazine. And so we did one or two lessons, but then dropped that, and I sent him some copies of my book, and he gave them to some people, and so it got one review, in *Poetry* magazine, as a result of that.

PF: When did you start writing? Were you in your teens?

Ammons: Yes, it was 19 actually. I was in the South Pacific during World War II. I had a little journal. You weren't supposed to keep journals, but I had one anyhow.

PF: Why weren't you supposed to?

Ammons: Because it might be information for the enemy. You know, the war was still on. But I still have that log, telling every place we went and everything we did. Nothing very exciting, but I began to write then and continued through Wake Forest University, which had no writing courses in those days, but I wrote the whole four years.

Meanwhile, I was taking pre-med and science courses, and that's where the combination of poetry and science started. I was never aware that I was writing poetry with scientific terminology. I was just writing from where I was, which was a mixture of science and poetry.

PF: Did science come very naturally to you?

Ammons: I did very well in science, except for embryology, which for some reason I had a terrible time in. I remember the identification of parts through slides was a very difficult thing. But in every other way, I was a very good student in science.

PF: What was it about science that especially appealed to you? Was it the sweep of theory or the precision?

Ammons: I think a combination, and I think that I reacted instinctively then, and that I only now would try to say why. Of course, it would be a reconstruction on my part. I think that I had a strong

need at that time to escape certain responsibilities of interpersonal relations and that science gave me a sense of an objective inquiry into an objective subject. And there's a kind of stability in that. It's sort of a pagan way of associating yourself with universals rather than with the coming and going of mortal things.

PF: That's interesting, science as pagan.

Ammons: It seems to me that the pagan tradition is now represented by science. Of course, there have to be modifications, but if you think of the pagan societies as rather carefully paying attention to what the natural forces were around them and then trying to identify with and, as it were, listen to what that force was and appease it, and know something about it, learn its nature, then science does precisely the same thing today.

It puts aside, for the moment, its personal interest in things and tries to know what is the nature of that thing out there. I regard that as a very high value. The humanities often feel opposed to that because that attitude obviously puts human things secondary, whereas the humanities have often claimed that man is the center of everything and has the right to destroy or build or do whatever he wishes. Well, that's an exaggerated statement—just to put it briefly.

There was a very moving article in the *Midwest Quarterly* about what was called archeo-astronomy. It's a combination of archeology and astronomy, and it studies specifically the megaliths and henges like Stonehenge. There are thousands of those places where, through the erection of stone circles and so on, the people were able to bring themselves into correspondence with cosmic order and with the coming—by the way, today is the summer solstice—and that's what those stone circles meant to measure, the winter and summer solstices. But they allied impermanent man with the eternal structure of things.

I came home and told my wife that that article seemed the best review of my work I ever read, but it had nothing to do with it! It's not noticeable from here [referring to the watercolors he has painted and which hang in his house; see the Afterword(s)] but circles and radial points coming from circles are very prominent in all my work, including the painting. Of course, then they talk about something called the sacred center, and once you have a ring of stones, as you approach the center of this, you approach the highest kind of integration you can imagine between the material and the spiritual, between the stone that lasts forever and the starlight which is ephemeral, between man and his time and the larger, apparently eternal.

PF: Poets today seem isolated in their writing; they don't connect with some of these other fields you mention. They seem to just cultivate sensitivity.

Ammons: Do you think anyone who had any sensitivity would ever want to cultivate it? And anyhow we might have to distinguish between sensitivity and sensibility. I've always been worried about people who wanted to be poets, and this distresses me every time a new group shows up for a class. It seems to me if they had ever been hit by the instability and improbability—

PF: They would try to avoid it?

Ammons: Yes. I think true poets are often in flight from their poetry, and it is only when they become fairly heroic that they can stand and look their own poetry and their own self in the face, because most of the big poets we know are monsters.

PF: Monsters in what sense?

Ammons: Well, they're monstrous in their achievement or in their—the size of the pressure is so large and inhuman. It often seems not to be a structure that allows a great range of subtle values. There are those huge, excessive insistences that bring pressure not only on the poor poet himself but on everybody around him. I mean monstrousness of that size, of huge insistence, devouring insistence.

I think it's probably necessary that all people ought to be in flight from such things. It may be absolutely necessary for the vigor of the poetry for that kind of energy to have been invested in it, but it's not the kind of thing you wish to live with, it seems. A parallel situation is the person who's very boring, let's say, and needs to feel moved, and he goes to the movies, and he finds that the more horrible the movie, the more he's moved by it. Someone who is likely to be a poet would be already overwhelmed by the death of an ant he had stepped on or something else. He wouldn't need to go to the movies to be stirred. He'd already be over-stimulated.

Another thing, there are two kinds of poet here. One kind of poet feels very little apparently, or it isn't accessible to him. He has to hack at it. He has to build the poem, and he comes back revision after revision, working his energy up to where he has it. The other kind of poetry is doing just the opposite. He has so much anxiety inside, so he's trying to dissolve it away, and instead of making large, hacking gestures to try to build energy into a system, he's being easy and quiet because he knows more is going on than he can handle, and he's trying to dissolve—

PF: Would you say that Lowell was a hacker?

Ammons: Yes, Yeats, Lowell, yeah. I would say that Stevens was a man under great pressure and did beautifully cool things to try to cause it to subside.

PF: You put Stevens in the opposite camp. What about yourself?

Ammons: I am certainly the opposite. Mr. Ashbery is in the opposite. But these two kinds of poet will never understand each other.

PF: So you don't do much revision?

Ammons: You know, one does everything. And in my short poems, I go over them and over them testing them out. Often, I don't change more than a word or two, but sometimes the whole poem is radically changed.

But it is true that for the last ten years in particular, I have practiced over and over, poem by poem, to try to see if I could reach the absolute crazy points where what is happening in my mind and what

is happening on the page seem to be identical. That's the thing I'm working toward. The problem is that once you get there, it no longer seems necessary to write.

PF: Once you feel you can make that connection at will.

Ammons: Once there seems to be a correspondence between the event and the word.

Untitled watercolor painting by A. R. Ammons, dated 1980.
Image courtesy Joyner Library Digital Collections, East Carolina University.

PF: What about the element of communication to a reader? Do you consider that extraneous?

Ammons: It is for me. I'm never aware that I'm speaking to anyone, and I suppose I'm not. I never think of an audience or anyone out there to whom this poem is being addressed.

One thing I do sometimes think of, and that is that if I can get this poem right, then it will represent getting the poem right for other people. That is to say, what happens to me is representative of what can happen in other minds.

PF: So it's a kind of paradigm.

Ammons: Yes, I'm trying to reach a paradigm, and once it's there, the shape is there, then if someone else wanted to test themselves against it… but I never had any feeling, direct feeling that there's something I know that I must tell you.

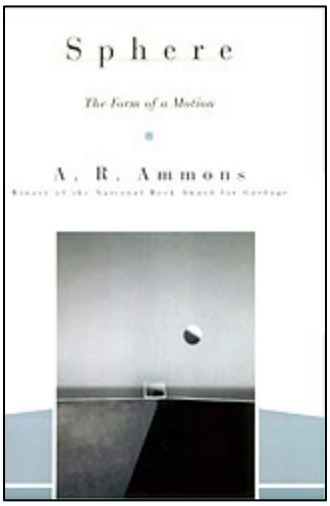
PF: But one of the strongest aspects of your work is the relationship you create with the reader, especially in the longer poems like "Hibernaculum" and *Sphere*. It feels to me like you are reaching out.

Ammons: The thing is, how do you do this? How do you reach that person, and here's the room where I do my work, and obviously I can't shout loud enough to be heard by anyone. So what I have to do is make something, some vehicle that then that person will come in touch with.

That's what I'm listening for, the accuracy of that communication between me and the poem. Certainly I'm interested in communication, but that's not the first thing you have to do. First, you have to build a figure that will make communication possible.

PF: The appearance of your poems on the page seems important. Does this translate into reading out loud, or is it primarily a visual experience?

Ammons: I've done a good many kinds of experiments, right? Some of them look like purposely regular stanzas and some don't. In some, the indentations correspond from stanza to stanza, the same line by line. But in some of them there is the random. I usually feel that I don't have anything to say of my own until I have tripped the regular world, until I have thrown the Western mind itself



somehow off, and I think that's what those—if I began to write a sonnet, for example, I think I would be stultified and silenced by that form, because it's my nature to want to trip that form out of existence as a way of making room for myself to speak and act.

I think I feel the same kind of sociological confrontation with things like capital letters and periods, because that belongs to the world I want to dismiss. So I think by the indentation and other devices, I try to throw the expected response out of line and then, it seems to me, I can come through with my own way of saying what I have to say.

By the way, what I've just said is just an attempt at this point to give an explanation for something I did without thinking. It seems to me that the thing a writer must be faithful to is what he feels like doing, through he doesn't yet know why. He feels like doing it, right, and later on perhaps he or someone else—it won't need necessarily be the poet—can find out whether or not he was answering to something accurate within himself or the world around him when he did that.

PF: In "Coon Song" you tell the reader that you won't entertain him but in poems like *Sphere* you do seem to make an effort if not to entertain then to hold. Would you comment on that?

Ammons: A colleague here recently taught that poem in one of his classes and he asked me to come the second day and talk with them. I did, and it's a poem that a reader can have more than one disposition towards [referring to "Coon Song"]. But we discovered that once you identify with the coon, the poem clears up. So though it sounds as if there's a speaker in the poem talking against the reader, those things are reconciled if you adopt the point of view of the subject in question, the poor raccoon, who is being hounded by these animals and about to be destroyed by them.

I didn't take time to go through a full exposition of that because it takes a long time. Later on, it's true, I think it's in *Sphere* that I said something about wanting to hold someone's attention. Now, do you know that poem of Frost's about how the more we hid ourselves away, the more necessary it becomes to reveal something about ourselves? ["Revelation" by Robert Frost.] Well, there's some such duality going on.

I think I feel that a great deal, that obviously I'm pretty hidden away here, especially with the typewriter at night, writing in a severe state of isolation. And I think I wish to hope that there's someone somewhere to whom I'm speaking and that this poem might bring me closer to. But there has to be a limit on that, because I don't want to be brought too close. But I think I may not be answering your question.

PF: One of the intriguing things about your longer poems is the oratorical voice that goes through so many changes, so many personae. Is it someone orating?

Ammons: All right, I think there's something to that, but the confusion may come from the fact that I'm not always speaking for myself but for others. That's where representativeness comes in. Some

of the time I'm speaking my own interest in the matter, and some of the time I'm trying to capture other interests that I have observed. So I try to speak for myself and for others, to the extent they might be able to interest themselves in that particular kind of speaking. At other times, I think the voice is simply a single voice saying, this is me. But not in the long poems. I think in the long poems there's more various kinds of—

PF: There's a drama between the personae. Sometimes it seems there's a medicine man, a circus barker, very showful types of voices, and this relates to your idea of showing forth. What is hidden and what is shown are constant concerns of your poetry.

Ammons: This touches on some of my background, my Southern background, and I mention it because I just read a piece by William Harmon on my poems, and he talks about—he said that they were 90 percent horse sense and ten percent goofing around. That is true: in the South there is a great deal of interaction, and people don't tell you simply what they think and feel but they go into all these stories and anecdotes and jokes and they put on a show, and then they mean for the show to take the message through. I think I do that.

Also, the religious thing is very strong in my background, where we had all kinds of preaching and dancing and holy rolling and so on took place, including glossalalia or whatever it is.

PF: Speaking in tongues?

Ammons: Yeah. I've seen people do that for hours.

PF: You do it a little bit in your poems.

Ammons: Just a little. It's incredible to watch a person whose behavior is absolutely regular as if he were buying ham from a delicatessen speaking to you in totally understandable words. Not done in a frenzy. I remember sitting on a bench in church when a person so possessed would come directly and stand in front of you as if telling you how to bake a cake and would go through this rigmarole and be absolutely unintelligible.

PF: You said in an interview once that you felt you repudiated your Southern background and yet I've felt this rhetorical thing not as a technique but as the Southern background coming through strongly.

Ammons: I think you're right.

PF: As far as spirit of place goes, you have Northern landscapes and, of course, the beach and dunes, and yet in this approach we've been discussing you are Southern. Why did you decide to leave the South?

Ammons: A lot of things happened. First of all, my father sold the farm that I was raised on, so I knew that route was cut. I couldn't stay there.

PF: But you considered it, though.

Ammons: Yes, I would have been a farmer, I think, but then I went into the Navy.

PF: Were you about 18 or 19?

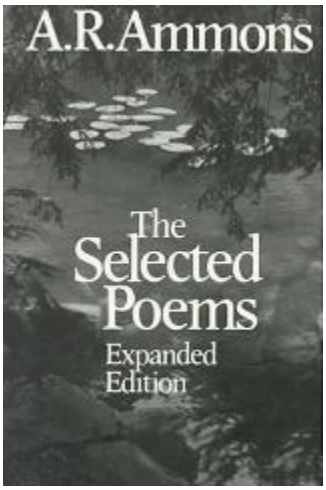
Ammons: Eighteen. But that gave me nearly enough credits to go to college, so when I came out I went. I knew I was relatively smart. I had been valedictorian in grammar school and in high school I had done well, so I figured that—oh, in high school I had been one of six people who had passed the college entrance exam. So I figured I had a chance.

Going to college, I began to inquire into this religious background which was so strong and so severe, and I got it more and more on a rational and historic level, which moved me intellectually from those positions that my family and aunts and uncles would have taken to be natural. See, I was already in exile in that country.

PF: In the sense that you—

Ammons: Was no longer able to accept the doctrine familiar throughout my youth. So moving out of it was a kind of relief, and there at Wake Forest I met Phyllis, who was studying and teaching there a little bit. We got married my first year out of college, when I was principal of the elementary school in Cape Hatteras. And she said, why don't we go to Berkeley, because she had already gone out there a year or two before that.

I did a little graduate work there. Then we came back to south Jersey, which was her home, and I got a job there. And I had felt without interruption the tug to go back to North Carolina. That's my center, that's where my home is.



PF: You have a wonderful poem about going back there underground when you die.

Ammons: But now, this is home, and I feel better here than anywhere in the country. I haven't lived in the South now, believe it or not, for 27 years. I've lived out of it longer than in it. But you know, those first years are crucial. So I guess I'm not at home in either place now, which is sort of terrible, but I'm more nearly at home here now.

PF: You know what Southern writer you also remind me of? Faulkner. He wanted to say everything in one sentence. I feel that, too, about your long poems, with the use of the colon. You don't have any periods, and the poem moves; you build speed into it. You want to get everything in.

Ammons: What is the Faulkner story where the giant comes crashing down at the end? It's a perfectly substantial and transsubstantial event at once, a pure illumination in imagination, a pure reality. I'll never be able to write that well. I think that's very beautiful. But you're surely right that

it's something one longs to write… wedge everything in the world together.

PF: About the colons, was that an instinctive use of punctuation?

Ammons: Yes, it was. I have since heard a great many explanations of the use of them, and they all seem quite reasonable to me. I think they're probably right.

What it feels like to me is a democratization thing, that I won't allow a word to have a capital letter and some other, not. That the world is so interpenetrated that it must be one tissue of size, of letters.

PF: Is that why you tell off redwood trees?

Ammons: Probably. I come from a pretty deprived background economically, and it was very rough; so it's been hard for me to learn how to deal freely with other people, and I think that language is a way of saying, here's a very complex, interwoven system where we insist that certain kinds of existence be equal for every member.

Also, in retrospect, I think of it as sort of a geometric or topological surface like terrain, or "landscapes" is a very strong word in my poetry. Yeah, that they are—what is the skin called? Something like that, something that contains, so the colon jump should do that, just connect and connect and connect, until you build not just the assertion you're making but this landscape.

I've never been interested in single discursive statements as such, as explanation, but I'm interested in clusters of those, because then they become, they sort of come to be the thing they represent. They're many-sided.

PF: In your larger poems, you don't have isolated attitudes. Each attitude calls ahead to some future one that will, if not contradict it at least modify it. This creates a sense of emotional speed. The poem gets drawn from the future, pulled out of the present.

Ammons: I may have said somewhere, but I think it's still true, that you don't want the poem to amount to no more than what you already knew when you began to write. Whatever kind of instrument it may be, it must be one capable of churning up what you didn't already know. That's what creativity is, and it is to be surprised by the end of the poem as much as you expect the reader to be surprised. That's why I think Frost is so right to say, you don't have the prepared last line and then try to write a poem that will end there.

PF: Do you write all your long poems in sequence?

Ammons: That's right, I just begin. I do the same for the short poems; they're written the same way. I never—I can show you some drafts—"Corsons Inlet," that poem "Corsons Inlet" was written just like that, from beginning to end, in one sitting. I don't recommend that as being better than anything else. I'm just saying that's the way I did it. I came back to it, of course, and reconsidered it with my best judgment.

If you weren't learning something, what would be the use of doing it? So you can't write out of just what you know. There's no motivation for that, and so I feel always in agreement with that thing that Emerson said in the essay *Nature*, where he says let me record from day to day my honest thought. Today, I say exactly the way things seem to me. Tomorrow, I also say, and it may differ somewhat from what I said the day before, but the difference, while it may be interesting, is not as important as the hope, which he expresses, that if you go on doing this somehow or other you will come to know a deeper thing that unifies all these days. Whereas if you had tried to plunge towards that deeper symmetry directly, there would be no way you could get there.

PF: Which is the whole feeling behind *Tape for the Turn of the Year*.

Ammons: If I go on just speaking, day-to-day, telling it the way I think it is, it may be that the sense of a presence which belongs to that poem will come to be, and will then interpenetrate—

PF: In fact, one day you could even say, as you do, that the prologue I wrote the day before seems phony and forced to me now.

Ammons: Right.

PF: But you don't go back and cross it out.

Ammons: No, it seemed honest then. This is what has seemed to me always so awful about Yeats when he decided to rewrite his youth. He says, it is myself that I remake, but it's himself that he unmakes. The early self was the early self. And he goes back and unmakes that self, and pours his old man into that young man.

PF: What guided you when you assembled your *Collected Poems, 1951-71*? I noticed that you changed the order of poems from the individual books. Were you restoring the original chronological order?

Ammons: Yes.

PF: Then what led you to put them in a different order to start with?

Ammons: That's a good question. I never had much respect for a single book of poems as an entity, although somebody liked the way I did *Expressions of Sea Level* very much and regretted the time when the dismantling of those books returned the poems to chronological order. But I've been interested in the whole work as a single poem and these minor divisions of it into books never seemed to me very interesting. So I'm still… my favorite is *Collected Poems,* and a book like *Diversifications* means hardly anything to me until I get it back in its order. Eventually, if I do another collected poems—

PF: So it's very much in the spirit of *Leaves of Grass*, a single book which grows.

Ammons: Except that I don't revise the early poems.

PF: In the poem "Plunder," you write about the poet as stealing something from reality, or hunting it. Doesn't this somehow lessen the poet's existential status?

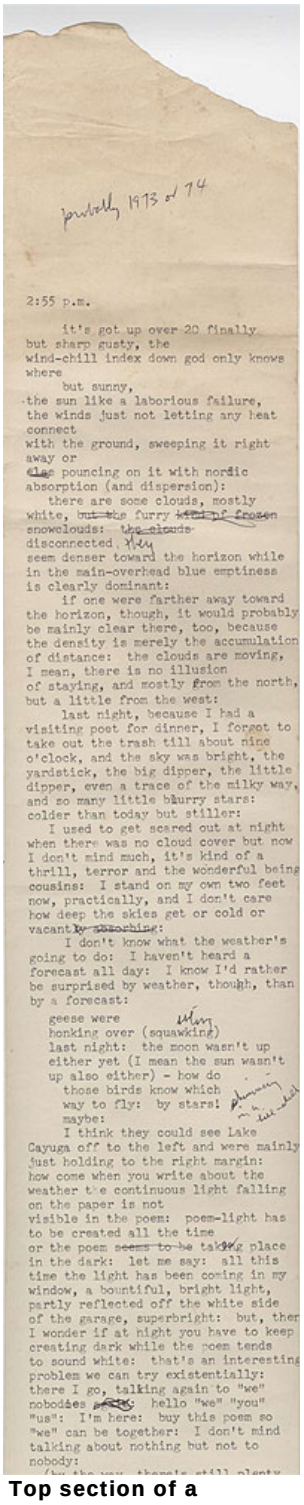
Ammons: Well, "Plunder" ends by saying that I'm "indicted." You know, there are two words—indicted to write, it's the old word for *to write*. But to be indicted by having trampled into those areas—I never understood that poem.

PF: The same thing emerges in a different way in "Motion." Words as music, as motion have as much reality as anything in the world, and yet as a referential system invested by man, words have only a secondary reality, not as important as things. Again, this would seem to put the poet at a disadvantage.

Ammons: I was trying to deal with the difference between words and things. I was trying to insist that somehow, and although there was no direct contact between words and things, the motion of mind and thought corresponded to natural motions, meanders, you know, the winds or streams. And that these might be parallel motions and where a level at which the representation was so basic and so close that it was nearly like actuality itself.

PF: There seems to be a little twinge that I hear when you say that. It's as though "nearly like actuality itself" is said with a certain poignancy.

Ammons: But you see it's more comforting, finally, to think that you don't touch actuality, because supposing you did? Supposing you



probably 1973 or 74

2:55 p.m.

it's got up over 20 finally
but sharp gusty, the
wind-chill index down god only knows
where
but sunny,
the sun like a laborious failure,
the winds just not letting any heat
connect
with the ground, sweeping it right
away or
~~clap~~ pouncing on it with nordic
absorption (and dispersion):
there are some clouds, mostly
white, ~~but~~ the furry ~~kind~~ of frozen
snowclouds: ~~the clouds~~
disconnected, they
seem denser toward the horizon while
in the main-overhead blue emptiness
is clearly dominant:
if one were farther away toward
the horizon, though, it would probably
be mainly clear there, too, because
the density is merely the accumulation
of distance: the clouds are moving,
I mean, there is no illusion
of staying, and mostly from the north,
but a little from the west:
last night, because I had a
visiting poet for dinner, I forgot to
take out the trash till about nine
o'clock, and the sky was bright, the
yardstick, the big dipper, the little
dipper, even a trace of the milky way,
and so many little blurry stars:
colder than today but stiller:
I used to get scared out at night
when there was no cloud cover but now
I don't mind much, it's kind of a
thrill, terror and the wonderful being
cousins: I stand on my own two feet
now, practically, and I don't care
how deep the skies get or cold or
vacant ~~by snoring~~:
I don't know what the weather's
going to do: I haven't heard a
forecast all day: I know I'd rather
be surprised by weather, though, than
by a forecast:
geese were
honking over (squawking)
last night: the moon wasn't up
either yet (I mean the sun wasn't
up also either) - how do
those birds know which
way to fly: by stars!
maybe:
I think they could see Lake
Cayuga off to the left and were mainly
just holding to the right margin:
how come when you write about the
weather the continuous light falling
on the paper is not
visible in the poem: poem-light has
to be created all the time
or the poem ~~seems to be taking~~ place
in the dark: let me say: all this
time the light has been coming in my
window, a bountiful, bright light,
partly reflected off the white side
of the garage, superbright: but, ther
I wonder if at night you have to keep
creating dark while the poem tends
to sound white: that's an interestin
problem we can try existentially:
there I go, talking again to "we"
nobodies ~~are~~: hello "we" "you"
"us": I'm here: buy this poem so
"we" can be together: I don't mind
talking about nothing but not to
nobody:

Top section of a typescript scroll poem draft by A. R. Ammons written in 1973 or 1974. Image courtesy Joyner Library Digital Collections, East Carolina University.

could, literally, change something with your imagination, your words.

PF: But you do.

Ammons: I know, but not in the real, not in the absolutely actual.

PF: But where is the absolutely actual? You're just as much the absolutely actual as a stone, and another person, whom you certainly influence and change by your words. Why not give them the full actuality of the stone?

Ammons: Well, it goes like this. I just read, I had never read it before by the way, *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius. He tries to describe the difference between providence and fate. Providence is that source of all things, ultimately God in his terminology, and fates is the action of that against us. We're trapped in that and must suffer the changes of things, but providence itself is this huge, constant, radiant possibility.

Well, you can't change that. And I'm not sure you can change actuality. On the fate side, we may recognize that we have to accept those limitations and the incarnation imposed upon us. So already, the imagination has had to step down a couple of spaces and what we can change, it seems to me, is the structure we make that we think represents things and is our fiction. We can change our fiction and we can change the way we feel about the fiction we make. But we can't really change actuality.

PF: In a Blakean sense—

Ammons: If you're a kind of romantic-consciousness man and said that there is no reality except what I imagine or am conscious of. Emerson went that far. I have never been able. I looked through too many microscopes and drew the pictures of the bugs, so I can't believe that the world is a result of my consciousness.

I think it's not clear about the place of the imagination in my scheme of things. As a farmer, I guess, I have always believed in the recalcitrance of the external world. You must plant the strawberry plant if you want to get strawberries. You remember that story, someone told me recently a story about Emerson. That one day he was trying to separate the calf from the cow, and he struggled with the calf and as soon as he pulled it away from the cow's udders, it was drinking milk, it would get right back, and this little girl came down the street and saw Emerson in his predicament, and she went over and stuck her finger in the calf's mouth and led it right away. Emerson said, that's what I lack, people who know how to do things!

I've had that yearning in me to know how to do things. But I don't have the freedom, imaginatively, to go out disposing certain kinds of things.

PF: Like Blake with his just obliterating of mountains.

Ammons: Blake is a man I love dearly, because it seems to me he goes all the way, as you're asking us to do. I don't understand that. Isn't it funny how tongue-tied I am about that. I really don't

understand the place of imagination in my work. I know that someplace or other I'm stopped, or that I stop myself, or that, through fear or incapacity, I don't know which—

PF: You do seem to be someone who is intoxicated by procedure. I say that in a positive sense. In so many of your poems, you have descriptions of various procedures.

Ammons: How to do things.

PF: Yeah, and as you describe it, the emotion comes through. It seems like a kind of bending of the knee to the world.

Ammons: But also it's like writing a poem, you know, you try to do it well.

PF: Right, and a lot of your poems seem to be concerned with their own procedures as they go along, they reflect back on themselves.

Ammons: Procedure could come to be the essential narrative, you see.

PF: That's a very contemporary value.

Ammons: Then the narrative would take on whatever mystifications and myths that would seem organically proper to it.

PF: Is that because we have no more good stories to tell?

Ammons: Umm hmm.

PF: Do you believe that?

Ammons: Well, I believe we don't know how to tell them. We haven't assimilated Freudian psychology, let's say.

PF: As a mythology?

Ammons: Yes, as a symbology, at least, and I think we're puzzled by how to dispose certain materials that we had an accurate level for before, but now if you said a particular word, such as the word "penetrate." I just read Boethius and the woman that he devised to be the representative of philosophy was, he says, sometimes a normal size of woman, but sometimes she was immense and she penetrated the heavens.

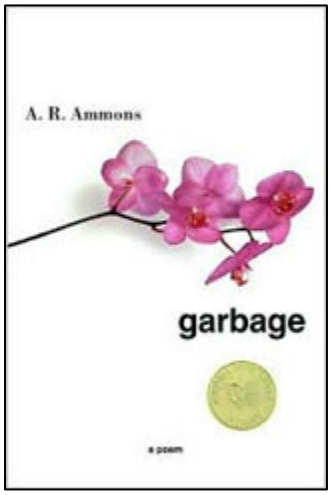
But then the word "penetrate" would stop us all, modern readers. I mean we would have to stop there and consider—what is implied by this woman, penetrater, you know, the text has become almost too dense at that point, but that's where we are, and in telling stories now we haven't assimilated the Freudian psychology and post-Freudian psychology well enough that we have returned to a level of innocent speech.

PF: Is that why there is more going on in criticism, with people like Barthes, for instance?

Ammons: Yes.

PF: So you think this period is a stopgap, this dwelling on procedure is a temporary measure?

Ammons: And the emphasis on analysis and criticism is a temporary emphasis. Eventually, we'll get back to the work of art. The imaginative construct is eventually where it is. That's where the energy comes from, and we'll get back there. It's very complicated, but somehow or other we haven't digested all that material and found new ways, a new stance of our own by which we can perceive, without loss of anything that we value, without being inhibited by what we know.



PF: That's a very delicate balance.

Ammons: Very difficult. But if we could get there, we could tell a great story again.

PF: Faulkner told great stories.

Ammons: Yes, but that's sort of pre-Freudian. I'm sure he knew Freud, but he doesn't engage it in his narratives. So in the meantime we have certain contours that compose a kind of narrative. It can be a narrative from one emotional state to another emotional state, if that will describe a figure and that figure, that narrational figure, is the level at which the poem sort of resembles a piece of sculpture. That is, it has found a figure of itself which is not speaking. It was made of speech, but it itself was perceived as silent, like a sculpture.

Many things at that point can be said about that figure, as you can say a great many things, as Barthes and others can say a great many illuminating and wonderful things about a piece of sculpture. But finally the marvelous thing is the figure. And that's what I think is the most we can seek in poetry today, to be accurate about the procedure sufficiently so that a figure comes to appear at the bottom that integrates the whole work.

PF: Do you ever see yourself as telling a story? Can you see yourself in the future—

Ammons: I know that if I tried to write a novel, I would be utterly hopeless and it would be a complete shambles, that I have no fictional ability in the regular way, but I know that my deepest interest is narrative. You see, but I have to do it in poetry, and I have to do it without any resort to the traditional novel.

PF: Robert Penn Warren, for instance, writes narrative poems. In the "Ballad of Billie Potts," through I think he could have cut out the existential comments.

Ammons: I don't know it that well, I have a vague memory. I think I see more than one kind or narrational interest in Warren. There is the surface one, which in his poems seems to have a resemblance to stories and novels and then there may be some deeper narrative, too. That's not true of myself. I have no surface narrational interest, but I am very much controlled by, and interested in, the deeper.

PF: Have you ever tried to write fiction?

Ammons: Yes, I did when I was quite young. It came out sounding a lot like *Tobacco Road*. Glad I got rid of that!

PF: What about short stories?

Ammons: I can't write fiction because I have a lot of problems with interpersonal situations, and I'm very lonely in life, in myself, and deeply afraid that what I feel about things is a minority view and that it would not stand for what other people—so I don't trust my ability to create a figure and then give him true motivation. Because I never believe when I know another person, such as you or anyone else, that I understand where he is coming from, or that I know what's motivating him. You know what I mean? That makes me feel pretty lonely, but it makes me totally certain that I would not be a fiction writer.

PF: But the poems that you write are a tremendous reaching out, in a very strong way.

Ammons: Desperate, almost.

PF: Frost said that what he wrote was out of fear. Is that true for you? Is anxiety one of the motivations?

Ammons: I think that is definitely one of them, and this goes back to what we were saying towards the beginning, that writing is one way of dissolving the anxiety. You get something else to contemplate there other than the anxiety itself, you get this piece of writing. You may even be lucky enough to find a good line in it, and then that will tend to help things.

PF: I have the sense, too, that you are an epic poet, or a poet with epic ambitions, but also someone who distrusts and undercuts this. I sense this risk and problem in your work. The desire to do it, and the tension of the undercutting.

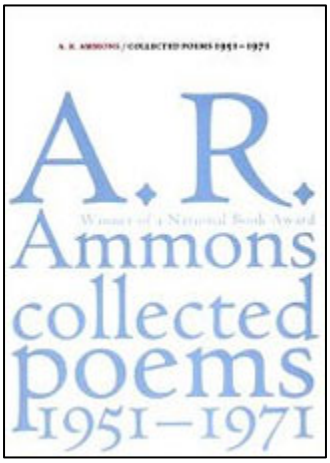
Ammons: Which forces me to make what I have done provisional. I want to do it, but it must remain provisional, because there is some cinching step that I refuse to take. I don't know what that is, but there is a kind of ultimate commitment that up to now, 54 years old, I won't make.

PF: Does that relate to what you said about imagination earlier?

Ammons: It could be, and that would be very interesting to know. There's something in me that wants to experience and say from my own points of view and other points of view, any number of

potentially rich and wonderful things, but there is a step which I refuse to take, and I don't even know what it is. It is like believing that what you have just said is really the truth.

PF: I feel that in your long poems you'll have extremely eloquent passages—



Ammons: And then just toss it away.

PF: Yes, then you're horsing around.

Ammons: Yeah, just throw it completely away.

PF: Of course, you never, you don't throw it away.

Ammons: What I mean, tonal.

PF: Sure.

Ammons: Look how easy that was, but it was nothing. That kind of thing.

PF: I'm thinking of the passage in *Sphere* beginning, "there is a faculty or knack."

Ammons: Isn't that a nice passage. I like that.

PF: It's lovely, it's one of my favorites.

Ammons: Me, too. I'm glad you said that.

PF: Especially the line, "a brook in the mind that will eventually glitter away the seas…"

Ammons: Isn't that something, I like that. That's what it's all about, it seems to me, to keep trying till you get to some place like that. And then, in a Heideggerian sense, it's a place you can live. You can live in that little passage.

PF: Yes, and others can, too.

Ammons: Well, that's what I mean by trying to be representative. I know that people are there, but I don't know how to speak to them directly, but if I can make something that we can share, then we would be speaking, as you and I are.

Now I feel very close to you since you just said that about that passage. Not because I wrote it and you didn't, but because we share it regardless of who wrote it.

PF: Perhaps to conclude, would you be willing to read that?

Ammons: I'd be glad to:

there is a faculty or knack, smallish, in the mind
that can turn
as with tooling irons immediacy into bends of con-
cision, shapes
struck with airs to keep so that one grows unable
to believe that

the piling up of figurements and entanglements could
proceed from
the tiny working of the small, if persistent, faculty:
as if the
world could be brought to flow by and take the bent of

that single bend: and immediately flip over into the
mirrored world
of permanence, another place trans-shaped with knack-
ery: a brook in
the mind that will eventually glitter away the seas:
and yet pile

them all up, every drop recollected: a little mill
that changes
everything, not from its shape, but from change:
the faculty
that can be itself, small, but masterful in the face
of size and

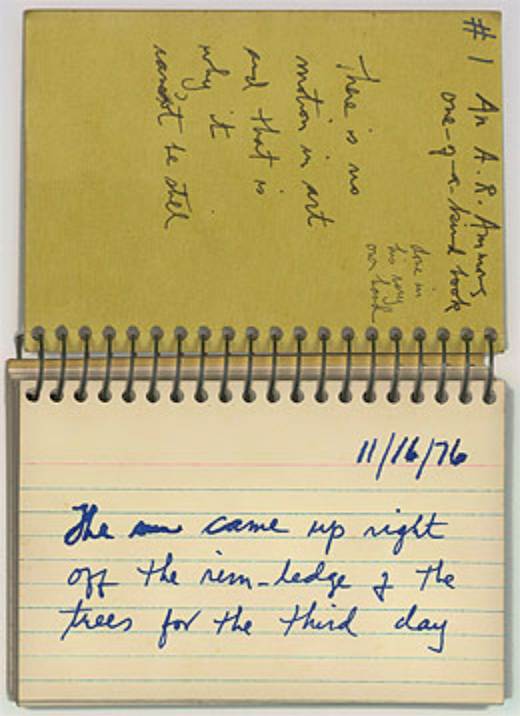
spectacular ramification into diversity…

Afterword(s)

by Philip Fried

After meeting A. R. Ammons, I felt as if I were carrying around, in the words of one of his poems, "a bucketful of radiant toys." I mean, of course, my impressions of the encounter, and I hope the reader will indulge me if I display a few of those "toys" here.

§



A handwritten notebook of poems from 1976: "An A. R. Ammons one-of-a-kind book."
Image courtesy Joyner Library Digital Collections, East Carolina University.

When I transcribed the interview, I was surprised to discover that it had a plot of its own, like the "deeper" narrative that Ammons speaks about. I had sensed, as we talked, that certain themes were weaving themselves in and out, but I never suspected that the interview would have such unity. Eventually, I decided to title our discussion "A Place You Can Live," to summarize and hint at its main theme.

My discovery of these patterns seemed to vindicate Ammons' belief in the Emersonian credo that if only you record your honest thoughts, a deeper symmetry will emerge. I was extremely moved by this statement, which led him to reflect on the difference between the academic and artistic points of view. A scholar is capable of entertaining a great many ideas, but only a writer is fool enough to believe one. Perhaps this "foolishness" is the source of Ammons' power.

§

I first became interested in Ammons' work several year ago, because of his use of biological concepts and terms. For a long time, I had been flirting with science, attracted by the shapeliness of theory but nervous about committing myself to a life in the laboratory. I had gone so far as trying to write an epic poem about Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*. So I was in an excellent position to appreciate Ammons' more successful explorations of science. In fact, I devoted a chapter of my dissertation on him to the role of evolution and ecology in his work.

After interviewing him, I am convinced that no writer who consciously tried to cultivate science would be likely to succeed. As Ammons says, he simply wrote from where he was, "a mixture of science and poetry." Poems are not willed. They are whirled into existence by internal winds, comparable to those that whip around leaves and old newspapers, or whatever is handy. These inner "whirlwinds" are the results of efforts to solve insoluble problems, namely the metaphysical and psychological dilemmas that beset us from an early age. If a poet is emotionally drawn to science, then bits and pieces of scientific lore will get spun into his poetry.

§

As I continued to read Ammons, I came to value him for reasons unrelated to science. He is, for instance, ready to take a risk. Not only does he experiment with form, diction, and tone, but he does so with a great deal of verve and humor. Above all, he allows himself to experience conflicts which I believe are crucial to our time. A transcendentalist in the central line of Emerson and Whitman, he is also influenced by contemporary doubts concerning the power of the imagination. He is possessed

by the epic ambition to "sum it all up" and by a sense of absurdity that undercuts this ambition. It is fascinating to watch these conflicts as they animate his work.

§

When I first spoke to him by phone, I was surprised by his gentle Southern voice. Though I knew he came from North Carolina, I never had the sense to hear the poems in a Southern accent! Now I won't be able to help it.

I only wish that the reader, too, could hear Ammons' voice in this interview, as it quietly and patiently weaves its concern, connecting the past and the present, inner and outer, "stone" and "starlight," until the fragile net is complete. But the reader should not forget that there was laughter as well. I remember, for instance, Ammons' enjoyment even of the scariness of the poet's position: "I think it's probably necessary that all people ought to be in flight from such things."

§

The many watercolors he has painted in the last three years [1977-1980] decorate the walls of his house and are piled nearly chest-high in one of his closets. Apparently, he is as prolific with his brush as he is with his typewriter. I meant to ask him in the interview about the connection between painting and writing. But he commented on it without my asking when he spoke of the "circles and radial points coming from circles" which are common to both his watercolors and his poems.

I enjoyed the composition and lively spirit of his paintings. Though I am hardly a professional art critic, I had the impression that Ammons paints extremely well, especially in view of the fact that he has received no formal training as a visual artist. This past spring he was even given a one-man show at the Cornell University museum.

Untitled watercolor painting by A. R. Ammons, dated 1977.
Image courtesy Joyner Library Digital Collections, East Carolina University.

§

I greatly enjoyed my tour of his backyard. This must be, inch for inch, the most commemorated third of an acre in our literature. He showed me all of the landmarks—quince bush, stone bench, elm tree, blue spruce—familiar to readers of his poetry, while supplying a running commentary on the past, present, and likely future condition of each. Strangely, Ammons seemed to move among as many "symbolic" objects as Yeats, a poet he clearly regards as an opposite, almost an anti-self.

§

At one point, he spoke about the exhaustion caused by paying too much attention to things. He laughed and said that, late in life, he was thankfully learning the happiness of "paying no attention at all!"

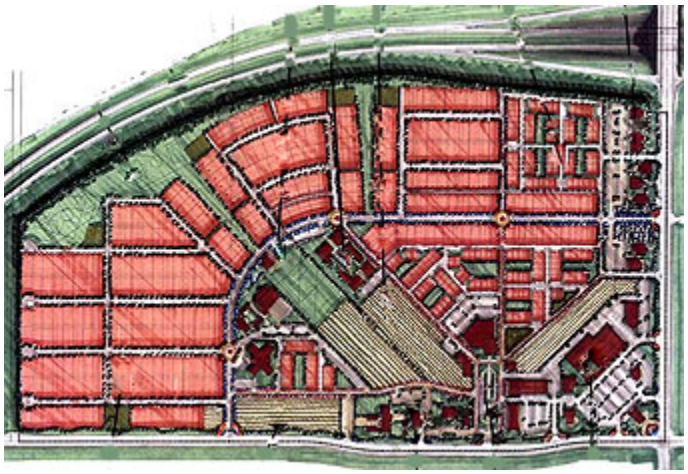
Philip Fried has published four books of poetry: *Mutual Trespasses* (Ion, 1988); *Quantum Genesis* (Zohar, 1997); *Big Men Speaking to Little Men* (Salmon, 2006), and *Cohort* (Salmon, 2009). In 2011, Salmon will bring out *Early, Late: New and Selected Poems*. He has edited *The Manhattan Review*, an international poetry journal, since 1980.

UnSprawl Case Study

By Terrain.org Staff
View Agritopia photo gallery at www.terrain.org/unsprawl/24

Overview

Located in the rapidly developing town of Gilbert, Arizona, Agritopia is the Phoenix area's first traditional neighborhood development and among the nation's first mixed-used communities to integrate working agriculture. Rather than similar principles of New Urbanism, however, the 166-acre community built on the last undeveloped portion of the Johnston family farm is based on a set of Christian foundational principles and subsequent derived principles that range from promoting a simpler life to honoring agriculture. Indeed, Agritopia could be called evangelical New Ruralism.



Site map of Agritopia.
Graphic courtesy Agritopia and BCDM/Barduson Architects.

The name Agritopia derives from Johnston family's vision for the project: "Agri" for the land's farming heritage—it has been farmed consistently since the 1920s—and "topia" for the perfect community. "Names convey a lot," says Joe Johnston. "I've always been annoyed by the way places are named around here. Quail Run, something ranch. We've never had ranches around here. There's

no relationship to what the place is."

With more than a dozen acres of active pastures and farmland at the neighborhood's center, and orchards on its periphery, the project seems to defy New Urbanism's transect model, in which dense mixed uses occur at the project's center and become less compact (and generally lower in building height) toward the edges, which then blend to a series of parks or other open spaces. For owner Joe Johnston, however, the project's goal was to keep agriculture as the "heart of Agritopia," according to lead designer Steve Barduson. By preserving the farmland at the project's core, other uses—porch-fronted homes, the local school, town center, parks and trails, the agro-commercial area, a church, and retail center—radiate from the agriculture, symbolically and literally.

Grapevines and unplanted fields, with cottage homes in the distance.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

Though planning and implementation was challenging, residential sales were rapid. In 2004—at the height of Agritopia's construction—Gilbert was the fastest growing municipality of more than 100,000 people in the U.S., according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Only one of the 452 lots comprised of "classic" and "cottage" homes remains unbuilt. The agro-commercial center is also largely built out, and the K-12 Gilbert Christian School and community center are complete while a senior assisted-living complex is moving forward. Because of the downturn in the economy, however, the retail center, town square with adjacent church, and bungalow office lots near the busy intersection of Higley and Ray Roads remain unbuilt.

Project History, Planning, and Design

Throughout the 1990s, the Johnston family had been selling off portions of its farm to developers. Gilbert was rapidly becoming a Phoenix bedroom community, far to the east, and with the planned expansion of Loop 202, it was only a matter of time, it seemed, before the entire area sprawled to match the rest of the metro area's typical, automobile-oriented suburbia. Joe Johnston and his family had also sold land for regional parks, and recognizing that farming was no longer in his family's future, he considered the possibilities for the last remaining farmland, which included the family home.

In 1998 the Johnston family entered into an agreement with Scott Homes, and soon brought on BCDM/Barduson Architects. Joe Johnston was clear on his vision, wanting to "honor God and the area's agricultural heritage" by creating a neighborhood reflective of the Midwestern small towns that are the heart of their agricultural landscapes. Though sad about losing that heritage, Johnston passionately believed that the project that was to become Agritopia could provide for the sharing of common amenities, reduce materialism, and focus on pedestrians—all the while honoring agriculture

by providing access to pastures, gardens, and orchards. “”The people make the place neighborly,” says Johnston, “but it is also the way you design the setting. The way the homes are done . . . the streets are done to deemphasize cars. All those make for a more neighborly neighborhood and attract people, who want to be social.”

Construction began in 2001, but not before the design team tackled a number of significant issues. “It was *so* challenging to make the project work,” says Barduson, even as he admits Agritopia is one of the most enjoyable developments he’s been involved with.

For starters, the design team needed to create a completely new zoning ordinance for the town of Gilbert, made more challenging by the fact that the Phoenix metro area offered no similar developments or ordinances from which to borrow. Part of the *Gateway Area Plan* for Gilbert’s “Gateway Character Area,” the Agritopia project also required a rezoning to rural-residential use. According to planning consultant David Longley, the *Gateway Area Plan* offered “a new approach to minimizing the effect of sprawl because of its design elements.” Town staff was encouraging, recalls Barduson, but that didn’t alleviate the great number of legal challenges.

Gilbert’s resulting *Gateway Area Traditional Neighborhood Design Guidelines* took more than two years to complete, and were key in not only allowing Agritopia, but also in providing for future pedestrian- and transit-oriented development in the town:

The Gateway Character Area describes desirable physical characteristics that will enhance Gilbert’s unique identity and bring back traditional neighborhoods. It provides for traditional village/neighborhood design concepts in exchange for higher densities. It promotes pedestrian/bicycle/transit-oriented design, and integrates residential, commercial, employment, schools, places of worship, and parks with rail and bus transit, bikeways, and pedestrian paths. It affords an opportunity for small-scale urban agriculture.

Perhaps the largest challenge in establishing the guidelines and subsequent overlay for Agritopia was working with the Gilbert Fire Department, which opposed the project’s skinny streets and roundabouts. Only after Scott Homes agreed to build sprinkler systems into every home did the Fire Department sign off on the planned area development.

Agritopia's Design Principles

We, the Johnston brothers, are Christians who believe the Bible is the unchanging and perfect Word of God. Creation, the fall of man, and the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ are real to us and affect all aspects of our lives. We believe it is the purpose of man to enjoy a personal relationship with God and glorify Him. The question is how to do that with respect to a project like this.

View all principles at www.terrain.org/unsprawl/24

Cottage homes feature large front porches that look onto a shared grassy commons.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

Designers faced another interesting challenge, as well. To maintain the Midwestern feel of the project, the team decided early on to provide for grass lawns and planting strips between streets and sidewalks. In Arizona, however, it is illegal to plant grass strips in residential rights-of-way because of the amount of water required to sustain the grass. By amending Gilbert's street standards to allow the property line to be defined as the back of the curb, however, Agritopia circumvents the right-of-way constraint and grass planting strips prevail.

BCDM/Barduson Architects led a series of design charrettes and workshops that included neighborhood meetings and storyboarding. The project's design grew out of those sessions, as well as negotiations with town staff. With the gardens and pastures at Agritopia's center, more active uses radiate out from the core. Along the southern border of Ray Road, the agro-commercial area bridges date and peach orchards with the town square and retail center, both still unbuilt. The gardens adjoin the school and ball fields, community center, and compact neighborhoods of cottage homes. The retail center at the intersection of Ray and Higley Roads is bounded on the north by the still-unbuilt live/work bungalow offices. The remaining classic and cottage homes are bisected by landscaped pedestrian paths and pocket parks with play structures. Along their northern edge, Loop 202 (SanTan Freeway) is offset by a green belt and Gilbert's extensive Central Trail system. On the west, Agritopia is bordered by Cosmo Dog Park.

Agriculture and Open Space

The Johnston family has owned the former cotton and cattle feed/grain farm since the 1960s. Though the 12-acre pastures and gardens at the center of Agritopia continue to be the heart of the project, they are privately owned. Still, the Farm at Agritopia—as the full operations are called—is perhaps the key element for the community. "It is not like a country farm in that it will be in the heart of a fairly dense urban area," say Agritopia's marketing materials. "This farm is an 'urban farm' designed to flourish in the urban setting. Instead of a huge field of one

Richly landscaped pathways weave among Agritopia's cottage and classic homes.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

crop, you find a patchwork of numerous specialty crops."

Crops from the central farmlands as well as eight additional acres of orchards on the project's periphery include dates, peaches, citrus, beets, basil and other herbs, lettuce, carrots, heirloom tomatoes, and more. "Initially," says Johnston, " we have focused on a broad mix of lettuce and other salad greens plus a vegetable garden. We have chosen these because we will need theses items in large quantities, they are high-value crops, and they have a long growing season . . . An experimental area in which we can test tropicals and other marginally adapted plants will come later."

A farmer experienced in growing organic greens aided the Farm in setting up its systems. Organic produce from the farm serves Joe's Farm Grill and the Coffee Shop and supplies the Farm Stand, open on weekends in the agro-commercial area through the fall, winter, and spring.

The Farm at Agritopia also intends for animals to join the urban farm mix. Candidates include goats (for milk and cheese), chickens (for eggs), cows (for milk), and bees (for honey and pollination).

Date orchards near the entrance to Agritopia off Ray Road.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

Surprisingly, Agritopia doesn't support a community garden, nor do backyard vegetable gardens appear to be common. However, one of the lead farmers plans to hold classes that teach residents how to grow food and cook or prepare raw meals.

In the meantime, residents can stroll along the groomed pedestrian paths that are lined by white fences overgrown with seedless grape vines and dotted by flagstone benches. All trails lead to the agro-commercial area, and eventually will lead to the town square and retail center once constructed. Neighbors may also wander on paths adjacent to the orchards.

If the Farm at Agritopia is the community's heart, then the extensive trail system and parks are its circulatory system. "Our goal was to have a park with play equipment within two blocks of every home," says Barduson. Connecting the well-appointed pocket parks and larger playing fields is a network of clay and concrete trails that enable pedestrians to easily move throughout the neighborhood. Additionally, the cottage homes front lushly landscaped, meandering walkways instead of streets.

Agritopia is bordered on the north by Gilbert's wide Central Trail, which connects neighborhoods throughout the town's incorporated area. Agritopia developers worked with town staff on the adjacent, award-winning Cosmo Dog Park, which features a large ramada for picnics, four acres of

fenced off-leash area as well as individual areas for timid dogs, a pond with wetlands, an amphitheater, area lighting for night use, and more. The design team also worked with town planners and the Arizona Department of Transportation to erect a bridge that spans SanTan Freeway north of the development. The pedestrian bridge connects Agritopia, via Gilbert's Central Trail, to the neighborhood north of the freeway as well as the large Crossroads District Park.

Landscape design plan for the agro-commercial area.
Graphic courtesy JJR|Floor.

Landscaping by Floor Associates (now JJR|Floor) provides a mix of native and non-native plants, though it's clear that Agritopia's design is far more Midwestern than Southwestern despite its arid location. Barduson admits there was little discussion about water efficiency at the time of Agritopia's planning more than ten years ago. "Things would be different now," he says. But, he noted, the Midwestern feel was important, and grass is a critical component.

While reclaimed water or other alternative water saving landscape features do not exist onsite, play fields, finger parks, and gardens are designed to capture runoff, and pastures and much of the agro-commercial area is flood-irrigated as part of the Roosevelt Water District.

Homes at Agritopia

Agritopia's home designs stem from Johnston's passion for houses that reflect the vernacular of older homes in downtown Gilbert and Phoenix neighborhoods like F.Q. Story, Coronado, and Encanto-Palmcroft. Scott Homes offered 11 floorplans each with four elevations created by BSB Design and based on the following architectural styles:

- Craftsman/California Bungalow, popular from 1905 to 1930
- Spanish Eclectic, popular from 1910 to 1940
- Northern European Revival (Tudor and French Revival), popular from 1915 to 1945
- Arizona Territorial, Agritopia's name for "a general style observed in the neighborhoods that spanned a territorial look, farm house look, and early ranch style homes"

While the homes range from 1,300 to more than 3,200 square feet—not including optional basements on some models that can add as much as 2,000 square feet and three bedrooms—the lots range from 2,500 square feet for cottage homes to between 7,000 and 10,000 square feet for classic homes. Because BSB Design wanted a mix of home sizes on the same block without larger homes dwarfing smaller homes, it concentrated on approaches to massing, including:

Cottage homes featuring a variety of architectural styles. Photo by Simmons Buntin.

- Dividing livable spaces into two or three floors to reduce the street-level footprint and massing of the house
- Limiting the footprint of homes to no more than 150 percent of the smallest home
- Setting the upper floor within the roof trusses and using dormers to reduce height and mass

The homes—288 classic models and 164 cottage models on 452 single-family lots—are further delineated through three additional approaches: flex-lots, bungalow units, and garage living space. Agritopia's unique flex-lot system allowed some homebuyers to choose lot size. The purchaser of a lot where the lot behind had not yet been purchased could choose the depth of the lot, which typically was 62 feet wide. The standard lot is 120 feet deep, but one or two 15-foot extensions could be purchased resulting in a 135-foot or 150-foot deep lot. Variations in lot depth allow for larger yards while maintaining consistent streetscapes and front massing.

Like many New Urbanist projects, Agritopia allows for the addition of carriage homes—or what BSB Design calls bungalow units—on about 40 lots designated for classic homes. The owner of the lot may then live in the main residence and use the bungalow unit as an additional residence for a relative or a renter, or as a place of business. The bungalow units are approximately 800 square feet in size with three floorplans: two-bedroom home, business office, and pool house designed for recreational purposes. They sit on the back of lots that do not back to another lot—usually on greenways or with a street at the rear of the lot. The architecture of the bungalow unit matches the architecture of the main residence.

Classic homes have no alleys but place the garage to the rear of the lot, accessible by strip driveways.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

"We consider it extremely important to design homes that are flexible enough to fit the changing needs of their owners," say Agritopia marketing materials. The builder also capitalized on flexible space within the garage, enabling original homebuyers to configure the garage to add an adjoining casita—equal in size to the space of one garage bay—or an apartment—equal in size to the space of two garage bays, with a floorplan of a one-bedroom flat.

Though homeowners may have opted for bungalow units and casitas which may then be rented out, the Agritopia homeowners association does not allow individual rental of full homes. "With rentals, you just never really know who you're going to get," says Dena Wall, whose family moved to Agritopia in part because of the no-rental policy, according to a 2004 article in *The Arizona Republic*.

The single-family homes were built in phases. Phase I was comprised of 157 classic home lots in the western third of Agritopia, adjacent to Cosmo Park on the west and bordered by a green belt and fields to the north. Phase II was comprised of 160 lots for both classic and cottage homes, bordered on the north by the greenway and Gilbert's Central Trail. Phase IV was constructed simultaneously with Phase II and is comprised of a cluster of cottage homes near the agro-commercial area. Phase III includes both classic and cottage homes, and bridges the town square and retail area with the community center.

"Land use planning and the home designs went hand-in-hand," says Brad Sonnenburg, partner at BSB Design, which led Agritopia's architectural design. His goal was to create an overall street system and individual streetscapes where people could interact. "We view the street system as not just for cars, but as a part of the public open space shared by pedestrians and cyclists," says Johnston. With sidewalks separated from tree-lined streets, narrow

Classic homes at the intersection of a secondary street and carriage lane.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

streets with on-street parking to reduce traffic velocity, and front porches serving as prominent and usable features, the neighborhood's walkability is evident.

The widest road in the project is Agritopia Loop, which bisects the project, connecting Ray and Higley Roads as it passes the school, community center, and forthcoming Agritopia Senior Living complex. Studded with a series of shallow roundabouts, the street is 37 feet wide, including two parking lanes of eight feet each. The distance from sidewalk to house front is only eight and a half feet, though the planting strip is seven feet wide and the sidewalk five feet wide. Secondary streets are ten feet narrower—27 feet wide—with similar dimensions from street to house front. Alleys do not provide for parking and are typically 17 feet wide, providing for a five-foot distance from sidewalk to house.

In addition to the single-family lots, developers still plan to build apartments above the commercial spaces of the retail center, as well as live/work units coined "bungalow offices" along Higley Road on the eastern edge of the project. The combination of loft-like apartments, carriage houses, cottage homes, and larger classic models results in a range of pricing and helps meet the developer's goal of residential affordability.

Yet given Gilbert's desert location and the abundance of sunshine—as well as the project's goals of promoting sharing and a simpler life—the use of passive and active solar resources on the homes would seem logical. However, Scott Homes offered no solar or energy efficiency options beyond tankless water heaters. Likewise, no advanced technology features such as home energy management systems or neighborhood wifi was built into the homes. Nor were water efficiency measures, beyond standard low-flow toilets and showerheads, implemented.

Agritopia's community center with shared ball fields behind.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

Commercial, Mixed Uses, and Civic Uses

Agritopia's most distinctive feature may be its agro-commercial area, the design team's "vision for our development of the Johnston family homestead area." Each existing building has been preserved by converting it to a new use compatible with an urban setting: the family's home became Joe's Farm Grill, a tractor shed became the Coffee House, and a garage and carport now house a Vespa repair shop and the Farm Stand fresh produce stand. One of the most visible structures is a bright silver barn shaped like an airplane hanger, which is fitting since it was constructed in the 1950s from the sheet metal of retired World War II aircraft. It houses farm equipment and may host a farmer's market in the future. The businesses within the renovated

buildings tie into the project's rural history through structure, plantings, and other elements, including tractor gears, cultivator wheels, and other parts that serve as artwork throughout.

The Coffee Shop before (as tractor shed, above)—red lines show additions—and after, with inviting patio (below).
Top photo courtesy Agritopia; bottom photo by Simmons Buntin.

Combined with the still-unbuilt retail center, the overarching goal of the agro-commercial area, according to Barduson, is to create a kind of "epicurean" center—a destination of local food and culinary arts for which the Coffee Shop, with its fresh-baked goods and gourmet coffees, and Joe's Farm Grill, with its organic produce and distinctive recipes, are just the beginning. A string of local restaurants is still a possibility, though in the current economic climate, no specific additional restaurants are yet planned.

Though the retail center and lots designated for bungalow offices along Higley Road remain unbuilt, they are actively marketed, and Johnston recently inked a deal with a bank as a tenant in the retail center. Construction should begin soon. Barduson acknowledges that the placement of a small-footprint Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market across the street was a missed opportunity for Agritopia because the grocery store is exactly the type of progressive market the developers were hoping would be built in the neighborhood. Though it's still nearby, residents are not as likely to walk to the grocery store since they'd have to negotiate the busy intersection.

Agritopia's town square, once built, will bridge the agro-commercial area to the west with the retail center to the east, while also providing linkages to pastures and gardens. It will be anchored by a church, though none has yet been identified. The vision for the town square is to include a bandshell reminiscent of those once popular in small Midwestern town centers.

The community center provides a venue for public meetings and other neighborhood events. It also includes a swimming pool, tennis courts, and putting green. The putting green and grass surrounding the community center are crafted of artificial turf to reduce water use and maintenance. The community center is located next to the ball fields that are jointly shared with Gilbert Christian Schools, a preK-12 1A private school with 470 students that focuses on spiritual development, fine

arts, and community involvement in addition to academic development.

Though development of the retail center has stalled, Agritopia Senior Living is moving forward on a five-acre site south of the community center, adjacent to a cluster of cottage homes and orchards. Two two-story buildings totaling more than 140,000 square feet will house 118 units, administrative offices, central kitchen and dining areas, a wellness center, and other indoor/outdoor lifestyle amenities. It will be constructed within the Spanish Eclectic style.

Additionally, a number of home-based businesses operate within Agritopia. Gilbert, in fact, has the highest rate of home-based businesses in the Phoenix metro area. Agritopia's developers encourage home-based businesses in order to:

- Reduce commuting and the effects of vehicular traffic on the community
- Encourage employment within Gilbert
- Strengthen families and reduce the need for child care
- Create a stronger, more vibrant neighborhood
- Embrace the opportunities of the "New Economy" which are computer-oriented

Though Gilbert does not allow non-family members to be employed in home-based businesses, Agritopia received a variance that allows up to two non-family members to be employed. Other restrictions include operating hours limited between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., no operation on Sunday, vehicular traffic cannot exceed five cars per hour or 25 cars per day, and no signs are allowed except for bungalow studios.

The Farm Stand at Agritopia's agro-commercial area.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

The home-based photography business of Bethany and John Lamar was recently featured in *Arizona Woman* magazine. Three-quarters of the Lamar's 4,300-square-foot home is dedicated to Lamar Photography Studios. Though the studio itself is in the basement, the dining room serves as the sales office. "We don't run our business out of our home," says Bethany Lamar. "We really live out of our business." Still, the business is separated from the living area because, as Bethany says, "Business is business; home is home. You have to have boundaries."

For Paul Prosser, who operates his own architecture firm, Prosser Enterprises Architecture, the distinction is clearer because his office is in the bungalow unit on the back of his lot. The opportunity to expand his firm and yet live nearby are the reasons he moved to Agritopia.

Agritopia's Sense of Place

Despite the Johnston family's efforts—or rather because of them—Agritopia remains a paradox: a green oasis in the desert; a suburban community that grows much of its own produce; a neighborhood school that, because it is private, is not open to all residents; and a mix of residential architectural styles that have evolved from historic architecture of the region and yet which seem out of place because of the bland uniformity of the tile-roofed houses otherwise found throughout Gilbert.

But are these faults? Upon an initial visit to the community, it may appear so. But on the second visit, thoroughly walking the neighborhood convinces one otherwise. Though it's easy to argue against grass lawns in the Sonoran desert, for example, it's also clear that lawns are successful in propagating Agritopia's rural heritage, both of Gilbert and the Midwest. And growing our own produce—urban, suburban, or otherwise—is a necessary step in sustainable development. Indeed, planners and policymakers recognize more and more that agriculture must be a key component of communities moving forward, with a recent movement by New Urbanists specifically to preserve agricultural land as a central component of a neotraditional town rather than, say, creating a golf course.

Though Agritopia's school is parochial, it gladly shares its ball fields, outdoor courts, and other exterior sports amenities with the community. Additionally, Gilbert Christian School opens its gymnasium to host large community events such as public meetings. While admissions are selective and tuition is cost-based, the school nonetheless serves as an amenity and central feature of the project.

Finally, Agritopia's architecture feels out of place only in the context of the surrounding I-could-be-anywhere suburban landscape. While some nearby projects have adopted similar architectural elements, those additions are only skin deep. At Agritopia, the architecture and land use were developed together—and work in harmony—to create an authentic neighborhood with a real sense of place and recognition of its agricultural heritage.

Evangelical New Ruralism? Maybe so, because Agritopia is a project worth preaching about.

The New Ruralism

By Rick Wartzman
New America Foundation

Cities across the United States and around the globe increasingly are championing agriculture and forging beneficial bonds between urban and rural locales. These links can take many forms, some more commonplace than others: bustling farmers' markets, "buy locally grown" campaigns, urban-to-ag water recycling programs, agricultural greenbelts and parks nestled in and around densely populated areas, city educational and recreational initiatives that regard the farm as a valuable asset. In each case, the key to success is getting people to recognize that the places furnishing our fruits, vegetables, milk, and meat are not separate from the regional metropolitan framework but, rather, an integral piece of it.

Read full story at www.terrain.org/unsprawl/24.

Just the Facts

Agritopia
Gilbert, Arizona

- Mixed-use 166-acre traditional neighborhood development with an urban farm at its core
- 452 residential lots feature a mix of “cottage” and “classic” style homes ranging from 1,300 to 3,200 square feet, plus carriage home “bungalows”
- 20 acres of working pasture, gardens, and orchards
- Agro-commercial area features farm offices and facilities, farm stand for the sale of local produce, coffee shop, and restaurant
- Town square with traditional bandshell planned; square will be anchored by a church
- Retail center based on “epicurean,” food-focused theme planned
- Live/work bungalow office lots planned along high-traffic area
- Parochial preK-12 school and shared ball fields onsite
- 118-unit senior assisted living complex under development
- Community center with pool and tennis center
- Integrated sports fields, pocket parks with extensive play structures, green belt, and access to regional parks, including the Cosmo Dog Park
- Developed by owner Joe Johnston and family based on “Christian foundational principles”
- Land planning by BCDM/Barduson Architects
- Architecture by Bloodgood, Sharp & Buster (now BSB Design, Inc.)
- Landscape architecture by Floor Associates (now JJR|Floor)
- Homes by Scott Homes

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For more information, view our Agritopia Photo Gallery at www.terrain.org/unsprawl/24 or visit the Agritopia website at www.Agritopia.com.

ARTerrain Gallery

Four series of impromptu sculptures-in-the-wild and studio sculptures by R. L. Croft : www.terrain.org/arterrain/24

Whether in the studio, hiking through the woods, or roaming a beach, R. L. Croft makes sculptural drawings that contrast the angst of life under siege with fleeting moments of peaceful introspection. An art world shunpiker by nature, Robin's work weaves subtle metaphors into images of fragmented construction. The viewer is likely to discover anxiety and delight within the same sculpture. In a sense, his efforts parallel naive art by avoiding prevailing trends and building upon rugged drawing guided by intuition.

After graduating from Virginia Commonwealth University with a painting degree, he immediately entered upon a 12-year abstention from self-promotion, exhibition, and competition in order to discover a path to making art with true originality. This austere beginning to a career normally associated with heavy marketing and networking was a radical move to assert independence from what he saw as an art world more interested in façade than integrity.

Though a fine artist by education, Robin made a peripatetic living for over 20 years in illustration, graphic design, and art direction as a way to support his concurrent studio efforts. He exhibits regionally and welcomes discussion of exhibition opportunities, as well as invitations to lead groups in the creation of "impromptu" drawings. Robin lives with his wife and two girls in the Washington, D.C. area.

For more information on the artist, visit www.RLCroft.com.

View full ARTerrain Gallery online at www.terrain.org/arterrain/24.

Poetry by Tedi López Mills, translated by Wendy Burk

Night (Cynical)

at night they bark
so many dogs

they bark tied
to the splintered post

they bark at the cat's leap
on the dry shrub
branches crackling
under claws

they bark at whistles

they bark at their stakes
ripping wood

they bark all night
under the withered tree

they bark I think
as I listen wide awake
because the second dog could not keep quiet
because of rage for order
because they will not break the circle
the choir of muzzles

because if one of them stops
it may never culminate

the bristling rite
fur against fence
in those hours
when I do not sleep
when there are too many
dogs in my head
and one outside in hunger

although maybe its caution
springs from another vision
the deepest growl
the guttural in-the-fangs
empty gut
why is it here on this dirty street?
to pay me back with its story
of a motionless body
four paws at my door
its cluster of flies
the night included
as one more episode—
so many dogs
week after week
and so on until the very end
part of a method
etcetera
dog after dog
barking biting
hurting, even?

Noche (cínica)

ya noche ladran
cuántos perros

ladran amarrados
a su palo de astillas

ladran con los brincos de gato
sobre la mata seca
el crujido de ramas
bajo la uña

ladran con el silbido

ladran a jalones
rasgando la madera

ladran por la noche
bajo el árbol enjuto

ladran pienso
mientras oigo despierta
ladran porque no se calló el segundo
por voluntad de orden
por no segar el círculo
de hocicos en coro

porque si uno se detiene
ya nunca culminaría quizás
el rito erizado
pelo contra reja
de ese tiempo

en que no duermo
cuando hay perros
de más en mi cabeza
y uno afuera en el hambre

aunque tal vez nazca
de otra visión su cautela
el gruñido de fondo
la gutural colmillo adentro
tripa vacua
¿a qué viene con la calle sucia?
¿a retribuirme con su historia
de cuerpo inerte
cuatro patas a mi puerta
su racimo de moscas
la noche incluida
como un episodio
de tanto perro múltiple
que seguirá
semana tras semana
y así hasta el final
parte de un método
etcétera
perro en perro
ladrando mordiendo
que incluso duele?

Night (Geopolitical?)

Although there may be a country within the dawn,
behind the afternoon I discover another,
more emblematic,
becoming charitable by night,
when it skirts the borders
with its waning beacons
seeking changes in the current,
a fickle gleam on the sidewalk,
the simplest human trace:
shadows or bodies
marked out against the earth,
a footprint in the ditch,
a plastic bag gripping the branch
in its own breeze;
or some inconstant place
to stop and think, perhaps, but what.

Without a visible corpse,
always dying,
passion begins to transmute,
to travel the line of fire:
on this side, what one loves,
the multitude of faces;
over there, what one hates,
no more than a gnat.
And you wake, indecisive:
loving the one who kills,
despising the one who dies.
Or you change sides:

according to the quotas of barbarity,
the clumsy doctrine of feelings,
the calculation of so many rich
for so many poor,
for so much humility in the end,
when at last it's really
necessary to give your life for something
and the whisper seems less certain
that nobody has the right to kill,
but some the obligation
(historical, be it understood)
to die, oh yes
so luminously.

Noche (¿geopolítica?)

Aunque dentro del alba sea un país,
tras la tarde descubro otro
más emblemático,
caritativo ya por la noche,
cuando bordea las lindes
con su mengua de faros
buscando variables en la corriente,
algún brillo desigual en la banqueta,
el rastro humano más simple:
sombras o cuerpos
deslindados de la tierra,
una huella en la zanja,

un plástico asido a la rama
en su propia brisa;
o algún sitio inconstante
para pensar quizás, pero qué.

Sin cadáver visible,
siempre muriendo,
empieza a matizarse la pasión,
a recorrerse la línea de fuego:
de este lado lo que se ama,
la multitud de caras;
allá lo que se odia,
el solo bicho.
Y uno despierta irresuelto:
queriendo al que mata,
despreciando al que muere.
O cambia de bando:
según las cuotas de barbarie,
la burda doctrina de los sentimientos,
el cálculo de cuántos ricos
por cuántos pobres,
por cuánta humildad al final,
cuando de veras
haya que dar la vida por algo
y sea menos cierto el rumor
de que nadie tiene derecho a matar,
pero algunos el compromiso
(histórico, entiéndase)
de morir, eso sí
cuán luminosamente.

The Swimming Pool

Sometimes,
when I look back
and I stop, let's say,
at my first ten years,

on a trip to the border,
brutal metal fence by the river
and drylands convened by old tires,
buzzards flocking
to a hollow branch,

or returning home to the swiftest city block
between the eucalyptus and the remote
cobbles of the church,

I come back to the pools
of my memory

and I remember the first, formless
swimming holes
resistant to my kicking legs,
stiff and slimy in my fear,

or just before solstice
reached the paths of my park
a public pool
named after a continent,
where I never saw the water
in its chlorinated vessel

just splashed in the air
along with the shouts
that stretched
with the stains of
noonday sun
while I watched
mud's enormous footprint
grow in the center of my towel
and sensed something
perhaps about myself
or about the assailable
whiteness
of certain things.

But there is one pool,
above all,
that holds me.
Its oval, perfectly timed,
gave way
with each dive
as if in response to my body's skill.
It was in Texas,
at a freeway motel,
and even submerged I could hear
the engines rasping
my last glimpse of pavement.

There, in that pool,
from where I stood on the sloping
shallow side,
all morning long I had,

eyes closed
to the light,
such a perfect will
in my legs and arms,
the foam so fully at my command
that the bubbles' fervor
breaking in my mouth
when I took a breath
deep below
was not an omen,
but a fate shared
with other days in the water

when later on the sea appeared,
blurry palms
by the curved bay,
sand shading into
threadbare, battered desert
and nothing else was ever
so impersonal.

La alberca

A veces,
cuando hago mi recuento
y me detengo, digamos,
en la primera década,

durante un viaje a la frontera

con la brutal lámina junto al arroyo
y el páramo convocado por las llantas,
los buitres de sobra
en la rama hueca de algún leño,

o de regreso a la cuadra más veloz
entre el eucalipto y los adoquines
remotos de la iglesia,

recaigo en las albercas
de mi memoria

y recuerdo los pozos iniciales,
sin geometría,
reacios al uso de mis piernas,
tiesos con su limo en mi miedo,

o tan cerca del solsticio
en la vereda de mi parque
un balneario público
con nombre de continente,
donde nunca vi el agua
en la pila de cloro
sino salpicada en el aire
con los gritos
que se iban dilatando
en las manchas de sol
ese mediodía
mientras yo miraba crecer
la huella enorme del lodo
en el centro de mi toalla
y algo percibía

no sé si de mí
o de la blancura
expugnable
de ciertas cosas.

Pero hay una alberca,
por encima de todas,
que me retiene.
Su oval en la hora justa
fue tan dúctil
con cada clavado
que parecía una maña del cuerpo.
Estaba en Texas,
en un motel de autopista,
y aun al sumergirme podía oír
cómo los motores raspaban
mi última visión del pavimiento.

Allí, en esa alberca,
desde mi estatura en el flanco
descendiente y menos profundo
tuve toda la mañana
con los ojos cerrados
en medio de la luz
un albedrío tan perfecto
en los pies y en los brazos,
un dominio tan exacto de la espuma
que el fervor de las burbujas
rotas en mi boca
al respirar hundida
en el fondo

no fue un presagio,
sino el final común
de otros días en el agua

cuando apareció el mar más tarde
en los cocoteros borrosos
en la curvatura de la bahía,
el estilo raído de un desierto
caduco en la arena
y nada nunca
volvió a ser tan impersonal.

A Few Words

Perhaps we are here *in order to say: house,*
bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window;
at most: column, tower…
— Rilke, Ninth Duino Elegy (trans. Stephen Mitchell)

Close

the gate

then the other gate

across the house

the bridge appears next

where the fruit-tree bends

like a pitcher

water seeking water

sometimes no one's fountain

sometimes earth's

but open the window

and see *here*

tower or column

more bridges

two or three fountains

then what is left

your water your earth

your *no one* the remainder

of those nine words

three of them banned

or is it a trap

one creation too many

because this—*here*—

is a place

not the world

and perhaps it always was this way

so to speak and speak
until that metal no longer
grates in your mouth
obstinate stag
sheep of mud
and the lamb beyond
bleating *here*

Algunas palabras

Quizá estamos aquí *para decir: casa,*
puente, manantial, puerta, cántaro, árbol frutal, ventana;
si acaso: columna, torre…
— Rilke, Novena Elegía

Cierra
hay una puerta
y otra puerta
para cruzar la casa
el puente surge luego
donde el árbol frutal se inclina
como un cántaro
agua que busca agua
a veces manantial de nadie
a veces de tierra
pero abre la ventana
y ve *aquí*
torre o columna
más puentes

dos o tres manantiales
después lo que sobra
tu agua tu tierra
tu nadie restante
a las nueve palabras
tres proscritas entonces
o hay trampa
una creación de más
porque esto *aquí*
es un lugar
no el mundo
y quizás fue siempre así
por decir algo y decirlo
hasta que ya no rechine
ese metal en su boca
el ciervo pertinaz
la oveja de lodo
y el cordero de más allá
balando *aquí*

Tedi López Mills (b. Mexico City, 1959) has published ten books of poetry, including *Segunda persona*, which received the Premio Nacional de Literatura Efraín Huerta; *Horas*; *Luz por aire y agua*; *Contracorriente*; and, in translation, *While Light is Built*. Her most recent book of poetry is *Parafrasear*. She is also the author of an essay collection, *La noche en blanco de Mallarmé*. López Mills has been a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte since 2000.

Wendy Burk is a poet and the translator of Tedi López Mills's *While Light is Built*. Her work has appeared in journals including *Terrain.org*, *Two Lines*, *Colorado Review*, and most recently in *Literal* and *Back Room Live*. She is currently working on a manuscript of the selected poems of López Mills in translation.

God, Seed: Online Chapbook of Poetry and Images by Rebecca Foust and Lorna Stevens

View online at
http://www.terrain.org/poetry/24/foust_stevens.htm

Rebecca Foust's book, *All That Gorgeous, Pitiless Song*, recently won the Many Mountains Moving Book Award and will be released in 2010. *Mom's Canoe* (2009) and *Dark Card* (2008) won the Robert Phillips Poetry Chapbook Prize in consecutive years.

Lorna Stevens makes visual comments about the natural world. *Huia,* her book about extinction, was acquired by the Brooklyn Museum and the New York Public Library. She received her MFA in sculpture from Columbia University.

Poetry by Pamela Uschuk

Mother's Day Celebration

For Terri Acevedo

What is love but feasting atop a grave?
Mother's Day and the Catholic cemetary is packed
with barbeques, Mariachis and plastic
tablecloths laid for picnics. There, alone
with his hands pressed into a burial mound
and in the cool shade of a concrete angel's wings,
a boy sits crosslegged. He could be a yogi
concentrating on the orderly column of black ants
that carry, one blossom at a time, yellow
mesquite flowers to their eggs underground, except
that its Mother's Day, and he is as alone
as he'll ever be, staring at the empty curl
of his fingers holding nothing but
the distant mourning of doves.
At desert noon even the dead enjoy
singing that braids heat waves
shimmering molten lead between spring blooms.
My friend has come to speak to
her mother riding the spirit horse of memory
along an underground river this past year.
She lights a candle and brushes debris
with her tender palms from the ant-tilled soil
above her mother's ghost face.
Walking between graves, her skin fills
with a guitar's laughing blue chords,
with charcoal smoke,
with the boy's mute hands,
with loneliness spun by hot wind each afternoon
under the invisible birth of stars, where
the dead begin to remember their names.

I Have an Illegal Alien in My Trunk

Just north of the border, the migra doesn't consider
this bumpersticker a joke. Only a chihuahua
without papers, maybe a pair of pawned cowboy boots
would fit in the trunk of this mini SUV driving Oracle
swarming at rush hour. Even though half of Tucson's traffic
speaks Spanish, the legislature's declared
English the only legal fuel—it's
the same Continental Divide stubborn and paralytic
as the steel-plated wall insulting our nation's learning curve
as it cleaves us. For over seventy years
my grandma's high cheekbones were illegal. Lovely
as a tiger lily she spoke
the six severed tongues dividing her heart.
In a grave that does not spell out her name
in any language, she is beyond the shovels of police
who would have to dig up her bones to deport them
back to a village outside Prague, where
beneath a Catholic church are layered
the crumbling skulls and femurs
of her ancestors slaughtered by centuries of wars.
I am safe in my adobe house
with its rainbow nations of chuckling quails,
pyrrhuloxia, phainopeplas, choirs of mockingbirds,
skitterish verdins and purple finches, coyotes,
javelinas, rattlers, scorpions, collared and leapard lizards,
and the not so silent majority of English sparrows
who accommodate too easily to walls—there
is not one passport among them. The cactus wren
weaves her tough nest among the barbed thorns
of the cholla, while round-eared gophers construct
complex subways for their babies to run
under chainlink fences separating yards.
Each day along the border of our sealed hearts
gleaming with coiled razor wire, traffic
idles waiting for armed guards
to pillage each car trunk for contraband
people and drugs. I have seen our agents rip
out the interiors of vans, spit commands
at old women with black hair and dark skin.
Sanitary, they use rubber gloves
to deconstruct the meagre grocery bags

and plastic purses of common lives. Indians
are particularly suspect, even though reservations
were drawn like tumors by both governments
to spill across borders, so that whole families
are amputated like unnecessary limbs.
This morning walking the Rillito River,
we read bilingual signs warning the thirsty
not to drink irrigation water slaking imported
ornamental bushes & flowering trees.
This year, statistics say, twice
as many border crossers will die of thirst
in Arizona. Who can stop tongues
alien or otherwise from swelling black at noon. After all,
in the barbed wire waiting room of the heart
there is no seating for sentiment
nor room for the frail arms of hope to save strangers, even
if they are nursing mothers or desperate fathers
looking for work who haven't yet learned
the English word for *por que*.
After all, waging a war on terror
like any war is not for the faint ambitions
of the humane, so, in the game of homeland security,
we erect a bulletproof wall across the borders of our souls
that guarantees destruction must win.

A Short History of Falling

For Namgial Rinchen

Sweet Babel of birdsong syncopates
dawn's light as bruised as the hematoma
oozing under the skin of my left knee.
Sudden leaves reshape trees and the delicate longing
of tree frogs pipes snow into a bad memory
old as falling. My knee still aches
from Sunday's tumble on the pallet I didn't see
over the stack of sawn aspen I carried
for the night fire. Unmindful, I tripped
on an iron fence stake cockajar
against the woodpile, this time breaking
my fall with my palm's life line.

My history of falls is unkind. At five, I
plunged through a rotten barn board
all the way from the hay mow
while shafts of numinous straw
whirled like moths on fire
past my Dad shoveling manure.
I smashed into the concrete floor wet
with cow piss near the Holstein's hooves.
Her licorice eyes were big as my fists
as she bawled at me this
first lesson of gravity.

At ten, when I slipped on ice
running for the school bus, I lay
on my back watching my breath
and snow become the ghosts of bare
maple limbs twirling blind white. Not wanting to
move my spine's broken porcelain, I
froze hoping to melt into all
that was pure and cold. When I couldn't
rise, my dad carried me in, cursing
my clumsy and bruised tailbone.

Afterward, falls pocked each year, unpredictable
as a broken clock, until
I crashed in a midnight parking lot,

both hands in my back pockets,
boot catching the cement bumper
turned upside down and painted with tar.

My chin cracked the curb first,
breaking my jaw, then ripping three
ribs from the sternum. What came
from my mouth was garbled
as birdsong, a blood murmur I mistook
for a scream for help. What I remember
are the three good people who walked
around me, not stopping and
the table full of cops I could see
through the restaurant glass, who never shifted
from coffee mugs overlooking
the wounded rug of my body. What I
remember is my lover's face white
as a terrified swan as he lifted me.

Above Mangyu Village, I hiked the thin
trail far above tree line to sunset,
bending to the infinitesimal
in the shape of a plant I could barely see,
petals the size of molecules, its yellow center
smaller than a drop of blood, when the mountain
tilted, and my shoes slid gathering speed
on talus that rattled like oiled marbles of fate.
I could not stop and wondered whether to fly
off the ridge pressed flat so
I wouldn't somersault the thousand feet
to the valley or to sit back on my heels
as if my boots were skis. The last moment
I grabbed the only thing that held
the last rim, a turquoise rock.

The other climbers thought my yelling
a joke, all but the Sherpa who leapt sure
as a mountain goat, zen master
of shifting stone, and snatched my wrists
to yank me back to the path.
We sat then, breathing for a long time, unwinding
our stories like prayer flags
strung out in Himalayan wind.

How do we ever thank who
or what saves us? Namgial told me to look
at the turquoise rock still clutched in my palm.
We call that a god's eye, he said, and there
in one sea-colored facet was etched the eye
almond as Buddha's and open
as if it knew, while above us,
a Himalayan eagle incinerated
before falling to the other side of the world.

Pamela Uschuk is the author of five books of poetry, including the latest, *Crazy Love* (Wings Press, April 2009), just nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and the chapbook, *Pam Uschuk's Greatest Hits* (Pudding House Press, 2009). Her work has appeared in nearly 300 publications worldwide and is translated into a dozen languages. She lives in Colorado.

Poetry by Jessica Weintraub

The *May Princess*

We did get there
in the end
(didn't we?)

There
love's best substitute,
love's best vessel.

The ferry's 'ship' wheel had
H-Y-D-R-O-S-L-A-V-E
tattooed around its rim.
I pointed: *That's us!*

Across the narrow deck:
a sour husband chiding his sleeveless
wife—even though it was May
I was chilly in my jacket.
A pair of 60-ish lovebirds,
glamorous in tweeds,
cuddling the entire hour ride.
She wore a chic shawl;
her arms trapped inside
made wings.

And the large woman in sloppy black,
raving about her brown-framed
Gucci sunglasses in American twang.
In gold-spangled script her T-shirt stated:
"The Search for Excellence Ends Here."

(sleeves of spray brushed by, haloed hair *there, there*)

I was staring—clenched in thought—
at a sea so blue it must hold some sort of truth
when your knee pecked at my sputtering hem.
You just missed the seals. Everyone
was on the other side of the boat except you.

(puffins—"pocketsized"—Anna said,
whizzed by, thrilling as bullets)

I jammed my waist into the rail, scratched
my nails against its red paint,
holding nothing by an edge.
I laughed, shook my head.
I was just thinking that I can never make
anything up!

Terns, razorbills, shags (I took a photo of you taking a photo:
Closest I've been
to a shag in a long time.)

guillemots, kittiwakes, 55,000 pairs
of puffins, gannets galore, a well-placed
kestrel, tiger-striped…
bunched into messy bouquets
tossed over the lacy shoulders
of clouds into a slavering crowd.

The Gucci woman shrieked:
They look like insects, a swarm! (*There!There!There!*)

I shot her a stern glance, then looked back
at the puckering sky, its stuffing coming undone,
wingbeats like unraveling stitches.

Sometimes: it is the perfectly
obvious, not approximated
mystery that rules the day.

She rose, proud,
as our bow nuzzled the Isle's dock.
Her sunglasses perched on her head

like a crown.

Sky Lark

> *The air hates you, and the ground hates you,*
> *the trees hate you—there is no purpose*
> *in your staying on this land.*
> — A senior aide of Yasser Arafat

How does mist divulge its disgust? Trees drop
bombazine leaves, buds tighten back to green
bullets. All things act concurrent parts in
two plays: a sky lark—summer's herald—claps
its wings toward cloud balconies: flames, insects
and/or lambent warmth now a stone's throw away…
Once-bulging waters suck themselves in, lay
low (the Red Sea Method). A man directs
his wife down the subway ramp, "I don't want to
talk." "We're not talking," he says. All panting
dovetails into landscape, cells… sunlight threading
itself through pear tree petals. Props are cued:
I hate Arabs AND Jews slapped on the first
sign: *Moving divide – Do not lean against*.

Fallout at MOMA

I.

After seeing the disembodied, artificial daisy

jointed stem, the color
of lemon meringue
anatomized
into seven paintings

mounted soundlessly

one for each hand-
ful of petalrays,
ripped out like hair;

two for the starry
center, hard-boiled,
but flaky

on the validated walls, how

could you think we would fail?

helovesmehelovesmenot

II.

The act of being alive is the navigation through parts:

corolla caruncle

calyx stamen

filaments

petals anthers

stem veins leaves fruit pods
pollen

ovaries

pistils

Even if my prismatic stamina
(a rainbow separated into its seven-note scale
red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet
like inverse flares, dispersed
soldiers—the bloom of nuclear families fractured
coloroverwhiteovercolorwithfuchsiaedges)
casts mutual love, how can my efforts project
credibility onto the vast exactitudes of your horizon?
Immodest expectations shriek *sforzando* orange—
uranium trioxide:
poisonous, radioactive orange
powder, a coloring agent

III.

Before reflection
swallowed the encapsulated moment

: he intoned something about the atmosphere

moisture garlands the mushroomy strat-
ospheric layer—as "silver bullets"
of sunlight pummel the sky,
its transparent brow goes robin's egg blue

: he missiled new words for our armored half-spaces
("vane": a metal stabilizing fin attached to the tail of a bomb, see *shooting star*)

Most fell away, what remains is little pieces and the name:
"Mass spectrometers"—black boxes with vacuum-type attachments—

solid rocks are pulverized, then the powder is suspended
in water—light-waves pulse through the mixture, winnowing,
to find uranium specks hidden in the unruly folds of bent color...

I don't want to look up the whole meaning—

I like how the body keeps bursting in.

Books don't croon science; they're too pure.

"Uranium" because Uranus—mythological god personifying the sky—
had recently been located, the *seventh* planet from the sun.
(Oh, the irreverent outcomes of coincidental collisions!)

He told me about mass spectrometers:

... during World War II women used the appliance
to test for the presence of uranium-238 in batches
of carnotite and uraninite. (Leaving sleeping children, dirty pans)
they picked rocks like roadside cactus blooms—similar scratch,
new weight pressing their wrists. Night after night,
elbows on wood or Formica (yolky light
orbiting bent heads), they detected (pies cooling on windowsills)
the silvery isotope. It's non-splitable, but when irradiated
produces (loneliness) fissionable plutonium-239.
—"Appropriate arrangements" may protect
against sustained explosions, see *daisy chain*.
—Heed distractions of (isolation and) uranium-235.
Underestimated, the way slivers always are *(nein?)*
pollen staining their fingernails...

the rustle of this glasswoven motherland
(satin prisms)—the lacy slips
we were lowered from

I only want to know from his valved voice.

IV.

My habits of high bliss,
like rain tumbling from galactic reaches,
hiss against the dredged bed of mystery.

Scrape a Geiger counter across the fuming ground; it will tick
when it noses out uranium's truffle-blush.
Imagine a rainbow glow.

Now, paint *terralove* by numbers:

1: public (law)
2: caution (prejudice)
3: opportunities for indigo, sex, or liberty
4: luck, connections, hard work, kitchen tables, and some red tape
5: dreams of flight, heaven, special effects
6: hope (that turmoil is temporary)
7: terror
(that it will never happen again)

V.

One of the perfect things about living
near a creek that barely budges
a town flat as a forearm bone,
is that any direction, any movement at all,
feels like progress.

A dusty grudge so endless and winding
becomes referential, reverential, even
religious in scope.

Even as advances in microscopy
dispelled dust as the universal
symbol of smallness

dust

—whose tiny, tinted prisms help us see colors

—which is found powdering the farthest star,
pillowing halo after lit halo

—which is found along the bottom of the ocean, cavorting
with Aphrodite (a fuzzy undersea worm)

is everywhere.

VI.

False Botanical Studies:

These renditions of a daisy seem at first to be scientific studies in their meticulous attention to detail. Upon closer inspection they reveal themselves to be re-presentations of a disassembled artificial flower. Likewise, the frames (which look like traditional wood frames) are actually Formica that has a simulated woodgrain finish.

What I'm best at is adoration
which is sometimes confused
with observation.

VII.

Half-life: The time required for half the nuclei in a specific isotope to undergo radioactive decay. As a radioactive substance accumulates time, its half-life diminishes indefinitely.

all those

drifting

almost-

invisibles

plummet

“Secret gully” or “Dry hole, a ditch.”
“Clutter is easily remedied” or “Compose yourself.”
There is a correct staccato to the things you measure.
Rendering in sound what is imagined in color
is an astrochemical attempt
(Remember

nothing is
whole or unalloyed)

(Remember

stardust is just shed skin)

through a prism we see only dust—that’s what color is:

uncatchable parings
gathered
the hinged cleaving of astral thighs,
amassing allied part-
icles of desire.

Can you hear it?

Can you isolate it?

Can you love
what falls

from space

Jessica Weintraub was born in Rochester, New York. She received her M.A. in poetry from the University of California, Davis — a place where art and sustainability are intertwined — and her Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In between degrees, she spent a blissful year in Edinburgh. Her novel, *A Unified Theory of Love*, came out of the poem "Fallout at MOMA." It is, like most of her work, a fraught love letter to a place: in this case, the East Tennessee landscape in the 1940s and during the 2004 Presidential Election. Both narratives use language/ideas from botany, hydrology, and physics' string theory to describe love and other human endeavors. Her poems have appeared in *Open Mouse/Poetry Scotland, in*tense, Spark, New Millenium Writings*, and *her story*. "Fluency" was recently published in the 2008 Knoxville Writers' Guild Anthology, *Outscapes*.

Poetry by Polly Brown

Another Country

For Sarah

i

If you drove into one of those tiny
compressed unknown villages I kept seeing
through railway windows,

it would be flat as any photograph
as you approached it:
the red tile juxtaposed roofs,
water tower, church spire above the fields.

Then suddenly it would surround you:
brown and blue and creamy white,
full of signs and glances,
sounds of animals,
smells of water—

and then again you would be out,
on a curving narrow
wind-silenced road, carrying
the village like a tune.

ii

One night, walking in Lyon,
we saw in a hotel window a dark blue falcon
stern-faced as time and change.

You are far away.

But this morning, in a dream full of that mellifluous
language you have borrowed,
which I don't know,

you and I, walking in a park, came to a girl
who'd set out on stone steps
her collection of small birds carved from stone,

and as we touched them, the birds
briefly rose to life, each one
larger and stronger,

until the last—the falcon, towering and ancient—
opened her wings,
and folded them around us.

Stopping in Middleborough

For APL

On the beach, my students
kept bringing me the bones of birds:
wing bone, shoulder bone, a chunk of spine
like a white bead to be strung—

and I knew I would stop to see you
on my way home:
my bird-lady, gone
and become a stone,
a speckled shoulder of granite
holding the afternoon's last sun.

Remember the poem about being a bird
who could feel a branch give way,
yet rise and sing?
Your counsel not to forget
that I had wings—

Here the maple branches lift and sigh;
three robins join them, carolling;
a dog barks
in my great-grandfather's neighborhood;
and I'm here; I'm here

listening in your name.

Vase from Jane's Wheel, *CA.* 1975

After their tribe had wandered away,
we drove one evening to the top
of Hubbard Hill,

walked into and through each handmade,
abandoned house,
listened to wind renaming the trees.

Near Jane's steps, where we'd sat
so often to watch the meadow
and drink tea,

we found in tall grass this vase,
walls thick as an inch in some places—
a purple, hollowed-out stone

with a grey glazed rim,
thrown by some friend
learning on her wheel.

Four states and three decades away now,
we fill the vase with lilacs,
laurel, half-wild

rain-wet roses—heavy
flowers that need some anchor
for their sweetness.

Polly Brown is a member of Every Other Thursday, a poets' collaborative in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This fall, in her day job at Touchstone Community School, she is exploring transportation with 11-year-olds: physics, history, Toad careening down the road. Her recent chapbook is *Each Thing Torn From Any of Us*.

Poetry by Linda Parsons Marion

Sprout

The gardener I never reckoned on, she sows
with the fire of a zealot—rows cowlicked
in garlic, snow peas fence-latticed, mounds
studded gold—my daughter bends to earth's
pure bidding. She's living up to her baby name,
called *Tater* for the sun-brown quickness on nose
and arms. She means to mine these coffers
for yields unborn, sequin the counter with
a gracious plenty. Her reach is the surest we know,
to feed and be sated, even as she nurses
a sprout on her belly's milk, all of us waiting
for the fruit made flesh, for the muskmelon
to twirl its sweet mouth in pearlized clay
yearning toward first harvest.

Last of the Red-Hot Maters

November, and I'm dropping the end of it
in my shirt tails. Not the rarified Oxhearts and Beefsteaks
of July, but late Israels split at the hardheaded stem,
shrunken to lesser greatness in a wooden kitchen bowl.
Slowly their cells drink thin western light, recall
the high life—painted ladies twirling at each potent flower,
the abundance weightier, juicier, redder. Now autumn
folds the prickly stalk, our contrary bones, former glories
splintered under the skin—and the bruises, once sore
and glaring, seep into forgetfulness. O winterful dream
rivers to the elbow, pounds the table for more, more
Brandywines still cupping the sun, seeds bursting
hot-blooded seams, our mouths at last unpuckered.

Linda Parsons Marion is the author of poetry collections *Home Fires* and *Mother Land*. She served as poetry editor of *Now & Then* magazine for 14 years. Marion's poems often join the inner and outer landscapes to bring about understanding and healing. She is an editor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Poetry by Jenn Blair

Something

is about in the back corner of the garden
where the wind lulls the Forsythia to sleep
then wakes it again.

is there under the brick
in the pathway knocked
loose like a tooth.

is threading iron in the cream
we take down inside us.

is sitting, a dark shape in the sun—
a clause in the peace of the Lord
we pass, half-hearted.

is sobbing in the river; a drowned
coherence that keeps on rising.

The Photographer

was not up early enough to catch
any heart-muscle contracting
or flurry exploding—the mud
and gut of the struggle and dance.

But new dust flouring the fields
brought him soft scrawl, a calligraphy
carefully penned
in no script but its stubborn own.

I've known those claws, sharp and hooked.
When they tear, they bring bright
right to the surface,
reminding a thing of rivers
it used to carry without thought.

Jenn Blair is from Yakima, Washington. Currently, she is a Park Hall Fellow at the University of Georgia, where she teaches British literature. She has published in *The Tusculum Review, Copper Nickel*, and *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, among others. Her chapbook of poems, titled, *All Things are Ordered*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Poetry by Laura Sobbot Ross

Sixteen Miles from Buffalo, Wyoming

The word *wing* opens into *Wyoming*—
a landscape of wind and sky,
where black cottonwoods loosen
with shredded cloud. An ancient sea

left these undulations in the horizon,
tucked fossils into the sandy hemline
of the Bighorn Mountains. Ravaged
remnants, scarp and shadow. Elements
that burn with ten thousand years
of winter. This summer solstice—

a startling of wildflowers,
the torque of river rush melded
with glaciers' snowy veins.
We climb horses like hills—
nub and sheen, June rising warm
beneath tooled leather, windblown
manes, lavender-scented sagebrush.
We hear there's a ghost in the ranch house

where we're staying and wonder why
she can't find her way out. Maybe
it's the continuum of one vastness
into another. This blue ocean of sky,
fathomless and riveting to its earthen floor
more than shell and bone, but spirits
burdened beyond hardships of season,
solitude, the howl of hunger—every
longing resonant with ponderous space.

Laura Sobbott Ross was nominated for a Pushcart Prize this year and last, and her poetry appears or is forthcoming in *The Columbia Review, Natural Bridge, Tar River Poetry, Slow Trains*, and *The Caribbean Writer*, among others. She was recently named a finalist in the Creekwalker Poetry Prize, and a semi-finalist in the Black Lawrence Press Chapbook Contest.

Poetry by J. P. Dancing Bear

Pack Your Trash

— Poem starting with a line by Jeffrey Levine

We'll pack one tent for our love, another for our sins, walk south

away from the ruins—Orpheus will never come back here.
The birds register a guarded song, they know us
by our garbage heaps, our casual disregard
for that which is not ours.

What the feathered remember in song is the unbroken
sky, pre-contrail, pre-carbon cloud,
the edge growing empurpled
and giving way to the evening star.

If they thought of us as gods, it was those drawn
with black blood, the unmentionable ones
living in their own pollution, and who must be
prayed against.

Yes, we leave dragging two tents behind us,
walking in the direction of green heat.
We have all our hopes and a few
lessons we may never unpack

because what we know we do not like to know,
what we carry with our hopes is a box of imps
and what we cannot force ourselves
to remember is that not everything we pack

should always be opened.

J. P. Dancing Bear is the author of *Conflicted Light* (Salmon Poetry, 2008), *Gacela of Narcissus City* (Main Street Rag, 2006), *Billy Last Crow* (Turning Point, 2004) and *What Language* (Slipstream, 2002). His poems have been published in *Shenandoah, Poetry International, New Orleans Review, National Poetry Review, DIAGRAM, Mississippi Review, Verse Daily*, and many others. He is the editor of the *American Poetry Journal* and the host of "Out of Our Minds," a weekly poetry program on public radio station KKUP. His next book, *Inner Cities of Gulls*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2010.

Poetry by Beth Winegarner

Fatherland

You must have been drunk
the night you told me about Záhony,
your great-aunt's tiny village
in the northern plains of Hungary,
so close to the Soviet border
that a child of seven could make the march alone.

Most days, you wouldn't even tell me
your full name—as though by denying
those twelve letters you could escape
your roots in people whose blood
won't pump without tokaj, whose very chromosomes
are etched with the inevitability of suicide.

But that night, in a manner you never do,
you paraded out the members of your Magyar family
like rare scarves, each one fluttering
in a distinct color, each one torn differently.
Woven at the center was your grandmother,
the only one who made sure you weren't starved
for love or food, until the winter took her.

I confused the faces of your ancestors
with Kundera's characters; those summer tables
crowded with workmen's elbows and laden
with fresh roasted meat, dumplings,
bread for sopping up the juice that bleeds from marrow-bones,
which would be stored away for winter broth.

You were Tomas, and your married lover was
Sabina, sexy and exotic with her dissident's heart.
Was I Tereza? I imagined we might run away together
to the Eastern European countryside,
where we'd raise food and make babies
and wait for the world's wars to die out.

To think I romanticized communism
before I met you, before I realized
you called your Sabina the “party leader,”
before I saw how proudly you waved her flag
higher than any other. She made you love
your blood in a way I never could.

And yet—and yet. The December night you and she
got drunk on cheap Kentucky bourbon,
living the Hunter S. Thompson dream, let me ask:
When you fell to your knees in broken glass
and bled through the hotel towels, did she call 911?
No. She tried to save her own skin first.

It’s easy to pretend you’re in paradise
when, just across the border, Soviet ghosts loom
like the sour face of your father. But in your bones
you know the truth: the communists held you down
for fourty-four years. This is whose flag you fly?
She would sell you for parts to build a new rifle.

What happened to the boy you were? The one who,
at seven, stepped across the border and waved
to the Russian guard cradling an AK-47 in his hands.
It was the kind of gesture we fetishize in children
because as adults we are too frightened and ashamed
to share joy with someone whose job it is to carry a gun.

These borderlands will not yield any more secrets.
I have stopped dreaming of Budapest, of holding your hand
as we retrace the railways of your childhood.
Even your favorite freight train no longer carries grain and machines
to comrades in L’Viv and beyond. Honesty is lost,
and only propaganda sings in your father’s son’s veins.

Fading in Desperation

Tonight the houses cling to the hills
like the men (who built them 40 years ago,
who believed all these right
angles and huge windows were timeless)
cling to their faded ideology: out of need.

From up here they watch through glass eyes
as the sunset's shadow sweeps east across the city.
They see everything as it changes, as ports and
power plants close, as towers
are erected and demolished,
created and bombed,
rising and falling in no way like the tide.

A half-mile away, in the canyon, a red-tailed hawk
hovers high, searching for its kill.

Why do humans convince themselves,
when they destroy, that they are building?

Beth Winegarner is a poet, journalist, and the author of four books, including *Beloved*, *Read the Music: Essays on Sound*, and *Sacred Sonoma*. Her poems have appeared in *New Verse News, Bardsong*, and *Tertulia*, and she has reported on the news of the San Francisco Bay area for the past 11 years. She lives in San Francisco with her partner and daughter.

Poetry by Peter Huggins

Interview with a City

The vampires have abandoned
New Orleans and headed for Vegas.
Even the ghosts have left.
They have nothing or no one
To haunt. It is a city
Without borders, without shoulders,
In search of itself,
Its lost names and its people.
It is the blues,
Louisiana's poor boy,
Nobody walks there anymore.
When the vampires trickle back,
When the ghosts return,
What will it be?
For now stick pins in it,
Sew it together,
Drink black coffee.

The Bridge in Sarejevo

Gavrilo Princip waited
For Archduke Ferdinand
On the Latin Bridge.

Princip would turn himself
Into a weapon
That would lift the oppression

Of centuries and remove
The foreign occupiers
From his land.

The pistol in his pocket
Would free Serbia.

He would assassinate
The Archduke and Archduchess.
He would not even blink.

June brightened, then bloomed.
July thundered, and August
Arrived like an ultimatum.

Peter Huggins' books of poems are *Necessary Acts* (River City Publishing, 2004), *Blue Angels* (River City Publishing, 2001), and *Hard Facts* (Livingston Press/University of West Alabama, 1998); *South* is fothcoming. He is also the author of a picture book, *Trosclair and the Alligator*, which recently appeared on the PBS show *Between the Lions*, and a novel for younger readers, *In the Company of Owls*.

Poetry by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

The Mudslide Reminds Me

Surrender.
Dark sky groans downward,
remembers it has roots,
and earth scumbles its clumsy red hands
across the paved highway
as if to mirror a billowing afternoon sky.
I let the rumors of heaven
enter my car's open window,
receive the crazy rain with its ten thousand tongues,
and the doors of my heart turn open,
the flood comes in
and I sing, because that is how it is,
because at least my blood
knows how to be honest,
knows how to praise today,
sludge-muck and schedule-stuck.
But there's somehow always more to surrender
hiding in the bones, the marrow that says
it's work to love this ruthlessness,
to feel the corners disappear,
to watch wide-eyed as afternoon unslopes into evening.

Life lover and organic peach grower **Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer** lives in Southwest Colorado. Poets that thrill her include Gerard Manley Hopkins, AE Stallings, Hafiz, Rumi, May Swenson, and Mary Oliver. For information about her books and ideas for your own writing, visit her at www.wordwoman.com.

Poetry by George Moore

Underworld

Under this world, beneath our feet
on sidewalks and in the old parts
of some Gulf Coast towns, there are
these ancient tunnels cut by pirates
into the earth's wet heart. Once they
connected the human longing for
escape, with the dark possibilities
of renewal. Slaves know the feeling
of death long before others imagine
the dank earthen passageway out
of all that is worse. The traffic in
deep feelings is the same, those things
we say haphazardly, forgetfully,
come back to run the gamut of those
buried tunnels, the words that then
perforate the lover's skin. Nothing
moves above, as if frozen in a single
instant of thinking, the blood beneath
surges, however, the tunnels run with
a rush we feel, unforgiven. The cities
are now full of love, but the slaves
have never left. They are the ones
who smuggle out the contraband
of what we were, and ship it off
to countries who have long known us
not for what we barter in the world
but for the tunnels out of which
those things have come.

The Fish

The world is our shadow.
Hunger is our mother.
We eat only the small luminescent
stars in the bloodstream.
Our currents carve the world
into its features. What was
hidden is now seen. What was
once eaten is now devoured.

The grouper off the coast
of Garrafón fill the dark rays
of the boat's shadow with
their column and sway like
a tree in a breeze of water,
dispersing as you enter them.

We have faded beneath
silently, decades blooming
in an acid rose like thin
coloring in clear crystals,
like mercury climbing down
off the back of our mirror,
and entering the bloodstream.

Up Galloway reach, lochs
are still, not streams but dead
water wrestles deep, deeper
still, to the depths on bones
of rocks, the barren undersea
remnants of fish graveyards
decompose into the effluvium.

Where do whales escape
anoxic shock, or the mussel
as its shell weakens, or coral
when its skeletal seascrapers
crumble, and entropy's
stale soup evolves? Waterways
lead to the sea like blood
to the brain, and we
swim in the change.

George Moore's poetry has appeared in *The Atlantic, Poetry, North American Review, Diode, Antigonish Review, The Scrambler, Stickman Review,* and *Zone*, and he has been nominated four times for a Pushcart Prize. A finalist for the 2007 Richard Snyder Memorial Prize, from Ashland Poetry Press, and earlier for The National Poetry Series, The Brittingham Poetry Award, and the Anhinga Poetry Prize, Moore's third poetry collection is *Headhunting* (Edwin Mellen, 2002), and he has a recently reissued e-book, *All Night Card Game in the Back Room of Time* (poetschapbooks.com, 2008). He teaches literature and writing with the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Poetry by Eva Hooker

Three Woodpeckers

I know I cannot open myself
to mere modulation.

Having room is a form of being,

place where you are cherished, even belatedly,
like the trio of woodpeckers

who arrive at dusk claiming the heart-wood—

They resist camouflage.
They do not hide their need or thaw

the instinct to prune flesh rot—

I hear the tap tap tap,
signal sound of the hard soul persisting, yielding

to its natural work.

They make amber
wheels of light, three, a ravishing, each *as the Spirit turns,*

making dark,
hovering usage of the winged self. Here—

Then,
        gone—

Eva Hooker is professor of English and writer-in-residence at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. *The Winter Keeper*, a hand-bound chapbook (Chapiteau Press, Montpelier, Vermont, 2000), was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award in poetry in 2001. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The New England Review, Agni, The Harvard Review, Salmagundi, Witness, Drunken Boat,* and *Best New Poets 2008.* Her poetry is affected by her experiences of the northland and of Lake Superior.

Poetry by Scott Edward Anderson

bridging

Between now and now, between I am and you are, the word bridge.
— Octavio Paz

I.

The bridge arcs over the stream
connecting more than just the banks.

The bridge connects water as water
connects the banks. They begin to emerge
as the bridge crosses the stream.

The bridge brings together
the expanse of landscape
extending beyond each bank—

Water may drift beneath the bridge
or be lathered by floods.

The bridge is braced for the sky and weather.
Ice floes move under the bridge the way life flows.

II.

The city bridge connects commerce
with marketplace, exchanging goods and ideas.

The old stone bridge crosses an unassuming brook,
providing passage from field to village.

The floating bridge brings enlightenment to Pliny's raven—
weight crossing displaces water determining volume.

The highway bridge creates a long-distance network,
making "remote" seem obsolete.

The suspension bridge proves nothing about human ingenuity,
only that tension combs strength from chaos.

The covered bridge is a repository for memory,
neither building nor dwelling.

The bridge between two people is *within* two people,
the way a river flows without acknowledging the bridge—

Bridges connect and combine, cross and current,
the way words connect lovers over distance and time.

bridging 2 (gathering)

Say that the bridge is a location,
the way a bridge brings together the banks of a river—

(Okay, the bridge gathers…)

There are many spaces along the river
that can be occupied by *something.*

(Something, anything…?)

One of these spaces proves to be a location
and does so because of the bridge.

(So Heidegger asserts…)

Say that the bridge does not come to be a location,
but location comes into being by virtue of the bridge—

(Do we really agree with that?)

The way points on a map are described by naming, by symbols;
the way mapping becomes an organized presencing.

(Shall we gather at the river…)

When we speak of human beings and space
we do not mean human beings on one side,

(The river, the beautiful river…)

space on the other—
The bridge gathers, uniting the banks of our river.

(Our beautiful, beautiful river…)

mapping

More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.
— Elizabeth Bishop

A boundary is where something begins,
spaces formed by locations.
Mapping is building spaces
and locations, as it is made.

Nature's boundaries
defined by interconnections,
and geophysical fact
not geopolitical friction—

Aspect, climate, elevation,
land forms and bodies of water,
aggregation of species,
watershed divides,
soil, time, bedrock, strata,
and shifting—

of this we are certain:
boundaries are always shifting.
(Only Man tries to deny this,
imposing order where chaos rules.)

Say that boundaries
are the beginning,
where things start,
not the end-point;
say boundaries are a beginning,
one among many.

Mapping delineates spaces
and locations through form.
Each boundary,
while defining the end
of shaped space,
is also a beginning.

Scott Edward Andersonhas been a Concordia Fellow at the Millay Colony for the Arts, and received both the *Nebraska Review* Award and the Aldrich Emerging Poets Award. He writes the popular blog, the green skeptic: blogging the new green economy, and is famous... on the Internet. These poems are part of a sequence called "dwelling: an ecopoem."

Poetry by Alison Hawthorne Deming

Pandora on Prozac

That was thousands of years ago
when everyone was a child
and supper grew on trees
faster than we could harvest

The troubles had not begun

Earth asked so little of us
our eyes blinded with sugary garlands

Gathering antheriums and orchids
to arrange in vases
was the hardest work

And then
for the rest of the day
there was the locked box

Who can blame us
that we were drawn
to what we couldn't see or touch
the box wrapped in gold cord
which we'd kneel beside
to try picking the fibers loose
never intending to undo the seal

Now whatever we do in this house
we feel there's something else
we should be doing or
something we should be
doing differently

The arguments never stop
the revelry
of the hiveless swarm

Specimens Collected at the Clear Cut

1. Wild currant twig flowering with cluster of rosy micro-goblets.

2. Wild iris, its three landing platforms, purple bleeding to white then yellow in the honey hollows, purple veins showing the direction to the sweet spot.

3. Dogwood? Not what I know from the northeast woods, the white four-petalled blossom marked with four rusty holes that make its shape a mnemonic for Christ hanging on the cross. This one, six-petalled, larger, whiter, domed seedhouse in the center, no holes on the edges, shameless heathen of the northwest forest that flaunts its status as exhibitionist for today.

4. Empty tortilla chip bag.

5. Empty Rolling Rock can. Empty Mountain Dew bottle. Empty shotgun shell. Beer bottle busted by shotgun shell, blasted bull's-eye hanging on alder sapling.

6. One large bruise four inches below right knee inflicted by old growth stump of Western red cedar, ascent attempted though the relic was taller and wider than me, debris field skirting a meter high at its base, wet and punky; nonetheless, I made my try, eyes on a block of sodden wood, reddened by rain, fragrant as a cedar closet here in the open air, the block of my interest wormed through (pecked through?) with tunnels diameter of a pencil. How many decades, how many centuries, of damage and invasion the tree had survived! But the stump felled me, left me with its stake on my claim and jubilation to see that nothing of this ruin was mine, mine only the lesson that the forest has one rule: start over making use of what remains.

7. One hunk of dead Doug fir, gray as driftwood, length of my forearm, width of my hand, woodgrain deformed into swirls, eddies, backflows, and cresting waves, a measure of time, disturbances that interrupted linear growth to make it liquid as stream flow.

8. Lettuce lung (*Lobaria pulmonaria*), leaf lichen, upper-side dull green, turns bright green in rain, lobed, ridged surface with powdery warts, under-side tan and hairy with bald spots, texture like alligator skin, sample attached to twig falls at my feet on trail to Lookout Creek. Day five, resampling the site, t.i.d.

9. Four metaphors for the forest. Plantation trees: herringbone tweed. Old growth trees: medieval brocade. Clear cut: the broken loom. Clear cut five years later: patches on the torn knees of jeans.

10. Skat. Pellets the size of Atomic Fireballs, hot candy I loved as a child. This, more oval. Less round. Not red. But brown. Specimen dropped by Roosevelt elk savoring the clear cut's menu of mixed baby greens. One pellet broken open to reveal golden particles. Light that traveled from sun to grass to gut to ground to mind. Forest time makes everything round, everything broken, a story of the whole.

Glooscap in Wolfville

Off the bay ferry from Saint John,
city Samuel de Champlain named for John the Baptist
when the Frenchman arrived
on saint's feast day—named the place and sailed on.

Along Highway 1 with Digby Neck stretched
long to the west
salt hay meadows downsloping
to bayshore and orchards a century old still blooming,

planted by English who'd kicked out
French from land they'd dyked, seeded,
and farmed, their Grand Pré,
who'd kicked out Micmac, Maliseet, Abenaki.

Glooscap napping on Blomidon Head,
who'd paddled his stone canoe
from the place before
people and animals were made, who chose green forest and red clay,

who stayed and when the people came taught them
to hunt and gave them purple amethysts.
Canadian town of fair trade coffee,
Salvadoran theater, town of sustainability and farmer's market,

flight simulator training ("very military"), Shakespeare in summer,
and the guy who carries
a folding bike in his canoe.
Town of bookstore, a woman tending glad to be back

from the ice of Inuvik who leaves me alone
with her yippy shih tzu to browse
"The Saga of the Barrens," "The Larceny of Ahjeeek,"
and "The Death Song of Chiliqui,"

animal stories from the far North while I live one
with the dog who whines
for her return—
his heart grown full by absence.

Alison Hawthorne Deming is the author of four books of poems, most recently *Rope* (Penguin 2009), and three books of nonfiction. She teaches at the University of Arizona and lives in Tucson near Aqua Caliente Hill.

Poetry by William Keener

In the Cathedral of Graffiti

The canopy begins a hundred feet
above our heads, the high vaulted
leafwork of *Sequoia sempervirens*,
Latin meaning “everlasting green.”

Their only way to perish is to fall,
to rip the root-maze from the soil.
Where the forest floor could not
absorb the massive blow, a tree

split-cracked on impact, exposing
heartgrain lumber down its length.
Impervious to rot, the redwood log
is now a message board, riddled

with epithets and annunciations
of love, whittled by timberjack
tourists—all the little Visigoths
so busy with their pocket knives.

And carved into the lettered scars
are testaments left by insects,
the wild woodcut script of beetles
who masticate the words to dust.

In Transit

What we pass through
is nothing more
than untouchable fog
dissolving our world
of steel above sea.

So dense is this mist,
we swab the windows
of the bus to look out
at immaterial walls
swirling past our bridge.

How hard not to use our eyes
even when we cannot see
where we are going,
when the road is swallowed
in a sunless gloom,

the neutral light of limbo
between night and day
that might give way
to one or the other,
if only we keep moving.

Emergency Exit

We pause where a burst of red corollas
spin their scented anthers up and away
from their glorious ten-petaled cups,

golden stamens hovering with the gold
of morning bees, so close for a moment
I could touch each incarnadine wheel.

But between me and flowering passion
vine is a single pane of tempered glass,
with its metal warning plaque riveted

next to my seat on the eight o'clock bus,
instructing me to pull the handle down,
crack the seal and kick the window out.

The days lurch ahead, and the petals are
guttered, but the handle still glows red.

William Keener is an environmental lawyer in the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry chapbook *Gold Leaf on Granite,* winner of the 2008 Anabiosis Press Contest, was recently published. His poems appear in the current issues of *Camas, The Main Street Rag,* and *Autumn Sky Poetry*, and are forthcoming in *Isotope, Atlanta Review, Water-Stone Review,* and *Margie.* In August 2009, he was invited to be one of the "Artists in the Back Country" in Sequoia National Park, a program designed to rekindle the tradition of enhancing public awareness of our country's great lands through literature and the arts.

Poetry by Brett Foster

West on I-70 Across the Land of Lincoln

Dear one,
one we had to leave in Boston,

I wish I could say more about Illinois
(or at least the eastern part) than "It's there."
No prolixity of praise disguised here.
Maybe the statement's unfair, my eye lazy:
the landscape cries out for the observant
one who can ponder the miles of tattered shoulders
of corn stalks, deep green field dusted with
disheveled husks, the stranded oak and ash
in islands at the field's edge. Their dark foliage
is streaked with blighted leaves. Maybe
there's energy in me yet—No. Short of water,
diseased, or heat-blanched, what does it matter?

They're there and painless will remain, but we,
we are always moving, and so maintain
our distance—Korea, California.
We joke about the tribal, how we'd like
to reinstate that *people-ness*. I hope
we mean it, too. Long hours across the plains
ahead, awaiting us beyond the sunset,
enduring lane that's growing narrower.
I need to believe it, that we'll inhabit
the same block someday, in some forgotten
town—one of these—not even of our own
choosing. What would it matter? Once again
together, we'd have no reason to decline.
"Anywhere" could be no better. We'd be
where we were.

There's color too in the very character
of all that's been constructed, little towns
we pass through, Greenup, Brownstown, Greenville,
and local color of the faded billboards:

Wickiup Motel, Nuby's Restaurant,
a foot-high pie at the Blue Springs Inn.
Once fed and boarded, our fresh attention
turns to commerce: Fostoria's glassware,
which makes me look twice, a clearance sale
to kill for at the Buck knife outlet store:
SPECIALS FOR THE LUCKY HUNTER!
Adjacent, a plywood jack-in-the-box,
Ronald McDonald's insidious smile,
sinister as ever as he gestures
with mad waves to entice the wandering
cravings in the minds of children.

§

She cried twice just this afternoon, I think
you ought to know these things. The first time sprung
out of nowhere. We were worrying about
those boring moving practicalities,
then a pause, the hum of car noise—
lost in her eruption of sobs, too soon
to explain, though she tried with stunted words.
I interrupted, like an oaf, "What?! What?"
It startled me, I thought I'd hit a dog
or something, or had forgotten the cat
back in Boston and now realized the fact.
I should have known. I believe I heard it
in the tone of her grieving, to arrive
and not find you there, to be less alert,
despite the belligerence of the heart.

She resumed later, but this time softly,
as if arranging sadness on the staff
of your friendship. The first, a violence
to answer the ecstatic moments or
revenge their absence, and its successor
nearly inaudible, yet sent to echo
in its way the tenderness between us
still present somewhere, imparted from you
toward my wife, shaken in this burdened car.
"What is the city but the people?"
She just found this in *Coriolanus*.
This afternoon, I thought you ought to know

§

From the high point of the highway we seem
to hover above the squat, fiberglass
prayerhouse near the Cross of Victory Church.
A large sign says **Porn Destroys the Family**
and stands immodestly at the forefront
of the property; thirty seconds later
we see the reason why: adult book store
farther along the access road. What good
the location? A late-night terminus
for lonely truckers? I can only wonder
as it vanishes in the mirror. I'm stirred
by such mysteries, layers of culture.
Due north of here, the ancient arrowhead
mounds of Cahokia, the small museum
a hokey, field-trip reminder of this state
in a state of nature, from which all this
has grown. Then as now, so faintly but as sure,
the land leads us to our own conclusions,
allows for our peculiar revelations,
how the roadside detritus of business
differs little from that of my home state,
fast approaching just beyond the Gateway
to the West. But there I cherish or gainsay
each embarrassment like a yearbook portrait:

Cafe Presley, and that dirty warehouse
abounding with concrete lawn ornaments,
or Itchy's Flea Market outside Creve Coeur.
It's not about them, but seeing them again,
just these. They witness to the native pull
of familiar soil, where even the most
ridiculous can gloss the Beautiful.
But you know what? I'm coming to discover
that this is, finally, untrue. Nothing more
than a favorite stretch to be passed just once
or once before, a garish nostalgia
diminished now by the light of higher
matters, other losses we must learn from:
age, action, changes of fate, commitments
that insist we're here, you're there, and that's that.

Will write again when we get there.
Yr
brother

Brett Foster's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Boston Review, Columbia, Hudson Review, Image, Kenyon Review, Literary Imagination, Missouri Review, Poetry East, Raritan*, and *Southwest Review*. He teaches Renaissance literature and creative writing at Wheaton College.

Poetry by Kathleen Hellen

Friendly Borders

Foreign to me how she looks in exile
from herself— bottle-blonde and bruised. The trill
of *Carlos, Carlos* drilled into my dreaming
I plug my ears to stop the trespass of
these row-house walls. The throated moans after
the tall Coronas he's deported
empty to the fence I've staked with flags
and pinwheel daisies—just to keep the
field rats out. The *cholo* squirrels. The rabbits
breeding more than rabbits can afford.

Kathleen Hellen's work has appeared in *Barrow Street,* the *Cortland Review,* the *Hollins Critic, Nimrod, Prairie Schooner, Runes,* and *Southern Poetry Review,* among others**.** Awards include the *Washington Square Review* and Thomas Merton poetry prizes, as well as individual artist grants from the state of Maryland and city of Baltimore.

Poetry by Thorpe Moeckel

Old Cypress of the Black

To have watched the pin oak, because wet, burn slower than the birch;

to have felt the teal's every roost
at the margin of twilight's last shard,
to have had & to have held,

to have seen beneath the bark the wood's harvests of sugar,
and heard it hiss, and smelled its kinship
to earlier stars;

to have marched forth, to have retreated

and then entrenched for years in love's holy war;

we came to a place where the leaves
did not care for us anymore

than the returns. There

we stayed, two birds, flitting
among the fallen limbs.

§

Two wood ducks on a westward beam,
the sky a laminate,
a low ceiling—there
was ease again. We had no words
for the standing by. It was a burn.
It was toothmarks
on the cypress knee. Nobody spoke
of black sand or of smoke
from the fire
where February laid

its hands, gave another fragrance
to the rain
that we darkened with beans
and sipped by the bank
watching the beavers go
like need
this way & that.

§

All blemish & swarth. The bottom
wasn't far,
was sand, roots, blowdown.
What underwater
mistletoe grew? Nuthatch
in Spanish beard.
Low February sun in every face that lived
in or on the trees. A hard breeze, a harder stillness
to undo. The canoe far
too red & long. This way was fine.
That way was okay, & grew.

§

A dark translucence
of cinnamon: how the openings began
to swallow us
slower. Heron,
kingfisher, titmouse. Nothing dramatic,
yet a gulf of minnows,
every edge,
a feathering of needles,
bay leaf, tupelo,
in the loam.

§

To the edge of edgelessness we slid.
Even the turning had learned
to spill. Land again
like a disappointment.

The channels came together again.
There was no way
in the now unbridled sunlight
but out of cypress

to be hewn.

§

The river, without teeth, was darkly tongue.

We meant to stay under forever.
Life had rarely felt
so ribboned,
so what.

§

Two thousand years.
After that, things got tidal fast.
There were naps involved. There were children.
Another shoreline.
The wind gave us hell.
The ocean couldn't stay put.

Thorpe Moeckel teaches at Hollins University. His third book, *Venison: a poem*, is forthcoming from Etruscan Press in spring 2010.

Poetry by Joe Wilkins

Sunrise from a Bench on Esplanade

So what's at issue, it seems, is light—
the way it slips
and tangles in the magnolia leaves,
the fire of it on a blown skin
of silver foil.

Perhaps the issue is shadow—
that man with the cardboard hat, shaking
his strung charm
of beer cans.
The way heels click
across pavement.

Maybe stone—
how it gives, and gives so cleanly:
like ice now,
but when the sun goes down,
and the music gets loud,
it burns.

Maybe wind—
the dank breath of cypress
always on your tongue.

Maybe water—
the river blue inside you.

Or earth—
delicacy of rot: chicken bones
and weeds and a shack's
broken neck.

Or all things—
cold throat of this bright morning,
those three stray dogs,
skin of your wrist
on my wrist, the light
in the leaves.

Fog

I drove through you, and out of you, and the world then
was lit like it's usually lit—winter trees bright
and black, their shadows black as well, the bright

and dirty snow in the ditch. A moment ago, I couldn't see
a thing. Yet now the tin siding on that lonely warehouse winks
and glisters, the dark graffiti cries so clearly: Forever my life.

Once, long ago, I sat on the front-room floor and stared
at the wreck of my father in his easy chair—his bald
and flaking head, red fist of face, chest collapsing

with the sound of a broken bone. He opened his eyes.
"What the hell are you looking at?" he asked. "What's wrong
with you?" I was nine years old. I left. I never saw him alive again.

Joe Wilkins was born and raised on a sheep ranch north of the Bull Mountains of eastern Montana. He now teaches writing at Waldorf College in Forest City, Iowa, and his poems, stories, and essays appear in recent issues of the *Georgia Review*, the *Southern Review*, *Mid-American Review, Indiana Review, Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *Orion*. He was recently awarded the Ellen Meloy Fund for Desert Writers for his proposal to travel the high plains along the Rocky Mountain front.

Poetry by Sue Swartz

Outside Tapatio's Bar

Jennings County, Indiana

Because they were unstable as water;
because they were serpents by the road;

because their pink knuckles were stiff with boredom
and a skull hit hard enough will crackle like lightning;

because you were a stranger on a beery night—
they approached you outside Tapatio's Bar.

Because your arms made firm by the assembly line
longed for a bit of Monday night celebration;

because your kin were 3,000 miles away, and you
no longer felt a stranger beside the sloping curb;

because the faint whirr of Midwestern steel trains
in the distance reminded you of laughter—

you invited the men home where they robbed
and beat you—*wetback*—until their knuckles

were satisfied; then wrapped you—*just another spic*—
in sheets torn from your own bed as more men

appeared (quite a catch you've got there, boys!)
in time for a motorcade through fog-soaked hollows.

Your toes and ankles were twisted to breaking,
and naked you were dumped into the humid woods.

For days I have considered your circumstance,
Rogelio Aguilar, and how the mechanics of death

are the same everywhere: the body peels away
from its chores, the mind from its preoccupations.

The dying is more complicated. Will we find grace
in that unknown and eternal land, the taste of home

effaced from our bloodied mouths? I imagine
a plea going up from your pummeled bones

into the night—a plea to be known. Answered
by a stranger, witness and unwilling confidant,

a stranger who dialed 911 in the dim light
of his drunkenness, because he remembered

when he stood, gawky and resigned, a boy
before a shrieking mother bird, bloodied jay

in his upturned palm, muttering apologies about
his cat. *His* cat. His cherished cat gone bad.

Because those tiny bones still rest in his fruited yard,
because the cries still caress him, because he feared

the judgment of morning—he drove back into town
with a dime. Thus you did not die that night.

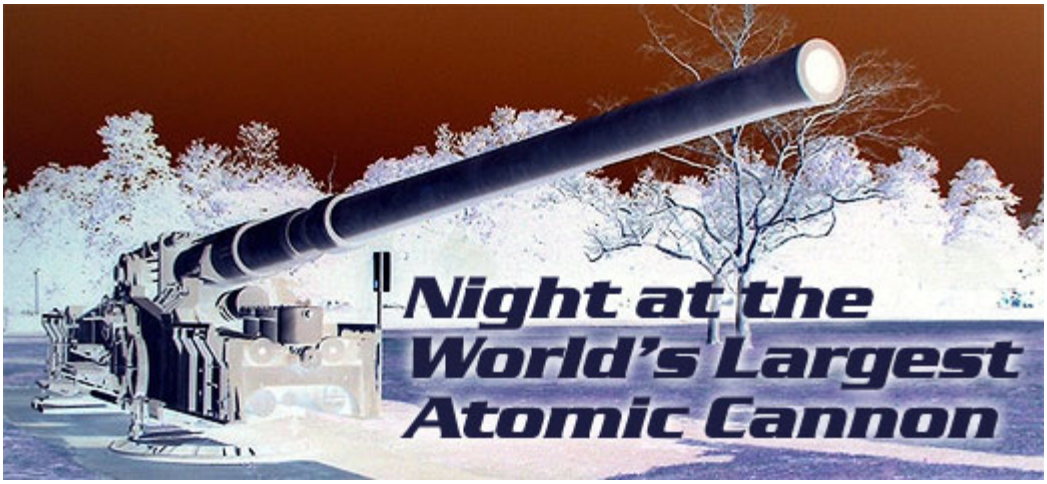
Thus were you delivered unto your kin across
the shifting border… and soon after, you left

the constriction of America behind forever,
though what drew close that night remains there,

in the spidery tire marks outside Tapatio's Bar.

Sue Swartz works, writes, ballroom dances, and makes trouble in Bloomington, Indiana. Her words have appeared in *Cutthroat, Smartish Pace, Isotope, Drash*, and *Jewish Currents*. She has just finished her first complete poetry manuscript.

Essay



by Christopher Cokinos

Watershed and extinction folders stacked beside me, I must have been driving home from the quarterly state gathering of activists when suddenly I needed to climb the hill beside the highway, where the dark of just-past-dusk gathered all around the World's Largest Atomic Cannon. No one else there in the parking lot, I took so many steps on the steep, broken asphalt path, I didn't try to keep count. I reached the place I'd also leave behind, where the weapon perches above and across from Marshall Airfield's entomological helicopters and dowdy Army hangars like a finger pointing where to go next. I was after textures, and the World's Largest Atomic Cannon looked certain of direction. Olive-drab, it pointed west.

Beside the big bluestem and Indian grass, beside the switchgrass and little bluestem, atop Kansas limestone—depth accumulation of condensed detritus—that long dark invention aimed back at and with the peculiar force of nostalgia: how I felt years ago, wanting the calming orders of drill, uniform and rank, wanting to be cockpit-hurtled in an F-5 or F-15. But I'd never fly that fast after Miss Hawk stood me in the hallway, the rest of Advanced Algebra wondering with me at my transgression, so later one summer I stood with my other Civil Air Patrol cadets while an officer like a tour guide explained the control panel of a Minuteman II bunker. I loved the white fluorescent serenity of the station. I knew then I would be an M.L.O., a Missile Launch Officer. Perhaps it was as simple as control but also, I reasoned, I could be posted quietly beneath the earth—so much time to read! It seemed hermetically exotic, the acolyte bound to a rock-walled, reinforced metal room that opened to the furiously divine once, only once. The probability of mushroom clouds I could make and the plasma purgation of the winnable mass war posited something mature and heroic.

Once when I was a boy I stood between the night window and the drawn curtains of our darkened living room on Sawyer Street and imagined that I spoke to a rally in Nuremberg. Had self-hatred begun that early, so for years I'd hate others? I could see the lawn from which I would fire bottle-rockets over a neurotic neighbor's roof. I could see the crowds that listened. I understood nothing. Now I think of Stanley Milgram's experiments and what I would have done.

Upshot-Knothole Grable M65 atomic cannon test at the Nevada Test Site, May 25, 1953.
Photo courtesy National Archives.

Beside the World's Largest Atomic Cannon—non-functioning, a relic, a memorial of sorts—I noted caliber and manufacture, not sure that those facts mattered, but I had wanted to live in the films of such weapons, Saturday morning's war shows on Channel 4, as well as in the black-and-white afternoons of lost late springs I watched closely in grade-school science units, the views of empty corridors then youngsters scurrying under desks without ever—astonishing—really disturbing the classroom's rows. How wistful to see those defensible boys and girls on bikes, the fathers in hats and narrow ties, narrow-waisted wives so chipper in the bomb shelters their chiffon had to hide something too sweet to say. Large-finned cars cruised forward through the understandable, our towns prepared for anything, because the streets were lined with glass storefronts sporting simple, painted words. I saw barber poles I'd never seen for real, and the narrator always knew his bass voice spoke reassurance, whatever he said, even as white arrows from nowhere might appear on the screen to demonstrate atmospheric circulations, the pulsed patterns of cumuli, rain, and fallout that could make, wonderfully, terribly, ants the size of airplanes.

I patted the cannon and must have remembered Hersey's *Hiroshima*, how so many bodies became shadows. I could not, cannot, believe that once I'd wanted such power beneath my hands: to erase the body, yes, to erase the body.

I took them off the metal and saw them block out stars. That night, I watched nighthawks zing down, up, everywhere, scimitar the air just above the hill. The soft orange lights glowed below me, glowed over highway, beside runways.

The stars reappeared.

It was a July, not long before I'd leave my wife. Maybe just months before. On the hill, I did not know that but I knew I was beginning to ask more of my keening disintegrations, my silent havocs,

my lusts, than I had in years, and the self wondered at so much latent poignancy, so many once-upon yearnings that came back, came back, came back, came back. What can be done with them? Ever? *Live them*, I'd understand later. And did I love standing there—and I did—because I've come to love artifacts that take me to another time? Does that too erase the body? Was it still a love of power, of speed, the trite hungers of boys? Was it negation of fluids? Was the Freudian cannon so stupidly obvious, so laughably obvious, I could not say more?

The Grable test resulted in the successful detonation of a 15 kiloton shell (warhead W9) at a range of 7 miles. This was the first and only nuclear shell to be fired from a cannon.
Photo courtesy National Archives.

Silence is always what had saved me but that too was mistaken. Quoting Whitman on contradiction no longer seemed to help. Reading ancient epics on the backyard porch gave me only Gilgamesh asleep with Enkidu. I no longer wished to rub away my own skin to paper.

That night beside the weapon, I also named flowers, which lately I had understood grew desire from the durable honesty of eons: mullein, coneflower, black-eyed susan, and compass plant, whose leaves align *with the edges of the blades pointing north and south*. Even the plants know which directions sustain or console. Weapons, birds, stars, blossoms—I could have stayed forever there alone (and perhaps that too was it—alone—thus desire was only conjecture) but a couple began to climb the hill, and, though I would look away from them, I imagined them with me, that arrival, that staying, that touching, another form of shame I'd soon begin to feel I should not be ashamed of, then shook my head clear then backed away. The nighthawks zinged some more, white-stripe wings and aerobatic feeding. The tarmac airfield of the fort stayed orange-lit and quiet. Insects rasped. I breathed. The stars stayed on and that was important.

Then I heard from the draw across the way, thick with oaks, the night calls of common poorwills, of whippoorwills, of Chuck-will's widows, the only place on earth where all three songs belong together. Pulse and syncopation, need-songs, need-songs, going-on songs. Somehow something gathered to make me feel for a handhold, for sure footing, and I took a different trail down.

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Essay

by Florence Caplow

> A monk asked Chan Master Yunmen, "How is it when the tree withers and the leaves fall?" Master Yunmen said, "Body exposed in the golden wind."
> — Case 27, *Blue Cliff Record*

I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge by car for the first time twenty years ago, and hundreds of times since. I've seen many great bridges—the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, the Brooklyn Bridge, the bridges of Rome, the covered bridges of the Midwest—but no bridge comes close to the beauty of the Golden Gate, a bridge as fabulously colored as a child's dream, never the same from one crossing to another, haunted in a deep fog, rising luminous into sunlight through broken clouds, dangerous and wild in a high wind. Often surprising, always breathtaking.

And what other bridge spans such a doorway, such a mythic threshold? To the west, the expanse of the Pacific Ocean; to the east, San Francisco Bay, an inland sea ringed with cities. To the south, the white and shimmering buildings of San Francisco; to the north, tawny hills and mountain lions lurking in the chaparral. Cold green swirling water below a sky filled with birds. Those who cross the bridge cross between one world and another, held for a few moments in the numinous space between.

On July 17, 2006, I had my first chance to walk across. It's a long way—more than a mile round trip—and the weather is unpredictable. Some days, a gale howls off the ocean as miserable tourists try to survive the crossing, like passengers on a storm-thrashed ocean liner. July 17th was a sunny, hazy day, and a friend and I decided to walk across.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived at the southern end of the bridge. We parked and began our walk. Pedestrians are only allowed on the eastern side of the bridge, looking toward the Bay,

although a blaze of misty light from the Pacific made me long to be on the west side instead. The broad sidewalk was crowded with walkers and bicyclists.

We watched squadrons of pelicans glide a hundred feet below us, their wings silhouetted against the dark water, as we talked about the bridge's reputation as one of the world's leading places to commit suicide. I had heard about plans to install nets below the bridge to catch jumpers, and wondered about the balance between protection and beauty, how that might change the feeling of being suspended over huge space, like a bird, like flying.

As we approached the mid-span, in the midst of an animated conversation, we failed to notice a commotion fifty yards ahead. Two policemen on motorcycles drove past, fast, and when we looked up we saw a motionless van in the westernmost lane. "A stall," we said. "At least it's not a suicide."

But when we arrived opposite the green van, all the pedestrians were huddled together. When we asked what had happened, we were told that just moments before, someone had jumped from the west side.

So there we were, onlookers, while hundreds of feet below us a person died in the waves, or was dying as we stood above. A Coast Guard boat slipped from the small harbor on the north side of the bridge as the police interviewed witnesses and waved traffic around the van.

The van had stopped at the mid-point of the bridge. I noticed the light pouring like a benediction from the west, the ocean tilted like a mirror to the sun. The person dying below us had gotten out of the van and leapt over two railings, falling into that vast, wind-filled golden light, down through the air until meeting the water and, the next moment, passing out of life altogether.

It's a strange thing, to witness a stranger's public dying—both intimate and anonymous. Unsure what to do, I began the beautiful Tibetan chant of *Om Mani Padme Hum*, "Hail to the jewel in the lotus" —a chant of protection and blessing, and a reminder of the sacred always around and within us. My friend joined in, and we stood on the sidewalk of the Golden Gate Bridge, chanting for a dying stranger as the Coast Guard circled beneath and collected the husk of the person whose van idled next to us, its seat still warm.

After a while we continued walking, still chanting. With each repetition I sent my blessings to the person whose name we didn't know, to friends and family who did not yet know what was coming, and to the circles of people who would be touched by this moment, including those of us on the bridge, the witnesses.

No one jumps alone. He or she takes down a whole world. It struck me that the suffering that had led to that jump might now be released, but the suffering of others was just beginning, had not even yet begun—the circles still only a moment away from the stone.

We chanted all the way to the other side of the bridge. While we chanted and walked, the van sped

by us, back the way it came, but this time behind a tow truck. We watched the Coast Guard vessel make its way back into the harbor, far below. We saw the body, wrapped in a bright orange body bag, and we watched as the sailors unloaded it onto the dock. The wind gusted over the bag as the men quietly stood around it. Other pedestrians, oblivious to what had just happened, moved by us laughing, or leaned against the railing for photographs.

There's a way, in extreme situations, that the mind plays a strange game. Maybe, I thought, we had imagined the whole thing. The oblong object in the orange bag was not a person's body. Maybe no one had jumped. How could the world contain these laughing people and that body, nearly side by side? How could we know something that the people who loved that person did not yet know?

Later that day, and for days afterward, I considered this experience. My heart felt heavy and strange, then gradually lightened. Every day I scoured the newspaper and obituaries for some hint of the person who had died below us, even though I'd been told that the paper doesn't publish stories on suicides on the bridge. I found nothing.

The word "suicide" does not appear in obituaries. There is an aura of shame around the word. But who are we to judge the desire to die? I think of people who live with nearly intolerable physical or emotional pain, people in circumstances that seem to require the endurance of a saint or a warrior, or both. I have a friend with bipolar disorder who struggles through alternating severe depression and psychosis, despite medications and regular hospitalizations. Every day she faces a mind that is unreliable to a degree I can barely imagine. Not long ago she nearly succeeded in a suicide attempt, and I understood that desire, even as I wished her a happier life. Even our greatest spiritual heroes grow weary sometimes. Surely that is no lack of courage.

And I wonder about the experience of the person who leapt over the side of the bridge, and why so many people are drawn to die in the waters beneath the Golden Gate, that place that seems to lie midway into a mythic and mysterious realm. I remember that the person jumped at the exact mid-span of the bridge—into the gilded light, not away from it.

He or she jumped toward the ocean, to the west—which, according to native peoples of the West Coast has always been the direction of travel for the dead. Whatever pain or hopelessness drove that person to die, whatever the experience in the flight and fall, and whatever pain it engendered, beauty also existed there: archetypal, poetic, and powerful.

I believe—or like to believe—that even though he or she chose to die, the choice was not entirely a dark one, that it contained also the deep desire for beauty, for illumination, and for the expression of courage. To go to this most beautiful bridge, to overcome the natural fear of falling, and to let oneself go into the golden wind of a late afternoon, sliding through the thin air into the great unknown: Who can't see something noble there? Nobility exists even in the pain of a human life, which can reach such inhuman proportions.

Who are we to say that someone should continue to live in that pain, or that a person doesn't deserve

a beautiful death, however we might wish it otherwise? And since that death occurred, whatever we may think of it, surely we would want it to be blessed.

That day on the bridge, as we watched the Coast Guard boat search the water, words from an ancient Zen story came to mind: *body exposed in the golden wind.* A clear, strange thought rose with them: we are all, every one of us, falling from the Golden Gate Bridge. We're utterly exposed and vulnerable, headed for the dark while we apply our makeup or prepare our arguments for the courtroom. Meanwhile, the ocean glimmers, the pelicans sail by, and the golden wind moves around and through us, everywhere.

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Essay

by J. David Bell

> *We have constructed a fate, an* Atropos, *that never turns aside.*
> — Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

Melanie told me to turn right, so I did. From her perch atop the dashboard, she purred instructions. Not the greatest conversationalist, but you had to hand it to her: when she had something to say, she said it.

Melanie, our co-pilot on this Father's Day trip to Derry, Pennsylvania, was not entirely a figment of my imagination, but neither was she a real person. Rather, she was a digitized construct of our new portable GPS receiver, a gift from my wife's twin sister. (Dizygotic, my wife six minutes the elder.) Melanie was no acronym, though it was easy enough to devise one for her (Motorist's Everyday Locator And Navigational Interior Equipment); she was a simulacrum, a ghost of a person, represented onscreen by a silhouetted profile with luxuriant sweep of shoulder-length hair. She had beaten out the other preprogrammed contenders, Lori and Richard, due to the raspy quality of Lori's voice and the fifties-robotic clangor of his. According to the instructions booklet, premium features on the manufacturer's website included downloadable voices from such luminaries as John Cleese and Mr. T ("I pity da fool who don't turn right in five hundred yards!"). But the voices of the stars were apt to be pricey and we were hesitant to divulge our email address, so Melanie it was.

Suction-cupped to the windshield of our Honda Civic hybrid and powered by the car's cigarette lighter, Melanie was an unobtrusive gizmo, no bigger than a muffin and, though I kept a nervous eye on her throughout the trip, rock steady through bumps, stops, and rumble strips. Crunched into her petite display lay a wealth of information: floating street names and multihued icons, directional arrows, speed and mileage indicators, current time and ETA. Touch-screen technology summoned all from the monitor: you could type in location and destination, zoom in for a closer look or scale back for a bird's eye view, select from a palette of day and nighttime color schemes (the latter, to my eye, looking uncomfortably like the noisome neon of early CGI experiments such as *Tron*). And

then, anchoring it all, there was Melanie's mellifluous voice, polite and self-assured, telling us where to go.

With Melanie as our onboard tour guide, I found myself freed, forced, to think of other things. I thought of how we had gotten to this point. Of my relationship to my android chauffeur, and, through her, to my world. I thought of how, in short, this miraculous machine had changed my positioning.

Everyone knows, more or less, how the Global Positioning System works: there are satellites up there, and there are cars down here, and they talk to each other. As a little online and library research reveals, it's a trifle more complicated than that in reality, but the premise is sound.

A radiopositioning system, GPS currently deploys 31 satellites orbiting at roughly 12,500 miles above earth and synchronized so that at any moment a minimum of four are visible from any point on the planet. At the approximate rate of once every millisecond, these satellites beam near-light-speed microwave radio signals, bearing a digital code indicating time, satellite position, and other system information, to an end receiver, in this case the box built or billeted in your car. Like a cell phone, BlackBerry, or any such wireless device, the receiver is exquisitely sensitive to, as well as finicky about, the infinity of floating streams with which we've flooded the atmosphere; only those signals of specified frequencies are recognized and decoded. With their antennae constantly putting out feelers for fresh data, the Melanies of our motor fleet gauge position via a process known as trilateration, the measurement of distance between the subject and at least two known points of reference. GPS receivers vary in the number of incoming signals they can process, but today's generation typically tracks anywhere from twelve to twenty (the higher the number, the more accurate the positioning). A multitude of environmental and mechanical factors—atmospheric conditions, interference from other signals, fluctuation in the satellites' atomic clocks, solar flares—can affect the performance of GPS. So, apparently, can car defrosters and coated windshields. Even the theory of relativity comes into play, the weaker gravitational pull on orbiting satellites warping the timing of their clocks relative to those on earth. Notwithstanding these factors, GPS typically fixes a user's location to within nine feet—an accuracy predicted to drop to nine inches once a covey of new satellites takes wing in 2019.

Most discussions of GPS emphasize the lofty satellite ring to the near exclusion of the unassuming receiver, perhaps because those flashy manmade moons call such attention to themselves, perhaps because we favor the extraterrestrial over the earthbound. But Melanie was no slouch either. Far from being the inert, passive object the name "receiver" might imply, she was a powerful piece of technology in her own right, a microcomputer capable not only of divining reams of data but of charting journeys throughout the continental United States via the maps stored in her memory and,

just as impressive, of recalibrating them instantaneously if the erring driver went awry. Granted, without her celestial cohort all her promise would be nothing but potential, and she no more useful a gadget than a coaster. But as the visible embodiment of the larger, unseen system, it was Melanie who riveted my attention.

Our maiden voyage to visit my wife's relatives in Derry involved mostly highways (Melanie cutely called them "motorways") and rural routes, so the system kept silent for long stretches. From time to time, however, Melanie's surprisingly sultry voice would issue from the device, dispensing pearls such as, "In half a mile, turn right, then take the second left." (Or our favorite: "Keep left, then—keep left.") My wife joked about me having an affair with her, and I'm forced to admit there was something oddly intimate, even kinky, about having an anonymous, disembodied female voice inside my car, telling me what to do next. At least, she suggested an absurdist short story: man falls for his GPS, the reader not to discover until the very end that the object of his obsession isn't real. He composes sonnets, sends flowers and candies, all the usual romantic overtures. He becomes increasingly distraught by her silence. Has she received his impassioned offerings? Why won't she respond? And then, at last, she does. "In two hundred yards, bear left, then go straight on." He veers off the road and is lost.

We had joined the Covenant of the GPS in 2008, at the tail end of the decade in which the device exploded in popularity. A 1997 study projected that the worldwide GPS market would grow tenfold in the same span of years, from $1.5 billion in 1996 to $16.4 billion in 2006. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Commerce estimated a growth in civilian GPS users of 2 million per month, with the total number of users topping 40 million by year's end. As of 2001, over 500 models of GPS receivers were commercially available (meaning, by my rough estimate, that we shared Melanie with approximately 80,000 people). In 2006, according to online clearinghouse yourNAV, the GPS market continued its "exponential" rise, doubling during the course of the year. As of 2007, the most current year for which information was available to me, the online Buyer's Guide from GPS World listed 232 manufacturers of GPS technology, offering over 100 categories and subcategories of GPS products and accessories. These range from the obvious (antennae, graphical interfaces) to the specialized (sonar, infrared) to the compound and polysyllabic (dataloggers, chartplotters) to the just plain bizarre (bar-code scanners?). The confident assessment offered in 2006 by Chris Jones, CEO of GPS manufacturer Canalys, seems safe for the foreseeable future: "The market just keeps

growing and growing."

One night, in less than 30 minutes' viewing on a single station, I counted four commercials—from Kia, Nissan, Honda, and Radio Shack—featuring GPS. Whether by chance or design, the screen of the device invariably centered within the larger screen of the television, glowing brightly inside the TV's ambient glow. The effect was of a magnetic point drawing all light and attention toward it. In its commercial form, GPS became a carbon copy of itself, an axis organizing its surroundings into satellites floating on its periphery.

I thought of the word "television," the roots of which I had recently explained to my daughter: far sight. Farsighted, as in the Who song: I can see for miles. I thought: if only.

I'm told GPS receivers have replaced stereos as the equipment most frequently stolen from cars.

Melanie mesmerized. I confess that as the trip wore on I began to pay less attention to the actual road than to the hovering blue caret that represented our spectral selves' progress. The juxtaposition was disturbing: cruising along at sixty miles an hour, creeping along on the four-inch-square screen. Or actually, come to think of it, even the impression of movement was illusory: the pixilated roads scrolled steadily backward (downward), pivoting and wobbling periodically to reorient us through a turn, while our shimmering triangle stayed fixed in the screen's lower third. Melanie made me, I admit with some shame, lazy, inattentive, not only to our natural surroundings but to my responsibility, as alleged operator of our motor vehicle, to know where in the hell we were. Should al Qaeda operatives figure out a way to sow a bug into the GPS mainframe, I perceived, we would all be up shit's creek.

Driving with Melanie, heeding her implacable directives, I was, really for the first time in my life, forcibly struck by the awesomeness of modern technology. When I say "struck," I don't mean impressed. More like nauseated. The longer I contemplated the tiny slate-gray box innocently suctioned to the windshield, the more I felt actually queasy, the way I used to get when I would read in the back seat of the family car, the way I now get on the Tilt-a-Whirl and Scrambler. Out of body, in twin senses: disconnected and used up.

I'm not totally sure why. Maybe it was because the device, deceptively slim as a well pruned wallet, secretly burst with technology: megabytes of maps and menus, all retrievable via a tap of the screen. Looking Melanie in the flat, unblinking eye, you doubted there was anything short of resurrecting the dead that human ingenuity could not somehow contrive to do.

As I think about it, though, I believe what I found most unsettling about Melanie was the very power

that provided not only her commercial appeal but her *raison d'être*: the power she possessed of knowing precisely where we were. Uncannily so: as our car edged to the intersection of East End and Waverley or passed beneath the Parkway West overpass, our hyperselves mirrored the movement, the timing, in a way I found creepily, even obscenely, tactile. I remember how I used to laugh when I'd see signs along the highway reading "speed enforced from aircraft." The feeble attempt to compel adherence to a brittle social compact by playing on speeders' base paranoia had always struck me as pathetic. But now, sensing the satellites above my head, knowing that through Melanie's insouciant circuits they could pinpoint my position at any time, I was granted an inkling of what it must have felt like to be a motorist, a citizen, during the height of the Cold War. Like most people, I've watched my share of fifties scifi films—*The Thing*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—and what strikes you most about them is their loony insistence that the invisible alien not only *is* there but *must be* there by virtue of its very invisibility. A self-fulfilling, totalitarian prophecy now fulfilled by the science (and fiction) of our own time.

"Keep watching the skies!" newspaperman Scotty famously warns the nation at the end of *The Thing*. It sounded like good advice then; it sounds even better now. But the problem is, keep watching the skies for *what*?

My gut reaction to Melanie was not, by the way, so far off. Like many technologies now enjoyed by the civilian population, global positioning originally developed for military applications. The choreographed choir of earth-looping satellites that guides you to Grandma's is the same that escorts ICBMs to their doomed targets.

The roots of GPS lie in the 1960s, when the U.S. Navy and Air Force developed separate prototypes of the current system to steer submarine-based ballistic missiles. In 1973, under the name NAVSTAR, the twin systems merged. Today, operating out of the GPS Master Control Station near Colorado Springs, with subsidiary, fully automated stations in Hawaii, Kwajalein, Diego Garcia, and Ascension Island, the U.S. Air Force ensures the system's functioning by downloading and uploading satellite data. Its civilian applications notwithstanding, GPS remains first and foremost a property and priority of the U.S. military. Before May 2, 2000, an intentional error hid in the code to prevent unauthorized users from honing in too precisely on potential targets. Today, to safeguard the military component of the system, the satellites transmit a dual signal, one public and the other encrypted. The satellites themselves, in the meantime, are manufactured by Boeing and Lockheed Martin, currently among the largest contractors for the U.S. military and responsible not only for weapons satellites but for the total machinery of war: bombers, fighter jets, attack helicopters, aircraft carriers, and short-range as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Even the system's opening to the public hearkens back to the close of the Cold War. GPS was first

approved for civilian use by President Ronald Reagan in 1983, after Soviet fighters downed Korean Airlines Flight 007 when it wandered into Soviet airspace. In the same year, Reagan infamously unveiled his plan to fund the Strategic Defense Initiative (dubbed "Star Wars" by its detractors), a futuristic iteration of GPS that would have employed satellites and missile-tracking software to shield the United States from an incoming squadron of Soviet warheads. When not dreaming of extending U.S. military dominance into outer space, the Reagan administration busily put weapons technology to use on the ground. Additional escapades during the decade included the covert sale of arms to Iran in exchange for hostages, the building of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's arsenal to back his war against Iran, and the support and training of the Mujahedeen to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan. From these scattered seeds our own decade has reaped the whirlwind: the rise of al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, the invasion of Iraq on the pretext of the very WMD we helped that country assemble, and the looming threat of war against a recalcitrant and supposedly WMD-seeking Iran. During the 2008 presidential race, Republican candidate John McCain called for a revival of the SDI "missile shield" to protect Europe from any Iranian nuclear threat that might materialize in the future. We look to GPS to locate us in a world rendered desolate by the system's own architects.

War restructures the globe: it displaces populations, shifts capitals, redraws national boundaries. More generally, in its modern, chronic mode it moves the very ground beneath our feet, making us all uncertain, unstable. At least once a week I have to reassure my children that the war won't come here. I have no idea if I'm telling the truth.

The hijacked planes that took down the Twin Towers were guided by GPS. Short of contacting air traffic control—a clear impossibility—there was no other way.

We were in Mel's World, and what a weird world it was. Tiny, yes, and featureless, and flat. Brown and gray and yellow roads angled off in every direction, twisting like parade streamers, but they lacked mass, contour, gravity, everything we use to ground our bodies in space. I would liken it to a video game—that would be the obvious analogy—but actually it wanted all of the features that make video games resemble reality. Like incentive, risk, anticipation, surprise. I felt more alive playing Ms. Pac-Man in the back corner of a smoky bowling alley, dodging Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Sue, than I did tootling down Melanie's miniature motorway.

Melanie, it dawned on me as we dove deeper into our drive, simply *saw* the world differently than we did. For her, reality was glimpsed through a keyhole, the only thing that mattered being the planar square inch that lay ahead. Any map, of course, is artificial—but at least conventional maps approximate the experience of human space: scale, context, dimension, relationship. Too, physical maps provide ancillary pleasures: the crinkling as you wrestle them open, the flap of air as you snap them flat, the corner poking your forearm as your passenger turns them like a second steering wheel,

searching for the next rest stop. And who could forget AAA TripTiks? So hopeful, so generous, your entire journey plotted into manageable, fold-out slices.

Melanie, by contrast, was shockingly stingy. With her, life boiled down to two interdependent variables: the road, and me.

Don't tell any of this to my students, though. They emerged into Melanie's world of instantaneous if incorporeal positioning, and they can't imagine any other way.

And so, when they exit my classroom and immediately flip their cell phones to their ears, they commence what to my 44-year-old sensibility seems, in more ways than one, an utterly pedestrian play-by-play:

"Yeah, I just left class. Uh-huh. I'm walking down the hall. Yeah, I'm in the cafeteria now. . . ."

I marvel less at the banality of their discourse than at their desire to be located at every moment of their lives. Or perhaps the two are inseparable: when you talk on the phone fourteen hours a day, what else *can* you talk about except your relative, ephemeral position? By contrast, I spend most of my time trying *not* to be found: sealing my office door, screening calls via the answering machine and, latterly, the small miracle of caller ID. My own kids get a kick out of me impersonating the answering machine message, fooling the automated dialer into disconnecting before a live telemarketer picks up. A small part of this wariness derives from my sense that no one could possibly find my moment-by-moment activities all that interesting. But by far the greater part comes from a simple desire to be left alone.

My students' condition, I have decided, deserves a clinical diagnosis, so I have coined one: locomania, the morbid obsession with place. That is to say, my students suffer from an unhealthy imbalance in their locomotive.

A college friend, Brad, who founded a business to help new graduates land their first job (and who, perhaps as an occupational hazard, has become a slavish convert to the BlackBerry), tells me that the Millennial Generation calls their parents four to six times *per day*. When we were in college we averaged a call a week on the hall's single rotary pay phone, dialing collect and tugging the resistant metal cord into the broom closet for privacy. No one ever began a conversation with "Where are you?" There was only one place you could possibly be.

I owned a cell phone only once, for the several months just before my second child's birth. For emergencies and labor's unpredictable onset. As it turned out, my wife's water broke at midnight, her frank, rounded form mere inches from mine. I had come to love that body, its startling curves and contours, and excited as I felt at the birth, I knew I would miss it. I touched the moist covers, giddily inhaled their earthy-sweet smell, while my wife called her mom to babysit our four-year-old daughter. When Grandma Claudie arrived, we drove to the hospital. There my wife gave birth to our son. A month later, no further use for the thing having presented itself in the meantime, I threw the cell phone in the garbage.

The products of my wife's two pregnancies, now ages nine and five, showed surprisingly little interest in Melanie. Lilly read, Jonah napped. To them, I suppose, she didn't seem all that miraculous, just another glowing gift from the gods. Jonah can already operate the DVD remote nearly as fluently as I can. Both he and Lilly are drawn to video screens as if they were indeed altars, something to be invested with significance far beyond their actual utility. For the present, the parental controls on our home PC keep the mysteries of the internet closed to them. Having received more than my share of advertisements for porno flicks and penis-enlargement ointments despite our firewall and spam filter, however, I dread the thought of what my babies will meet once the curtain is lifted, what virtual predator may then turn horribly real.

The trio of GPS, cell phone, and internet may be the central icons of a technocultural revolution that has radically restructured not only our systems of communication but our sense of public and private, space and place. The roots of that revolution, however, are not recent. In fact, looked at from a certain perspective, they coincide with another revolution, the one that gave birth to the United States.

In *The Letters of the Republic* (1990), Michael Warner traces the rise of the modern nation-state not only to new forms of political consciousness but to new relationships to technology—in this case, print technology. Warner's argument is that though the printing press had existed for hundreds of years prior to the revolutionary era, "the act of reading performed by the individual citizen" was "redetermined" during the course of the eighteenth century. Whereas previously readers had positioned themselves in relation to, at most, a single other person—the author—now it became "possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading, becoming part of an arena of the national people," to envision oneself scanning pages along with thousands of distant but nonetheless kindred others. "No longer a technology of privacy," Warner writes, "letters [had] become a technology of publicity." In this sense, the period's soaring rates of literacy and burgeoning market in pamphlets and broadsides reflect a larger structural transformation: print had not simply gone public but had come to *constitute* the public. To put this another way, the republic itself (*res publica*, public thing or thing of the public) took shape through the mediated, displaced form of embodiment that is public-ation.

The quintessential symbol of print culture in the new nation had to be the newspaper, which (prior to the internet) outstripped all other forms of print technology. These days, newsprint-and-ink may seem stodgy and quaint, hardly a "technology" at all. But in its heyday, this relic shifted the individual's relationship to the space he or she inhabited in ways every bit as profound as the internet does today. Most obviously, the dailies connected each person to a much wider world of information than anyone could acquire through firsthand experience, opening to public inspection the most private data about fellow citizens, elected officials, and the nation-state itself. But more subtly, newspapers formed the perfect vehicle for projecting oneself into the virtual public sphere about which one read, into a nationwide, phantom corps of informed reader-citizens. You could be pretty sure of someone in Philly—a lot of someones—reading the same article, maybe even at the same time, as you in New York or New Orleans. As with the internet, the cell phone, and GPS, the newspaper formed a technological interface that connected you, if only imaginatively, to other, invisible selves.

As one might imagine, this kind of out-of-body experience both turned people on and freaked them out. Thus it is that Warner's representative man, Benjamin Franklin, newspaper editor and public persona extraordinaire, guarded his privacy as ferociously as he broadcast it, writing his autobiography, for example, in the form of a private letter to his son, never published in his lifetime. An Enlightenment-era celebrity, as evasive of the spotlight as he was avid for it.

Or take one of my favorite authors, Henry David Thoreau, who, three-quarters of a century after the Revolution, turned his thought to the triad of technologies that in his own day had most transformed the experience of place. Of that distance-gobbling monster, the locomotive, he griped in his most famous work, *Walden* (1854): "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us." Of the telegraph, he groused: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate." And of the newspaper, he grumbled: "To a philosopher all *news*, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea." Summing up his caustic assessment of his era's technology, he wrote: "As with our colleges, so with a hundred 'modern improvements'; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance. Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our

attention from serious things."

My students, the pretty toys their cell phones have become clutched in their hands, took offense at Thoreau's indictment. They thought he was a jackass. One woman in particular, the editor of the college newspaper, bristled when she discovered that Thoreau, far from being as newspaper-averse as he claimed, read them voraciously and relied on them to advertise his services as lecturer and surveyor (the professions by which, wanting a bestseller, he kept body if not soul together). How, she demanded, could he get away with such outrageous accusations—such *lies*? She was incensed. He had not only insulted her chosen profession. He had violated its precepts by misrepresenting his position toward it.

I tried to talk to her about this, but I'm afraid I didn't get very far. I suggested that Thoreau, as a satirist, might have been making extreme statements for a purpose—to "wake my neighbors up," as he put it. (She wasn't buying that. Like many modern readers of *Walden*, she had been conditioned to think of Thoreau as not having had neighbors, and she wasn't convinced by the essay I showed her that called Walden Pond "less Thoreau's home than his home page," a "virtual space" painstakingly engineered for maximum visibility.) Trying for something closer to home, I asked her to think about how editorials sometimes take liberties with the truth, strictly speaking, to make a point. Maybe, I suggested, she could think of Thoreau in that way—as an editorialist, less interested in telling his life than in taking a position on it.

Thinking back over that failed conversation, I suspect that my fault lay in being too teacherly, too academic. I might have made more headway if I'd simply reminded her that classic authors are people too, and that like the rest of us, Thoreau both feared and felt modern technology's irresistible tug. Perhaps, to humanize Thoreau, I would have been better advised to position him in relation to machines.

Being an academic, however, I can hardly resist theorizing my students' locomania. At times I think it simple opportunism: new technologies inspire (or inflict) new capabilities. Thoreau understood this, writing of his perennial goad and nemesis, the railroad: "The startings and arrivals of the cars are now the epochs in the village day. They go and come with such regularity and precision, and their whistle can be heard so far, that the farmers set their clocks by them, and thus one well conducted institution regulates a whole country. Have not men improved somewhat in punctuality since the railroad was invented? Do they not talk and think faster in the depot than they did in the stage-office?" New technologies, Thoreau perceived, call for new positionings.

A second thought, however, succeeds the first: perhaps it is not simply because they *can* find each other at any time that my students do. Perhaps something more fundamental, not merely formal or

functional, makes them so fervent for the perpetual, veridical experience of place. The possibilities are tempting: perhaps it is because so much in their lives is virtual that they feel the need for the occupation of space to be verifiable. Perhaps it is because they spend their days adrift among the dizzying dislocations of hypertext linkages that they grope for what Thoreau called "a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call *reality*"—something to which they can say, "This is, and no mistake." Those of us who teach freshman composition have long lamented that the internet must be doing something to our students' minds, encouraging a stone-skipping mental rhythm to match its own headlong tempo. But could it be that the internet has diffused not only our students' brains but their bodies?

Could it be that these ghosts of persons long to be reminded that they once *had* bodies?

Or could it be, on the outer reaches of possibility, the fact that my students became adults in the shadow of September 11 that makes them so fearful of losing their place? The freshmen I struggle valiantly to teach to read with depth and delight were ten when the Towers fell. With each passing year they will become younger and younger. For most, that day represented their first experience of things falling desperately out of place. They remember the snapshots of lost loved ones, the mosaic of the missing. Perhaps their need to know where everyone is reflects their formative experience of knowing where no one was.

Collective tragedy resolves into reconstructed location. Trauma freezes not only time but space. It is doubtless because where *we* were that day matters so little that we recall it so fiercely. In my case, I sat preparing for class the morning the planes hit. Pat, a colleague who has since moved on to another institution, crossed the hall to ask whether I'd heard what Howard Stern had said, whether I believed it. Misunderstanding, I told her I'd believe both anything and nothing coming from him. We turned on the radio and listened as the story unfolded. Sometime during the next half hour my wife called from work, frantic, having heard only that the nation was under attack. Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where Flight 93 went down, rests about an hour's drive from Pittsburgh. I reassured her as best I could over the phone. Then I went to class and tried to convince a roomful of non-majors that literature still mattered. Had I thought of it, I might have used as my text the words of Thoreau's mentor: "The things we now esteem fixed shall, one by one, detach themselves like ripe fruit from our experience, and fall."

We remember where we were when the Towers fell. But the Towers having fallen, do we remember where we are?

As our journey wore on, it became increasingly evident that Melanie, for all her considerable charm and charisma, really didn't have a clue. For one thing, her databanks proved spotty: from time to

time she rechristened lanes, conjured nonexistent highways, snubbed real ones. And her awareness of life off road was nil. When we entered a shopping mall to pick up my wife's pills, Melanie fell silent, her console registering a miniature expanse of blank brown space as innocent of inscription as a pre-Lewis and Clark map of the West. Landmarks remained as foreign to her experience as the land itself had been to theirs.

I suppose I could have lived with this; I don't expect everyone and everything to share my perspective. But as it turned out, it was not simply the gaps in her programmed reservoir that made Melanie such a negligent and unreliable guide. Her myopia, it proved, made her coldly oblivious to, even contemptuous of, the human driver she presumed to assist. For instance, nearing the obvious left turn that would take us past the lake and crescent beach of Keystone State Park, she advised us to "bear left." Had we not made the turn many times before, we probably would have missed it. Minutes later, she made the same error in reverse. A paltry bend in the winding country road she upgraded to a right turn, so that had we been truly lost, we would have been baffled by the want of the turn we were meant to make.

Naturally, this got me to wondering how we *Homo sapiens* tell a turn from a bear, a bear from a bend. What spatial algorithm do we apply to the grid and circuits we've laid over the land? But at the same time, organism that I was, I couldn't help feeling I was right, Melanie-mechanism wrong. The centrifugal tow of my torso knew more than any machine: a turn is a turn, and there's no two ways about it.

The final straw turned out to be Melanie's insistence, as we pulled into the asphalt driveway of my relatives-in-law's modest two-story home, that we were still a solid seven-tenths of a mile from our goal. Had the evidence of our senses not shown us her mistake, might we not have kept on down the road? Might we not have feared that the house itself—the most evidently stable thing in this whole enterprise—had gone missing?

Thoreau knew no satellite greater than the earth, a hurtling meteor transmuted to the perfect emblem of the spirit's flight: "the very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit." Still he managed to sound Walden Pond to a degree of accuracy that has not been surpassed. Emerson, too, had conceived such a missile earth, a "wild balloon" rocketing toward an unfathomable end. All our institutions, he wrote, rest on a "mass of unknown materials and solidity, red-hot or white-hot perhaps at the core, which rounds off to an almost perfect sphericity, and lies floating in soft air, and goes spinning away.... at a rate of thousands of miles the hour, [one] knows not whither—a bit of bullet, now glimmering, now darkling through a small cubic space on the edge of an unimaginable pit of emptiness." Absent space signals, the twain had tuned in to a deeper frequency: the harmonic correspondence between their own momentary flesh, and the

fleeting ground beneath their feet.

Musing on Melanie, her quirks and capacities, suggests a familiar scene: showdown at the Nokia Corral. Twin sisters have planned to meet at Idlewild Park in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The younger (by six minutes) has flown in from Long Beach, California for a summertime visit. The elder, who has remained local, raises her cell phone to an ear permanently crimped by the extra-tight uterine squeeze and places a call. The West Coaster, in the parking lot, begins the half-mile trek toward the native, who, loitering in kiddie land, sets out in the absent other's direction. The two stroll the looping trails in tree-swathed sunlight, pass (respectively) the kettle corn stand and arcade, all the while chattering away. Her sister's voice laughing in her ear, the Californian rounds the bumper cars, their current a tinny tang on tongue and palate. Her wombmate, abreast the stage where the bad knock-offs of Disney musicals play, fills her lungs with the lush fragrance of deep-fried funnel cakes. The Ferris Wheel intervenes. Then, at last, the two spot each other, wave enthusiastically—and continue their conversation. Only when they are within arm's reach do they sheathe their weapons; certainly they hug. They are thrilled to see each other in the flesh, but those last few moments of long-distance love ("long-distance," obviously, being a relative term) were too precious to spare.

How many miles, I wonder, did those signals have to travel, bend, rebound so these two lovers, united from before birth yet falling progressively apart for the forty years thereafter, could close a fifty-foot gap still wrapped in mediated embrace?

I am no more a Luddite than Thoreau (I have my GPS, don't I?). But I do startle at the tricks of technology, how it fixes and dislocates us, shows us the way while making us lose our place.

Toying with Melanie on the drive home, trying to trip her up, I took several turns she hadn't anticipated. She directed me to exit the motorway and remain on Penn Avenue, one of Pittsburgh's main arteries, and then turn left onto my home street. A more direct route but, I knew, a longer one due to traffic and stoplights. At first, Melanie appeared unfazed by the ad hoc turns I took, recalculating my vector each time and offering what would be the next logical move under the altered circumstances. Toward the end, though, she seemed to become a bit flustered—or even exasperated—by my perverse deviations from plan, as she insisted I turn right when our home lay

directly to the left. The stress of her job, shuttling strangers across a landscape made alien by the same power that had given her birth, must have been taking its toll.

Once I had made the final turn, however, she recovered her composure. Acting as if nothing had happened, showing not the slightest discomfiture at her gaffe, she announced that we were almost there. Though we knew where we were, it was still gratifying to hear Melanie's silky voice: "You have reached your destination."

And so we had.

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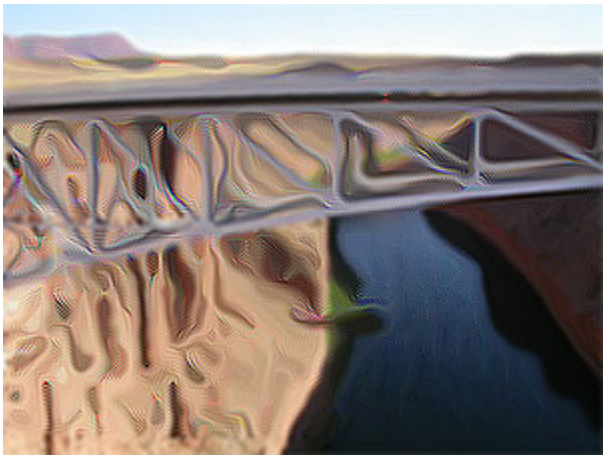
Essay

by Ben Quick

Five-hundred feet below, between vertical walls of limestone, thin sandbars show here and there along narrow scree slopes, and chunks of bark and broken earth boil up in the greenish-brown current of the Rio Colorado as my son scoots back across the concrete neck of the old Navajo Bridge above Lee's Ferry, Arizona, on June 1, 2007. We are at the midway point in the car ride from Tucson to Logan, Utah, where Sage will spend eight weeks with his mother before returning to me and the desert at the end of July. We've stopped so he can pee, but one glimpse of the bridge and he's forgotten his bladder. He shoots me a look over his shoulder as he moves.

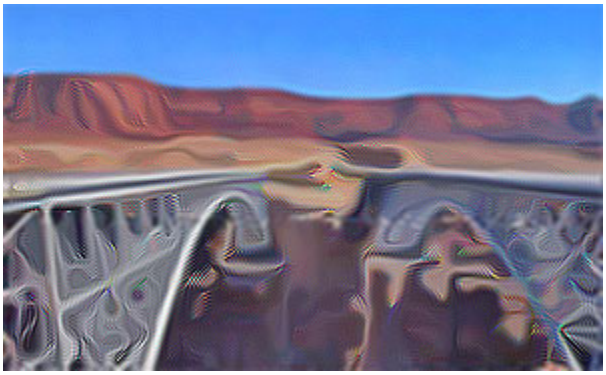
"Wait a minute, Dad."



I know without asking—maybe because I was once a young boy myself and maybe because I know my son well enough to read his motions—that Sage has been taken with the most natural of seven-year-old urges to watch stones fall from high places and is heading toward the lip of rock at the end of the bridge in search of a pebble to toss. I remember the signs at the head of the railing that read, "Caution, do not throw objects from the bridge. They can kill. Violators will be prosecuted." I almost tell him to stop. Instead, I scan the river for parties of rafters, gauge our distance from the small group of suncapped tourists near the other end of the 800 foot span of retired roadway, and urge my son to hurry.

Passing through the Arizona strip—the northwest corner of the state, lopped off from the rest of Arizona by the canyon's impassible abyss—carries me off to a place of deep nostalgia. In the early spring of 1997, after a year spent driving a delivery van and sleeping in the unfinished basement of

my mother's home in Pleasant Grove, Utah, I was hired to sell t-shirts and trinkets in the gift shop on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. The two summers I worked on the North Rim, the southern boundary of the strip, the place where the land leaps from cool groves of aspen and pine to the gorge and the river in the pastel depths, twenty miles south of the Navajo Bridge, changed my life in an elemental way. Twenty-two, restless, and lonely from all those months among the teetotaling, insular Mormons of Utah County, I could barely contain my excitement the morning the employment offer arrived in the mail.



A month later I awoke from a night of restless sleep on wet duff beneath ponderosa pines just outside of Jacob Lake, the small lodge and jumble of cabins named for Mormon folk legend Jacob Hamblin. I was halfway up the Kaibab Plateau, within sight of the place where the spur to the North Rim breaks from Highway 89 and begins to wind its way up through rock-strewn meadows and dense stands of conifers to the edge of the abyss. I tossed my sleeping gear into the back of the car, cracked the skim of ice that had formed in my water bottle during the night, and brushed my teeth. After buying a cup of weak coffee from the lodge store and waiting 15 minutes for a Park Ranger to unlock to gate blocking the road, I started up the grade in my '83 Toyota.

The sun made its slow, warming creep through the trees, but the wind howled, and the snow along the freshly plowed asphalt grew deeper with each mile. By the time I reached the park boundary—30 miles and 1,000 feet in elevation from Jacob Lake—the curving, white walls on either side of the pavement stood at least a foot taller than my car. When I finally pulled to a stop in front of the broad log cabin announcing itself as the employee dining room and personnel office, I was cold, as lonely as ever, and unsure about my choice of summer work.

On the widow's peak of that great and broken plateau, all doubts were soon erased. In those two summers the North Rim of the Grand Canyon became many things for me: wind swirling like ghosts through clusters of pine needles; May snowmelt rushing through nameless gullies in furtive rivers of light, pooling like mirrors in mile-long meadows, dropping lower and lower with each sunny day, giving itself entirely to blades of mountain grass, the first shoots of wildflowers, leaving behind a carpet of green; hikes with my new pal Sky Waters down the North Kaibab trail to Roaring Springs, sunning with books and sandwiches on flat slabs of fallen sandstone, watching tufts from cottonwoods skitter over water that gushed like thunder from bare rock and cut its way through the banded crags and pinnacles of Bright Angel Canyon to the inner gorge; late-night rambles with friends through damp hollows of waist-high ferns and glades of conifers, twigs and needles snapping under boots as we made our way to some secret clearing, the eyes of deer following us from the forest edge as we capped the night with a round of whiskey beneath stars and satellites and the wildflowers, the paintbrush and aster we picked as we traced our way back in the morning light.

Near the end of my second year, after the monsoons had scoured the land of dust and pollen and the nights became brisk, when half the crew had left for school or been fired and the tourists thinned out, when the aspens turned gold and the stock in the gift store ran low and the date of the first snow was thrown around as betting fare, the North Rim of the Grand Canyon became the place I met the woman who would bear my son.

I would like to say that some spark exploded in the air the first time our eyes locked, that we had the kind of chemistry that couldn't be ignored, that we had something special. None of this is true. The truth is this: Cota was souring on the front desk supervisor she'd flown from North Dakota to see, and I was wounded and lonely. One drunken night I fondled her breasts in the women's bathroom. The next night, she slept over. The day after that, she moved into my dorm room. Three months later, she was pregnant.

On the 1st of February, 1999, in Portland, Oregon, we waved goodbye to the benches of people waiting to argue speeding tickets and restraining orders, and walked through the doors of the Washington County Courthouse as husband and wife. We followed my father and brother—our witnesses—around puddles in the parking lot to my father's black Mazda. Cota's hair was stiff and cropped and a shade darker than the folds of the brown dress that covered all trace of early pregnancy and scraped the pavement like wet leaves. I smelled like patchouli.

On September 1st, at precisely seven a.m., after 21 hours of labor and two epidurals, in one final burst of effort from his mother, Sage Benjamin Quick tore past Cota's perineum and issued forth into the whiteness of the world on the second floor of the municipal hospital in Minot, North Dakota.

That was nearly eight years ago. His mother carried him for nine months in her womb. She endured the stretching, the examinations, the 40 extra pounds in the heat of summer, the hospital gown, the dilation, the sloppy anesthesiologist who misfired on the spinal tap, the ripped vagina, the stitching—hardships I will never know. When she came home from the maternity ward the headaches were so bad she could barely stand. Not until late the next day, after a trip back to the hospital where a doctor patched the hole in her spinal wall with blood cells, could she move around her parents' house without pain. And even then she was not altogether well.

Whether the postpartum blues, sheer physical exhaustion, something in between or altogether different, Cota did not take to mothering. From the afternoon we clomped up the thick wood of the stairwell leading from Cota's parents' garage and made our way through their living room to the converted art studio that would serve as our bedroom for the next few months—Sage swaddled and sleeping under a square of blue velour in the car seat that hung from my elbow—it was me, more often then not, who tended to the needs of our son. Mixing particles of yellow formula with water, sterilizing and heating bottles in boiling pots, rocking at three in the morning, bathing, changing shitty diapers, drawing cool wipes over raw skin, powdering and lifting up legs, sliding clean white fabric beneath, pushing close adhesive strips on plastic, and comforting our son when he was frightened: these became my jobs. And I enjoyed them. Yet Cota's mother fought me every step of the way.

If her daughter was not going to be the parent she had hoped for, then by golly, she, the boy's grandmother, would be the one to carry the load. I understand now in a way I did not then the rigidity of a woman's role in certain parts of rural America. I know that her lot was not an easy one, that out there on the Northern Plains where the wind blows and the bars carry Grain Belt and the sky swallows all but the grass, she had given up on personal ambition, and any drive toward fulfillment in the greater world had been lost to her children and her husband's career. Becky had been in college, going for a nursing degree when Walter, her childhood sweetheart and budding cowboy artist, found she was dating another man and rushed back into her life with a marriage proposal. That was it for her. She soon quit school, became pregnant with the couple's first boy, and settled into a life defined by a throwback culture and a narcissist husband, a life that said boys will be boys and women will tend to the kids and the house. Power, for a woman like Becky, began and ended in the domestic.

I was the product of hippies. My mother always worked, and my father shared in the parenting. The idea that a man should step back and let others see to the needs of his child while he read the paper in the morning and went out drinking at night was as foreign to me as my insistence on changing diapers was to Becky. She lectured me on the proper way to swaddle and grimaced when I turned down her offers of help with nursing and baths. For weeks, the tension between us rose. I started calling my mother nearly every day with increasing hysteria. Becky soon opened the door to the studio, pulled Sage out of his crib, and took him regularly into the living room without so much as a knock or a question. I would look up from my homework, and she would smile, and I would turn to stone, not knowing what to say, feeling as though some vital part of my agency had been stripped.

On the afternoon I finally mustered the courage to speak, the sun reached through the poplars outside the sliding door and struck the hardwood floor of the living room in scraps of golden light. The smell of yeast from the kitchen grew stronger, and reflections of half-bare lilacs moved like fingers across the frames of paintings behind the couch as I made my way, trembling, toward the woman at the sink. Cota's ancient labradoodle pawed an ear.

"Becky?"

"Yes?" I could tell from her sigh that she knew exactly why I was there. I stood at the end of the counter, my bare feet inches away from the meeting of wood and tile that marked the entrance to the realm of pots and olive oil, dishes and knives.

"Do you think we could talk?" The tang of dish soap bubbled up through the yeast, and now the air took on the flavor of lemonade and biscuits. On the surface of the island at her back, bits of garlic skin, dry and weightless, shuddered in the breeze as Becky pulled bowls from water and placed them on a rack.

"Oh, I guess." She had always been graceful, and by all appearances, much younger than her 60 years, but as I watched her now, she seemed to age before my eyes, becoming frail instead of slender, hollow instead of buoyant.

My mother told me I should thank her first, and I did.

"Well," she said.

And then I said, "I feel like I need to set a few boundaries."

She dropped a pan into the empty side of the sink, the clang of aluminum on aluminum echoing through the house. Then she exploded into tears and stormed out of the house, Hanna the dog trailing after her as she stomped through a patch of coneflowers, up the hill, and toward the road. Though it would take several years to fully fail, Becky trudging up that rise, for all intents and purposes, was the beginning of the end of my marriage.

Upriver, where Marble Canyon gives way to Glen, the landscape explodes into massive jumbles of chocolate hills and lines of high red walls. To the right, the Echo Cliffs trickle off in a low and ragged line toward the hogans, roadside trading posts, and stray dogs that prowl the wide expanse of the Navajo Reservation. To the left, above haphazard piles of fallen rock and talus and conical mounds of eroding brown shale, higher and more solid, stretches the smooth and seemingly unbroken sandstone wall of the Vermillion Cliffs. Afternoon light settles on the rampart, and in some places on its lower half the sun catches the sheen of leeching minerals and veils the umber of the cliff face in a translucent shade of metallic green. Here and there, pastel lines of lighter sediment run through the looming mass like layers of frosting in a cake.

Somewhere on the rim, 2,000 feet above the alkali and sagebrush of the House Rock Valley, white globs of condor shit seep down perches and collect in cracks amid junipers and piñon where scavengers with ten-foot wingspans scan the distance for dead mammals as my son comes hopping back toward me. The small bulge of belly presses the purple mesh and the number 13 of his Steve Nash jersey away from his body. He's told me several times that when he grows up he intends to change his name to that of his basketball hero, and he's taken to wearing the jersey over a tight purple t-shirt at least three days a week. When I bought him the Arizona Wildcat basketball shorts and the NBA headband and wristbands earlier this week, he started wearing them all as a combo package. He's been checking himself in the full-length mirror every time he drifts through the hall of our Tucson apartment—dark bangs pushed up behind elastic and white cotton, his legs nearly hidden by baggy tubes of navy blue and red, the plum of his jersey matching nothing. When I catch him, and our eyes meet, I smile, and Sage smiles back. Out here on the Navajo Bridge, under a sky so blue it hurts, there are no mirrors.

With less than 24 hours and 500 miles to go until I drop him at his mother's house, the only thing on my son's mind is watching something fall from a very high place to water. He walks right by me, says nothing, keeps moving toward the tourists, small rock in hand. I hurry after. When he reaches a spot a third of the way across the bridge, he stretches his right arm over the brown metal of the railing, not waiting for his father, not so much as glancing over his shoulder to make sure the coast is clear, and drops his tiny load.

Sage's face, only moments earlier a measure of tight-lipped determination and purpose, goes blank with expectation. He cranes his neck past the edge. I crowd in beside him, moving my eyes back and forth, trying to catch sight of a plummeting piece of stone no wider than a nickel. After a few seconds, I give up, train my eyes on the river, looking for a splash, a shiver of rings on the water's surface 500 feet down. Nothing. A breeze kicks up, and I glance at Sage, his bangs drifting like black thread in the desert air. Still nothing. He steps back from the railing and takes off running.

"Stay here, Dad. I'll be right back."

We left Logan on a mild day in the first part of August 2006. After months of tense and sometimes hostile talks with Cota, she'd finally decided, following a week when it seemed like we were heading for court, to let my son come with me to Tucson, Arizona, where I'd work on a degree in writing for the next two years at the state university. I drank expensive tequila and cheap wine with friends on our porch the night before we left. We danced and flirted and hugged each other way too much. We spilled liquor on the concrete. Some of us threw up in the flowers. Some of us took off our clothes.

The next morning, I finished wiping down the window sills of the living room, crammed bottles of Lysol and a mop bucket into the tail end of the U-Haul, and strapped the wheels of my Subaru to the trailer I would tow. As I waited on the grass in the front lawn for Cota to bring Sage by—my hands black from latching and unlatching and playing with various trailer parts, my head sore from the previous night, my joints aching from all the boxes and furniture—I watched contrails dissolve over the Wellsville Mountains. I knew it was time to go.

That first Thursday morning in Tucson, before the sun had risen high enough to make the five-block journey from our apartment to the tiled roof and hummingbirds of Sam Hughes Elementary School an exercise in endurance, I registered Sage for second grade. As we rode our bikes down silent streets, for the first time, I was a true single father, no ex-wife living five blocks away, no mother a quick shot down I-15, no friends, no support of any kind.

We passed by mission-style homes—some tan, some brown, some purple and green—that spilled thick manes of bougainvillea bracts, pink and heart-like, over the lips of walls that hid yards I could only imagine. Some spreads were guarded by high hedges of living cactus. Others rinsed patios and stone verandas in the thin shade of palo verdes and birds of paradise. As we rolled down Third Street, the shadows of palm trees reached out to meet the spokes of our wheels. A lizard scurried through patches of light on a rise of cobblestone beside the pavement. Above us, sparrows flitted around a tree draped with what looked like oranges. I pulled my brake lever.

"Sage, check this out."

"What?" He hauled up behind me, bumped my rear wheel with a knobby tire, and nearly toppled trying to move his butt from the seat and his feet to the ground. "My crotch is too long," he said with distain, grabbing at the zipper on his cargo shorts.

"Oranges." Having grown up in the Midwest and living solely in places with harsh winters since, my only exposure to live citrus were the trips to my grandmother's condo in Naples, Florida when I was young. I found myself taken back to that time, to gusts from a storm that whipped drapes through an open screen door 20 stories up, to hunting sea shells on Sanibel Island, watching from a raised wooden path as gators curled through lily pads, my grandmother's white kitchen, her scents of perfume and vodka. For Sage, there were no comparable memories. He had never been to Florida, had never seen a growing orange up close. He did not know my grandmother before her death.

"Can we pick them?" He filled with the simple fascination of seeing something new, something exotic. Forgetting the frustration with his hem, Sage dropped his bike and approached a thick bunch of spear-shaped leaves hung with three plump and glowing specimens.

"Can we?" He turned to me and pushed a shock of hair from his eyes to the nylon strap of his helmet.

"Well, maybe one." Before the words were out of my mouth he thrust a hand into the green mass and yanked. And there it was, bright and round and, it appeared on first inspection, not anywhere near ripe. Still, it was an orange: rare, precious. And at that point, one week into our new life, with Sage missing his mother, missing his friends, having not yet started school, not yet beginning to fill the empty space with anything substantial enough to ward off the longing for the familiar, even the smallest discovery was pearl-like.

"Let's peel it when we get home." He handed it to me. I reached around my side and plopped it in a pocket of my backpack.

"Let's do that," I said, and so began our desert communion.

During our first few months in Tucson, when Sage's bedtime came, the ritual often played out like this: at around eight o'clock, I'd harass him into taking off his clothes, usually mud-stained and splotched with ketchup or some other condiment by then. He would resist.

"It's time for you-know-what."

"Shut up."

"Don't talk to me that way."

"I hate you. You're the worst father in the world. My mom doesn't make me go to bed this early." And I know that I was easy on him because of the move. I couldn't help myself.

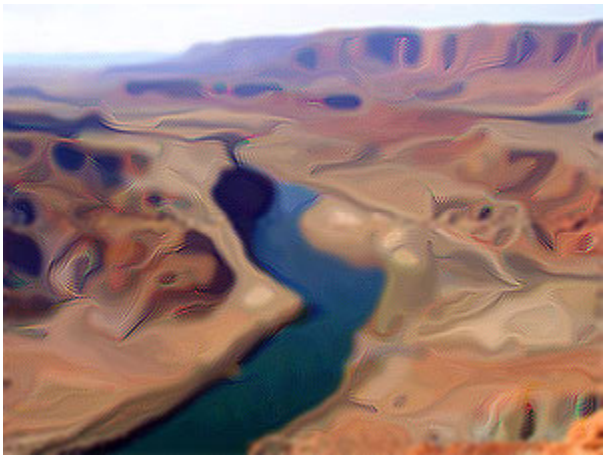
"Sage, you can't—"

"She's nicer than you. She buys me better things." I felt like asking him why he thought his mother spent so much on his a birthday present instead of coming to see him. Most of the time, I bit my tongue.

"I'm sorry."

"I miss my mom." Sometimes he sobbed. But as the months wore on, Sage cried less and less. He joined the chess club and fell in love with basketball. He began to trade sleepovers with friends from school. Our weekends filled up with boys shooting water pistols and movie marathons. We settled into a routine. Gradually, change nuzzled into both the tone and substance of our nightly negotiations.

"I'll read you a chapter in Harry Potter," I would say.



"Two chapters."

"We'll see if we have time. You're wasting it right now."

"I need help." He would raise his arms above his head and wait for me to pull off his shirt. With his toes, he pried his shoes from his heals and kicked them at the ceiling.

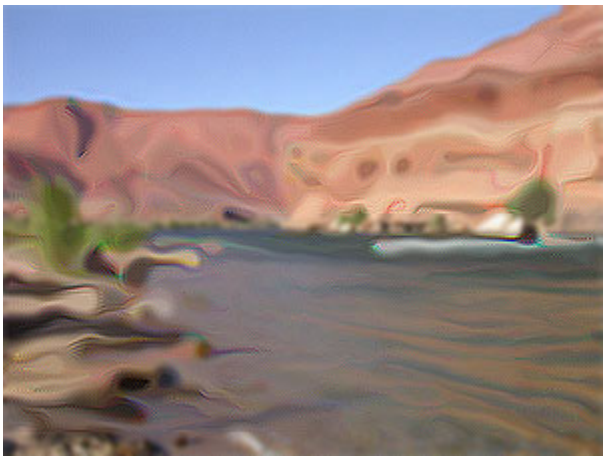
"Don't do that," I said, and he grinned. I unbuttoned his pants, yanked them down, and slid his socks over his toes. He took two steps back, ran toward the bed and jumped as high and far as he could, grunting as his feet lifted. Upon impact, the bed scraped across the hardwood floor, adding to the wake of gouge marks. Sage looked pleased with himself.

"Jesus, Sage. Scoot over." And he would. I'd burrow in next to him, reach down for the covers, and off we'd go into the magical realm of Hogwarts. I could usually sense him nodding off halfway through the second chapter.

"Are you sleeping?"

With great effort, he turned his head toward me. "Keep reading." His words slurred like warm soup. He yawned. When his breath grew heavy and coarse, I knew it was over. I kissed his forehead and trundled off, relaxed and ready for a few hours of silence.

By the end of the school year, Sage's report cards were better than ever. He had more friends than free time. No longer timid with speech or strangers, he had become a young man, buoyant, and more often than not, cheerful and poised. It was obvious that something about his life suited him, something in the apartment, in the boys from Sam Hughes, in the order of our days and the ruckus of our mornings, in the otters and snakes of the Desert Museum on the west side of Gate's Pass, the



busyness of Speedway and Grant, the pork burritos of Chipotle, and the crook in the branches of the mesquite tree he climbed to when things got hard. In the grain of the front door he couldn't quite close without a thud, the nest of wood chips he shook from each shoe after school, the blue oven of sky, and the cactus and gravel of the city, something wore him well. He had grown sturdy in the sun.

Sage comes charging back, smiling from ear to ear, his right hand clasped around another rock. Again, he shoots right past me. Again I know without asking exactly where he is heading and why. He wants to be sure he is in the absolute center of the bridge. He worries the first stone may have landed among the broken boulders on the river bank and wants to be sure it won't happen twice.

That Sage, a seven-year-old with a mother who is neither dead nor imprisoned, lives with his father matters little out here where the stones fall with gravity and wind. Stones and people do what they must to find repose. And yet, I am aware of the alien space we occupy, my son and I. I'm reminded each time someone asks about Sage's mother. Even in the post-modern culture of 21st century America, it is still enough for a single mother to say to strangers, "He's an asshole," and for strangers to nod their heads. Not so for single fathers, for men who love their sons.

After drifting back and forth for what seems like minutes, the second rock finally hits the water. Sage shows his teeth, does something between a jig and Mambo, spinning with his knees bent and his fingers in the air, straightens up, glances back at the spot on the river where the stone made contact, satisfied.

"Come on, buddy," I say. "We've got a long way to go." I walk back toward the car, motioning for him to follow. After a moment, he does. We shuffle over the gravel and past the row of blankets where the Navajos have spread their jewelry to sell, and then we are on our way—brakes grinding, just enough gas in the tank to make it to Jacob Lake, the two of us eating crackers.

Ben Quick served as Beverly Rogers Nonfiction Fellow on his way to an MFA from the University of Arizona. The recent winner of a prestigious Pushcart Prize, Quick lives in Tucson with his son, Sage, teaches writing at the U of A, and is hard at work on a memoir that chronicles his solo journey through history and loss in Vietnam.

Essay

by Mark Tredinnick

Editor's Note: The following passages come as Mark Tredinnick is riding the pastures of Jim Commens, a man who has spent a large part of his life working the valleys and ridges of the Blue Plateau in Australia's Blue Mountains.

I

The heads of 30 kangaroos poked from the grasses bunched by Potter's Cottages. The animals held themselves as still as holy men, if nowhere near as calm. They stood in a sustained and perfect vigil of alarm, and we were what alarmed them: two men on horses, crossing their ancestral grasslands.

But Jim wasn't looking at the roos. He was pointing at the fox stealing through the grasses away from us. "Knows 'is way around these tussocks," Jim said, and steered his horse after the fox. "The old bugger. Ya see 'im? There 'e goes." I turned my horse after Jim, but I lost the fox at once.

Veering thus from our slow straight line, we tipped the roos from the precarious meridian they'd been holding; they gave up, in an instant, the hope of not being seen, and they bolted for the timber. Jim nudged his horse. I pressed my heels to Stock's sides, drew the reins tight, and we turned our horses after the roos, and the tall grasses crowded about us, so many clustered bristles on the head of a broom. We were the afternoon's breath. We were passing among these grasses like a thought through someone's mind.

If you'd asked the roos, whose elegant panic had carried them already into the brittlejacks, they might have said the thought we embodied was threat or nuisance, just plain trouble. And they might have been right. What the fox spells—for animals with a far longer lineage in this valley than the fox, for young kangaroos and smaller marsupials—is death. If Jim had a rifle he'd have been firing it, but not at the roos.

Jim's palomino side-stepped sharply round a strand of blackberry in the tussocks as though it was

barbed wire, and Jim rode the swerve and got himself straight in the saddle again, and our horses broke into a run for the ridge.

If it had not been so much like riding through belly-high grass toward the trees, I would tell you that this metrical rise and fall, this rapid rolling stress and unstress, felt like cantering in dactyls through cloud.

II

The Maxwell family (left to right): Billy Maxwell, Les Maxwell, and Jim Maxwell, some of the first ranchers of the Kedumba Valley.
Photo courtesy Max Hill.

I'm describing an afternoon in early June one year. At three o'clock, as we set out to look over some of the horses Jim agists, he'd pointed to the sky. "It's two years since I saw a cloud like that," he said. A skein of high cirrus, fraying and bone white, was drawn taut across the blue sky, north to south—ice, braided by wind. Up there the winds were screaming; down here in the grasses of the Kanimbla, sunlight pooled, and the air was very still. 'I wonder what shapes a cloud just that way, every other year,' Jim said. Two years earlier, one afternoon in winter, the quality of the light and the mood of the wind high above these dry paddocks had been just the same, and way up in the troposphere the air had been as fierce and cold.

To remember this, to be fluent in the language of the sky, to recall the figures it recites and repeats, is to belong, I thought then, to a valley as the roos belong to it.

III

Halfway round the horses, we stopped by Jim's mother's house, and Jim's twin Lachlan was there working in the yard. The sky that morning had been full of clouds, and Lachlan reckoned they were an odd color; he reckoned they were stained with dust blown all the way from South Australia and all the dry country in between; and he reckoned the dust was still in the air. The afternoon was now so clear—just that rope of cloud, as pellucid as optic fiber—I found it hard to see how the sky could be steeped thus in drought. But as afternoon wore on, and we rode among the horses, the cirrus

rolled east, and the sun fell west and as it fell discovered filaments the sky remembered, all of a sudden, from the morning. The droughty sky flared pink, and evening made a sunset out of all that desert overhead.

IV

Jim looks at a horse the way some men look at a car. He loves it, if it's any good—sometimes even if it isn't. He knows its sins, its signature moves, the way it breaks his heart; he works with it; he enjoys the way it carries him across the ground; and when it breaks or grows too old, he lets it go. He sells it or—speaking of horses exclusively now—he puts it down.

"Ya dig a hole till ya find rock," said Jim as we rode on toward that sunset. "Then ya lay the horse on the rock an' backfill. Ya make a mound over it, an' ya let it settle flat. Ya need ta dig down ta rock—ya need it deep or the dogs'll get at it. No one wants that. 'Cept the dogs, a course.

"People get sentimental about animals," Jim went on. Among the agisted horses that afternoon was a white mare, 28 years old, three-quarters blind. She had to come up close to find out what we were, and we watched as she made her way off through the paddock, head lowered, walking half-steps, feeling out the terrain. She came up too close to a pony and shied. "An' that one's over 30," said Jim.

Another old limping mare belonged to a woman who'd moved to Tasmania three years back. "She rings me one night," Jim said. "'How much would it cost to ship her down?' she asks. To Tasmania. A horse 30 years old. 'More than it's worth,' I tell her. So she asked me ta keep the horse here. She shoulda put the mare down. But I couldn't bring meself ta say it. A thousand dollars a year is a lot ta spend ta keep a lame horse alive, though I'm 'appy ta take it."

"An' look at this old thing . . ."

Our ride among the elderly continued. But these horses didn't look old to me, and if they were suffering they weren't showing it. Or was it just the kindness of the light they grazed in?

It had been months since I'd ridden, and we pushed the horses along, for the afternoon was failing, and we still had a way to go. I was thinking how sore I'd be tomorrow or the next day, and how this was the widest I had been awake for weeks, out here in the air on a horse in a valley. We moved at a steady canter past the old woolshed, and we were talking as we rode, and I was thinking how smart that felt, when Jim's mobile phone rang. It made a sound like a frog in a swamp, a frog in some agony. At a canter, Jim pulled the phone from his belt and held it up and looked at the number on the screen and pressed the talk button and asked, "What's 'appenin'?" This is what cowboys do these days.

"Righto," Jim said to the phone. "Won't be long," and I guessed then it was Judith. This particular cowboy had just turned 45, and Judith had a party organized for him up on Camel's Hump that night,

though Jim thought at that stage it was just a barbeque with a couple of friends. Jim clipped the phone back onto his belt, still at a canter, and we pressed on.

"The wind's gettin' up," Jim said, "an' it blows like buggery on that ridge." And he didn't know it yet, but 50 people would be up there later freezing with him in the wind and letting him know he'd be out to pasture soon himself.

At Potter's, we had trouble with the gate. The post, which was new, had shrunk in the dry weather and pulled the chain taut so that Jim had to take pliers, from his belt beside the phone, and bend the hook so it cleared the eye. He got that done, and we rode through and I shut the gate behind us, and that was when we became two doubts in the mind of a mob of kangaroos.

Painting, untitled, by Philippa Johnson, courtesy Milkweed Editions.

V

We slowed the horses to a walk and came down off the ridge through the evening timber, and Jim said, "I guess it's what ya grow up with.

"When we were kids an' Dad come in an' said there's an old cow or some bloody thing that needed a bullet, there'd be a fight f' the job. You know, Lach'd be goin' Jim shot the last one an' it was 'is turn an' I'd be runnin' ta get there first. It wasn't that we liked the killin'. I don't think we were 'specially cruel. It was just a job with a gun, an' that made it one a the good jobs."

VI

I looked up at the sky again and the darkening scarps as we rode through the home paddock, and I decided I'd been wrong earlier about the light. It wasn't kind; it was, as ever, simply true. It touched the grasses and it brought out the drought in the clouds, and it didn't care. It knew nothing about pity. But it seemed to me that we should. We need to be careful, though, whom our pity serves. Are we sparing ourselves or an animal? What is right, I was thinking, is what has about it the quality of this light; whatever helps to keep such stern beauty alive.

VII

As we rode past Jim's new house Judith came out and waved and called, "We won't have any horses ridden through here, thanks," and Jim sang out "Did ya drench the horses?" and she said she had. "But get a move on down there, you boys," she added.

By the shed, a fire still smoked in a big circle of rocks Jim had built there for the tourists. There was a billy hanging in the smoke. "Now wouldn't it be nice ta sit an' drink some tea right now," said Jim. But we didn't have time, and he knew it. We unsaddled the horses, and hung the leathers in the container where they were stored. Jim fixed the horses' feed in a couple of buckets, molasses and oats, and stirred water into it under the tap.

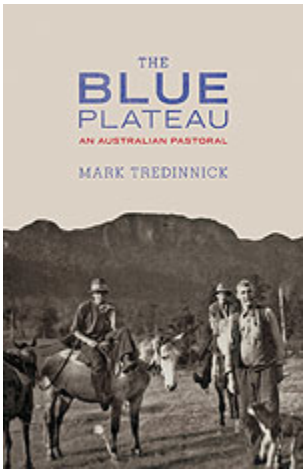
We waited till the horses had eaten. Then we opened the gate to the yard and let them water at the trough. They stood a bit in the last of the daylight, and each of them looked out across the paddocks for his mob. It must have felt good—it felt good just to watch them—to look out at the evening, fed and watered and done carrying men, done spooking at blackberry and chasing roos, ready to find your mates and graze with them while night fell.

Then Judith came down and hurried Jim away, and he sauntered to the house flicking through a book I'd given him. A book about a meadow, a place not unlike this one, but at the mercy of a different sky. And I walked to my jeep, and turned it around, and I waved at Jim and drove away. Halfway up out of the valley, a lyrebird crossed in front of me and carried his furled tail into the bracken by the road. A shadow puppet on the gray backlit screen of the night. And then it was night entirely, and I let the jeep peer ahead astigmatically into the darkness and take me home.

This excerpt is from Mark Tredinnick's book *The Blue Plateau: An Australian Pastoral* (Milkweed Editions, 2009). It is reprinted with permission of the publisher.

At the farthest extent of Australia's Blue Mountains, on the threshold of the country's arid interior, *The Blue Plateau* reveals the vagaries of a changing climate: the droughts last longer, the seasons change less, and the wildfires burn hotter and more often. Here, Mark Tredinnick tries to learn what it means to fall in love with a home that is falling away.

Charting a lithology of indigenous presence, faltering settlers, failing ranches, floods, tragedy, and joy that the place constantly warps and erodes, *The Blue Plateau* reminds us that, though we may change the landscape around us, it works at us inexorably, with wind and water, heat and cold, altering who and what we are.



Mark Tredinnick's honors include numerous Australian literary awards for both poetry and prose. *The Blue Plateau* is his first literary publication in the United States. He lives and teaches in Burradoo, Australia.

Fiction

The Hank Williams Dialogues

by Andrew Wingfield

"Blue birdy, Daddy! I want blue birdy!"

"Hang on," I say to Max as I fiddle with the straps of his car seat, "blue birdy's on the way."

I get myself buckled in and switch on the stereo. Slow slide guitar takes us out of the driveway, and then Hank's sorrowful voice comes in:

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill
He sounds too blue to fly
The midnight train is whining low
I'm so lonesome I could cry

"Is this a sad song?" the boy asks.

"It is a sad song."

"No it's not," he says. "It's a *lonely* song."

"Well, sometimes being lonely can make you sad." I brake gently, creeping past a stop sign.

"Why is the birdy lonely?"

"I don't know," I say, "but maybe your brother does. After all, he is in first grade."

We both wait hopefully for Nicholas to speak, but he is mum.

"He's lonely because he misses his birdy friends," Max says.

"Maybe that's why."

"He *does* miss them," he insists, threatening tears.

"Yes he does." I round the first corner and speed up, swinging left to pass a car that's stopped at the curb, hazards blinking.

"Daddy?"

"Yes, love?"

"Is Hank going to cheer the birdy up?"

I tell him that's exactly what Hank's going to do. Right. At 29, Hank died alone in the back seat of a limousine with a few cans of beer and a handwritten song.

"He's a blue birdy," Max observes.

"But not the color blue," I say, braking. At the stoplight, I swivel in my seat and look back at my boys. Nicholas sits behind the passenger seat, the booster beneath his butt lifting him high enough to use the car's shoulder strap. He stares grimly out his window. Max, on the driver's side, is getting too big for his toddler seat. "Get this," I say to him. "Blue also means sad."

Hank may be launching into the fourth and final verse, wrapping up this song, but we're still glossing the first two lines. While Max chews on my last assertion I close my eyes a moment, scanning the family bookshelf for a supporting example. "Think of Curious George."

"Curious George is brown," he points out, and the light changes. We're moving again.

"True, but remember the time he was riding his bike along the stream, looking at all the boats he'd made out of newspapers, not watching where he was going, and he hit that rock?"

"It wasn't a stream. It was a river."

"And his bike was broken. And he couldn't ride, and he couldn't carry it, and what did he do?"

"He cried," the boy says in a small voice.

"He was feeling blue, just like the lonesome whippoorwill." I pull up to the curb in front of Cleave Springs Elementary. "Now say goodbye to your brother."

I grab Nicholas' backpack from the seat next to mine and go around the car to meet him. I remind him that his mother will pick him up. Kneeling down, I take his shoulders in my hands, fishing for some eye contact but not even getting a nibble.

Have a great day, I might say to him if the possibility didn't seem so remote. Instead I tell him to have a decent one.

I drive Max over to the preschool and walk him inside. Chiming welcomes me back to the car.

"Jambalaya," I say into the flipped-open phone, and give Harriet a few beats to respond. "You don't like it."

"I like jambalaya," she says. "It's delicious, when it's cooked right. But as a name? For a restaurant owned by us?"

"That's the idea we've been toying with."

"*We've*?"

On Depot, our first Cleave Springs restaurant, Harriet took the lead because it was her idea and I was still working on Capitol Hill. On Black Iris, over in Beverly, we worked as equal partners even though Nicholas was nursing. But since Max was born she's focused on the home front while I've taken on more and more of the responsibilities for our growing empire. Still, I'm not ready to face this third one alone.

"I got the name from the Hank Williams song," I say, her silence telling me this information soothes her. "Most of Hank's tunes are dreary, but 'Jambalaya' is about good times."

"You listen to Hank Williams?"

"Not closely, before now. I was thinking about restaurant names the other day and 'Jambalaya' popped into my head. I bought a CD so I could see if it sounded the way I remembered it. Have you noticed that Max is getting hooked on Hank?"

"He keeps talking about some blue bird."

"The lonesome whippoorwill," I say, pulling out of the lot. "What's up with Nicholas? He won't talk."

"He's brooding about something."

"I brooded too, but when my parents spoke to me I answered."

"*We've*," Harriet says again, and I just wait. "What makes you think she knows anything about designing a new restaurant?"

"She studied design in college. This is professional experience for her and a bargain for us."

"You know who she worked for, don't you?"

"I know she worked for Big Boss Man."

"You know what she did, right?"

"Should I ask him? We're meeting first thing."

"He's a rat," Harriet says. "You can tell him I said so."

"Consider it done."

She tells me that Max has a doctor's appointment at 1:30 today, his three-year-old visit, which means I'm picking Nicholas up from school. "I hope you remembered that."

"Me, forget?"

"That's a laugh," she says, not laughing. "Listen, are you going back out after stories again tonight?"

"Have to. I'm interviewing another chef."

She sighs. "We need to talk."

Harriet doesn't work inside restaurants these days, but she watches the balance sheets like Dutchmen watch dykes. It's too early in the day for me to hear about a leak.

"Aren't we talking right now?"

"No," she says, "we're not."

Big Boss Man rules Cleave Springs from the white, four-door pickup truck that's waiting for me when I pull into the parking lot behind the building. I take a spot near his and watch him climb down from the high cab.

"Hank Williams," he says, having heard the music through my open windows. "Your cheating heart

will tell on you."

"So I've heard."

He watches me closely from under the bill of his cap, like he's looking at me—really looking—for the first time. "Hank Williams?"

I nod toward the manila folder in his hand. "You have that lease?"

"Let's go inside."

I follow him around to the front of the building and he opens the boarded-up front door. It's the old bank building, the plum property on the Avenue, and the only space on Cleave Springs' main drag that hasn't already been cleaned up and leased to a business that caters to the people who can afford what houses in our neighborhood cost these days. Two years ago I tracked down and tried to do a deal with the owner of this elegant, crumbling edifice, a crazy old woman hooked up to an oxygen tank. She sent me packing without ever naming her price. A few months ago, when I heard she'd sold to Big Boss Man, I instantly saw him standing in the sick room in his heavy brown boots, looming above the old woman's wasted body, one of his burly hands clutching the fragile oxygen tube like he might start to whip her with it, the other hand offering her the pen she would use to sign the property over to him.

The guy knows how much the space thrills me because I made the mistake of telling him so the first time we came in here together. Even with the tall, arched windows boarded over, even with the mold stains on the walls, even with the only light coming from two naked bulbs that dangle from the high ceiling, I come in here and all I can see is what a happening place Jambalaya will be.

"Another restaurant," he says.

"Restaurant and bar."

"You don't think the Avenue's already saturated?"

"My whole plan is predicated on Cleave Springs becoming a destination."

"Predicated," he says.

"Depot, the other places on the Avenue, they're mostly serving the people who live here. But people from everywhere will want to come to this new joint."

"They'll want to come because...?"

"There's a sweet spot between funky and fine. I know how to find it. Now," I say, reaching toward the folder, "are you going to let me see that lease?"

His phone chimes as he's handing me the folder. He starts talking and heads for the door, motioning for me to come with him. He locks the door behind us and I walk back toward the parking lot with him, scanning the lease as I go. When we reach his pickup, he flips the phone shut and tells me he's got to run.

"One minute. These numbers are all wrong."

He climbs up into the truck and shuts the door. "Call me," his lips say as the engine roars to life.

"Predicated," I say. "What's wrong with the word 'predicated'?"

"He's threatened by you," Crystal says. She sits next to me in the booth in Depot's front dining room that I've occupied all morning. Her fabric swatches, six-inch squares, make a neat stack on the table and her thigh presses lightly against mine. The lunch servers whisk around the room, getting things ready for the noon rush.

"Threatened?"

"All that fancy education." She lifts the swatch at the top of her stack, which is way too orange.

I shake my head. "Did you threaten him too? I could see him having trouble dealing with a smart young woman."

"Secretary is a support position. I played that role, and we got along fine." These last words are pitch-perfect, no trace in them of the stories that swirl about Crystal leaving her job under pressure from Big Boss Man's wife.

"And you left because…?"

"Because I don't want to be a secretary when I grow up."

"What *do* you want to be?"

She holds up another swatch. "This is nice."

"This color," I say, "or this job?"

"Both. I like working for you and Harriet, but I don't want to serve forever."

"This was our first restaurant," I say, lifting the salt and pepper caddy off the table, a little steam engine made of homey hammered tin.

Crystal toots like a locomotive. Her mouth is playful, her pale brown eyes as hard as walnut shells.

I set the caddy down. "Harriet wanted the train motif because Cleave Springs started out as a railworkers' neighborhood."

"All aboard," Crystal says.

"My leverage was limited back then. Hadn't quit the day job yet. But I did manage to put the brakes on a couple of bad ideas."

"Like?"

"Engineer hats for the servers. Every booth a little boxcar."

She grimaces as if from shooting pains.

"Jambalaya will be different," I say. "We'll do it right. You'll get a lot of experience, set yourself up for another design job. I know you pulled the dinner shift last night. Thanks for coming in this morning."

"Thank you," she says, and it's the weight she puts on *you*, the suggestion that I've already given her more than I know, that sends me back to the lease on the table in front of me. For the third time since we parted earlier, I call Big Boss Man. Straight to voicemail again.

"Could it be a test?" she says after I slap the table.

"How bad do I want it, you mean?"

She nods. "Do you want it more than the other guy?"

"The other guy? Do you know something?"

"Only how he operates."

"So you think someone else wants to lease the space?"

"Or use it," she says, tilting her head.

"What, he wants to open a business himself?"

"He's got time on his hands. It's not like Cleave Springs has many properties left to flip."

"True," I say, remembering how he quizzed me about my business plan this morning. "Crystal, is he thinking about opening a restaurant?"

She raises another swatch, this one the color of kidney beans. "Do I know what he's thinking?"

I nod, but not because the color is right.

Lunch at Depot is busy. The crowd's convivial roar travels up the stairwell and through the open door of my office, where I sit reading chefs' resumes. The phone barely has a chance to chime before I flip it open. "He's fucking with the numbers."

"Surprise, surprise," Harriet says. "Competition?"

"Of one kind or another. Where are you?"

"Just picked up Max. He's distraught because Hank is in your car. Can you talk to him?" The phone tumbles from hand to hand.

"Daddy?" The boy's voice teeters on the edge of grief.

"Hi, sweetheart. How was school?"

"Daddy?"

"Here I am."

"I want goodbye Joe, Daddy."

I was never a good singer, but fatherhood has made me a willing one. "You want goodbye Joe? Get ready, big boy. Here it comes."

Goodbye Joe, me got to go, me oh my oh
Me got to go pole the pirogue down the bayou
My Yvonne the sweetest one me oh my oh
Son of a gun we'll have good fun on the bayou

When I sing most artists' songs, I'm acutely, even painfully aware of my voice's complete lack of range and color. Hank's songs are different. Something inside them numbs my critical ear. I'm the

one singing this tune, but it's Hank's cracked timbre that I hear, as if the jaunty phrases he unfurls, the fresh emotions that set them alight, have welled up this very moment from my own soul.

Knowing my listener as I do, I stop at the end of the first verse for a bit of exegesis. As usual, he wants to know if a pirogue is a boat, and I confirm that it is. He wants to know if the bayou is water, he wants to know if Yvonne is Hank's friend, he wants to know if there's going to be a party on the bayou and if Hank and Yvonne are going to the party and if there's going to be cake. I answer every question in the affirmative.

"Daddy?" he says.

"Yes, love."

"Where are you, Daddy?"

"At Depot, working. I'll see you for stories."

"I'm going to choose a book," he says.

"Only one?"

"Two books!"

"And I'm going to read them to you."

The phone tumbles from hand to hand again. "Remember," Harriet says. "You're picking up Nicholas."

I'm rehearsing monologues as I lean against my idling car. When the herd of first-graders bursts through the double doors and comes rumbling across the playground, I don't even try to catch sight of mine. I know he's behind the pack, going at his own pace, this boy who reads circles around his peers but could use a tutor's help to master the basics of walking. Harriet is probably right to see his gangly, tentative gait as a purely physical problem, his body slower than most at coordinating itself. I take his steps more personally, seeing too much of myself in the walk of a boy who can't quite trust the earth to support him.

Most of the other cars have launched by the time he arrives, his crabbed, halting steps out of sync with the look of fierce concentration that grips his face. "Hello, handsome," I say, relieving him of

his pack. "I was wrong when I told you Mommy would pick you up. She had to take your brother to the doctor for his checkup."

I toss the pack on the passenger's seat, sit down behind the wheel, and wait until I hear his seatbelt click shut. "Everything all right?" I say, pulling away from the curb. "How was school?" I check the rearview and see him staring out his window.

What, I could say, *you want to scare me off so you can get into the restaurant business yourself? It's a tough business, very tough. What do you know about creating a scene people will like? What do you know about developing a concept, hiring a chef, naming cocktails? It's nothing like being a contractor, believe me. If you do this, you'll fail.*

Okay, I could say, *you want a piece of the action? That's reasonable. You've got the space, I've got the concept, the experience. Tell you what,* I could say, *you put up half the capital, I'll put up the other half. Let's be partners.*

But you don't want to collaborate with me, do you? You want to give me a choice: walk away or fail. Either way, you're still the king. Well, I could say, *good try, asshole. I'm not intimidated. I'm not backing down. Get ready to lose your throne.*

When I pull up in front of the house Harriet's wagon is there, back already from the doctor's. I check Nicholas' face in the rearview, and something about the squint of his eyes tells me to hold my tongue, to sit tight and give him a minute before I take him to the front door.

"I was wondering," he says.

"Yes?" I wait several beats, willing myself to stay quiet, be patient, but he's gone silent as a stone. "What were you wondering, love?"

He releases the seatbelt and opens his door. I grab his backpack and step around to meet him, going with him up the walkway and onto the front porch. "Are you going to tell me?" I say, and the squint of his eyes says he's still thinking about it.

But Harriet opens the front door, and the moment dissolves.

Crystal, in white blouse and black slacks, dressed to serve, pops into my office before starting the dinner shift. She drops a furniture catalogue on my desktop and rests her hands there, bending at the waist, her pale brown eyes level with mine. "Some nice pieces for the bar in there. I marked a

bunch of pages."

"Thanks, I'll look at them."

"We really have to get back in there with a tape measure. I need to be in the space to know if some of these pieces will work."

"If Big Boss Man wasn't AWOL, we could try to get the key."

"Ah, the key." She reaches into the pocket of her slacks and pulls out a gold key on a white string.

"How'd you get that?"

"He's not entirely AWOL."

"Just from me?"

She reaches back and slides the key into her pocket. "The more time you have to wonder, the less certain you get."

"Here's what I'm getting uncertain about," I say. "You."

"Me?"

"Crystal, who are you working for?"

She lifts her hands from the desktop and stands upright. "You sign my checks."

"The key," I say. "Why'd he give it to you?"

She shrugs. "I asked, he gave."

"No strings?"

"Hard to imagine," she says, nodding.

"Impossible, actually. But here's what I *can* imagine. You know one of us is going to open a restaurant in that building. You don't care who it is. Either way, you're going to be involved."

"Half right," she says.

"Okay, what am I wrong about?"

She plants her hands on the desktop again, this time leaning in close enough that I can smell her shampoo. "I do care."

We hold each other's gaze a moment before she backs away, standing upright again. "Will you be here when I finish? I thought we could go over there tonight."

"I'm interviewing that chef from Serpentine. I'll hang out till you're done."

Harriet has just finished getting the freshly bathed boys into their pajamas when I arrive. It's her turn to read to Nicholas tonight, so I cozy up with Max on his bed, a head of fragrant brown curls propped on my chest. The child knows every word of the six or eight books that currently hold his interest, and I make sport with his memory while I read, occasionally veering away from the text so he can catch and correct me.

Two books, a little chit-chat, and the separation dance begins. I move his head from my chest to the pillow. I pull the white blanket up over him first, then the green blanket. Froggy goes on the pillow next to him, otter goes between him and the wall, but walrus sleeps on the floor. I move to the chair near the bed.

"How about the window song? Haven't sung you that one in a while."

"Window song!"

"Let's see if I remember the words." I close my eyes a moment, waiting for the intro to materialize in my head. I hear the plaintive guitar, and then my being starts to fill with Hank's forlorn sound:

You're window shoppin
Just window shoppin
You're only lookin around
You're not buyin
You're just tryin
To find the best deal in town

"Who is Hank talking to?" Max wants to know.

"To a friend, I think."

"Is his friend a girl or a boy?"

"I'm guessing his friend is a woman."

"She's going to buy a window?"

"Not exactly. Window shopping means shopping for something when you don't plan to buy just yet. It's an expression."

He chews on that for a moment. "What is Hank's friend shopping for?"

"She's shopping for a man," I say. "But it's kind of tricky. People can't be bought like things in a store, so if this woman is looking for a good deal, it's not exactly the lowest price she wants." I stand up. "I'm not making much sense, am I?"

"Daddy?" Max says, yawning.

"Yes, love."

"Is Hank angry?"

"It sounds to me like he's more sad than angry."

"It's a blue song?"

"It *is* a blue song." I bend down to kiss his forehead. "Now it's time for Daddy to say goodnight."

"I want Mommy to say goodnight, too."

I go to the doorway of Nicholas' room, where a familiar tableau awaits me: dim lamplight, books strewn about bed and floor, son cleaving to mother, both asleep. I tiptoe across the floor and touch Harriet's arm. Usually she awakens instantly, but today, like yesterday and the day before, she doesn't even move. I shake her lightly, then harder. The eyes open, slowly the brain engages. She yawns, blinks several times, and slithers out of the boy's grasp.

"He wants the bank building for himself," I whisper to her in the hall.

"For what?"

"Wants to open his own restaurant."

"Let him," she laughs.

"But that's competition for Depot."

"I doubt it. The guy's a contractor—a bad one, I might add." She glances down the hall toward our bathroom, where we spent 2,000 bucks on plumbing a month after Big Boss Man sold us our "fully renovated" house. "What makes you think he can run a good restaurant?"

"Mommy?" Max calls. "I want Mommy to say goodnight."

Harriet tells him she'll be right there.

"We need to *talk* about this," I say, clinching annoyance in both fists.

"We *do* need to talk," she says gravely. "Wake me up when you come in."

The chef sports a mane of wavy black hair and a small silver hoop in each ear. The stubble on his face is a few days from becoming a beard. Facing me across one of Depot's bar tables, he leans in to listen as I weave my Jambalaya vision. It's not a Cajun restaurant that I've got in mind, not some greasy spoon in the French Quarter where you go for gumbo and red beans and rice. No, it's an *inflection* I'm after, a Jambalaya spirit of good times, good people, and creative, authentic, down-to-earth food.

The chef sees what I'm saying, or claims to. Halfway through the second martini he begins to speak, discoursing on the versatility of oysters and shrimp, the mysterious properties of andouille sausage, the untapped possibilities of okra. Somewhere in the middle of this Crystal appears, her hair down, the white shirt less buttoned than before. The dinner shift must be over.

She joins us for a drink. I start to tell the chef about the bank space, but before I get very far I remember that Crystal has the key.

We quickly empty our glasses. I grab my briefcase and off we go down the Avenue, where the cool night air on my face and the solid sidewalk beneath my happy feet make me understand for the first time how buzzed I am. I buzz to my companions about Cleave Springs, this blighted little neighborhood that we've brought back to life. The big stucco house on our right is a salon and spa called Revive. Thugs used to congregate on the porch of this falling-down place, the thumping woofers in their cars rattling the teeth of all who passed. The Lily Pad Café occupies the ground floor of the neighborhood's original department store. After the department store closed a series of churches passed through the building. When the last congregation left, it became the crack house it was when Big Boss Man sold Harriet and me our house. These days the Lily Pad bustles every morning with well-dressed babies and moms who hold advanced degrees.

"And now for the next big thing," I say as we arrive at the boarded up bank building. Crystal unlocks the door and turns on the lights. We give the chef a tour of the space, talking him through the layout—bar up front, dining room in the center, kitchen tucked under the loft we plan to build in

the back. He loves our idea of turning the old bank vault into a wine cellar. As Crystal starts to take some measurements I walk the chef out to the street, querying him on the brands of equipment he favors, showing him the kind of owner I'll be, how I'll listen, support, facilitate.

Back inside, I don't see Crystal. I walk around the space a minute before I notice a light coming from the doorway of the vault in the back corner. I find her in the fortified room, sitting on a little ledge that runs along one wall, the catalogue open on her lap.

"I needed better light," she says.

I go to sit down beside her, but misjudge the height of the ledge and lunge sidelong against her. "Sorry," I say, but don't scoot away.

She closes the catalogue. "Well?"

"I think he's the guy. His references are stellar, he's ready to run his first kitchen, and he digs our concept. I like him. What do you think?"

"I missed most of the interview," she says in a voice that might be cross.

"Oh," I say, "you want to interview chefs with me, too?"

Her face swivels away from me.

I lean in, closing the little gap she's opened between us. "That came out wrong. I just don't want to presume anything, Crystal. What I meant to ask is how much do you want to be involved in?"

"Everything," she says, turning to me again, her eager voice reaching in to shake a part of me that used to come awake whenever I was with Harriet, a part of me made vibrant by the light of my wife's attention.

Everything. Is that what I have, or is it what I want? It's what I'm ready to give to be everything to someone again.

"Crystal," I say, lifting her hand to my mouth.

She yanks her hand away and stands, glaring down at me. "What are you doing?"

I have no answer.

Her neck is scarlet, her eyes murky with affront. "Did you think?"

"But you said…"

"What did I say?"

"That you *did* care who opened a restaurant here. I thought you were saying you wanted it to be me."

"Not because I want you to kiss my *hand*." She walks to the door of the vault, peering out to the main room.

"Crystal, I'm so sorry."

She stays in the doorway, looking out.

"I thought you were interested in me. I wanted you to be."

"I *was* interested in you," she says, facing me again. "I *am* interested in you. I'm interested in *working* with you."

The disappointment on her face sends my eyes to my feet. I'm still looking down when she says, "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"Would you ever, in a million years, open a restaurant with plaid table cloths?"

"He likes plaid?" I say, looking up at her again.

She nods gloomily. "His roots are in Scotland."

"I see it now. Hairy-legged waiters running around in kilts. All you can eat haggis. Intimate candle light dinners with live bagpipe music."

We laugh a little. She comes back and sits down, leaving a good foot of space between us.

"Not that it's any of my business," I say.

She shakes her head. "No, never. He worries about me, like a daughter or something. People see the way he acts around me and jump to conclusions."

I tip my head toward the rhythmic sound of boot steps thudding across the main room. "He protects you?"

"From wolves," Crystal says as Big Boss Man fills the doorway of the vault.

"I was driving by," he says. "Saw the front door ajar."

I stand up. "You're out late."

"You too," he says. "Hi Cryssie."

Crystal raises her catalogue. "We were talking about furniture, taking some measurements."

"Restaurant furniture," he says. "Can I see?"

Crystal hands him the catalogue and he starts thumbing through it.

"Is your phone broken?" I ask him. "I've been calling you all day about the lease."

"Is there a problem?"

"Only that the numbers on there aren't the ones we agreed on."

"They're not," he says, his tone falling somewhere between statement and question.

I open my briefcase. "Take a look," I say, handing over the document before I sit back down on the ledge.

He quickly scans the pages. "Those are the numbers."

"Pretty high, don't you think?"

"I've got numbers to make too," he says. "This building wasn't gifted to me."

"Of course not."

He pinches the bill of his cap and adjusts it, making his eyes more visible. "Listen, if this little thing of yours can't crank those kind of numbers, fine. I'll work out something else." He rolls the lease up into a loose cylinder. "That way, the two of you can go home and get to sleep, which is what I'm about to do." He turns to go, but pauses. "Cryssie, you need a ride home?"

"Oh," she says, "thanks."

I stand. "Wait a minute. We're not done here."

Neither of them moves as I pull from my shirt pocket the gold pen my mother gave me when I finished law school. "I've got some papers to sign." I take the rolled-up lease from Big Boss Man and sit down on the ledge, briefcase across my knees, heart pounding ferociously as I flip through the pages and scrawl my signature boldly above my printed name.

"I guess that's done," Crystal says, pleased.

Big Boss Man smiles. "Not quite."

"Harriet has to sign it too," I explain, and Crystal's darkening face tells me I've surprised her a second time.

The three of us walk out together, Crystal locking the door and then handing the key to Big Boss Man. The white pickup sits curbside. After they climb into it, I approach Big Boss Man's door and his window slides down. "You're a Hank Williams fan," I say, intent that he, too, should be surprised just once before this day is done. "I'll bet you know this one."

Before he can respond, I start singing the words I've already sung once tonight, and they rise up out of me as raw and woeful as when I sang them in Max's bedroom.

"Don't worry," I say when I finish, stepping up on the truck's running board, "you'll know tomorrow."

"Know what?" they both ask.

"Who's got the best deal in town."

I'm too keyed up to read or watch TV or even to comb the Web for further details of Hank's biography. I'm about to open the liquor cabinet when I remember that Harriet wanted me to wake her.

Upstairs, I switch on the bedside lamp and find Nicholas sleeping in my place. I lift his limp body and carry him back to his own bed. Harriet is in the grip of the same aggressive sleep I interrupted earlier this evening. It takes me a full minute to rouse her, and when I finally do she regards me with a look that begins in alarm and ends in accusation.

"What happened?" she says.

"You said to wake you when I got in."

She struggles slowly upward, propping herself on a pillow. "Jesus. What time is it?"

"Late."

"How was the chef?"

"I liked him. He seems to like the opportunity."

"What about the lease?"

"I'm starting to think we can make it work. I'll show it to you in the morning."

"I have an appointment in the morning," she says, studying me through eyes that grow more alert, more wary by the second. "You look strange."

"I'm excited."

"She was at the interview, wasn't she?"

"Excited about Jambalaya," I say.

Her eyebrows lift. "So you've settled on that name?"

"Whatever we call it," I say, "this is going to be the one."

"The one?"

"The first two were learning experiences. I can't wait to see what happens with the training wheels off."

"That's what I am to you, training wheels?"

"I didn't say that."

She lifts a pillow from my side of the bed and places it on the one already behind her, settling back into the stack. "Can't you concentrate on making the ones we already have as good as can be? Why do we need another?"

"*You* talked me into this business," I say, my voice surprisingly fierce.

"You miss the hyenas over on the Hill?"

"I'm just saying that restaurants are what I do now. What I do, I do to the hilt."

"Restaurants aren't all you do."

"They're what matters."

She looks at me like my face is melting. "Nicholas. Max. Do those names ring a bell?"

"Hank Williams was a father too," I say. "Do people remember him because he made children?"

She nods. "To hell with your children, then. Work on Jambalaya, or whatever you want to call it. If

it's really good, some strangers might remember you."

This is the moment when Hank walks downstairs and out the door, stepping into his waiting limousine and cracking open a cold beer. As the car pulls away from the curb, he starts scrawling the first lines of a new song. What I do is go to the bathroom and brush my teeth.

Back in the bedroom, I sit on the corner chair and reach down to untie my shoes. "How was Max's check-up?"

"What do you care?"

"You know I do."

She nods, conceding. "You act like that's a character flaw. If you didn't take an interest in your children, think how many restaurants you'd have."

"The check-up?"

"He's fine. A healthy three-year-old boy."

"Nicholas must be restless. He was in our bed when I came up."

"He does sense things," she says. "Do you?"

"What things?"

"Why can't I look at the lease tomorrow morning?"

I shrug. "You have an appointment."

"With Dr. Shea."

"No wonder," I say, because Dr. Shea's test isn't the first test, or even the second. Dr. Shea's test only confirms the ones taken at home. That's why she's been sleeping so hard.

"No wonder?"

Already on the highway, into his second beer and halfway finished with that new song, Hank misses this moment entirely. This is no kind of moment for Hank. No, this is a moment made to test the mettle of a vain, ambitious, flat-footed performer who lacks the luxury of a limousine.

"No wonder you look so beautiful," I say, and watch what a few friendly words can do. Her color warms, her face opens to me as it hasn't in months.

"Oh, I do not," she says.

On my way to her, I catch sight of the boy who one day, in the middle of his second grade year, will become the eldest of three. How long has he been standing in our bedroom doorway? I go to him, take his shoulders in my hands and gently turn him around, walking with him to his room and peeling the covers back so he can crawl into bed. He lies on his back and I sit on the edge of the bed, stroking his hair. In the nightlight's glow I can see that he's actually looking at me.

"I was wondering," he says, and as I wait for more I press my lips together hard. Harder. "Is this a dangerous place?"

"Dangerous? Why do you ask?"

"I need to know."

"Did something happen to scare you?"

"Nothing happened."

"Did you see something scary?"

"No."

I take his hand. "This is a safe place."

"Cleave Springs?" A hint of challenge in his voice.

"The neighborhood's named after the family that owned all the land before there were houses on it. Cleave, they were called."

"Your dictionary didn't say that."

"My dictionary?"

"Cleave is in there."

"Impressive," I say.

"It means to cut."

"Right. Chefs cut meat with a cleaver."

"And to hold tight."

"Like when we hug."

"Did you know that?" he says.

"Why do you ask?"

"Did you know it before I was born? When you and Mommy moved here?"

"I suppose I did," I say. "But not like I know it now."

He closes his eyes thoughtfully. I watch the surface of his forehead going smooth, like choppy waters when the wind dies.

Sometimes, after the pump is primed, this boy will release a great gush of words. I wait for him to say more, hoping he will, thinking I can be more patient if I don't look at him, so I look everywhere else—the fish tank, the bookshelf, the toy chest, the chair—before my eyes circle back and find him asleep, his mouth barely open, the corners raised in a smile that conveys something I can only read as gratitude, as if he's thanking me for sending him off to sleep at last, letting him leave me alone in this dangerous place.

When I'm sure he's asleep I remove my hand from his and tiptoe out of the room. I go into Max's room and pull the covers up to his chin, standing there to hear him draw and exhale two healthy breaths before I head out to the hallway and slip down the stairs.

My briefcase sits on the kitchen table. I take out the lease, roll it up tightly, and light one end of it at the stove. Afraid of setting off the smoke alarm, I carry the flaming scroll quickly out the back door and stand there in the dark yard, convinced, at least for as long as the flame holds out, that the best work is done in obscurity.

Andrew Wingfield's 2005 novel, *Hear Him Roar*, deals with people and mountain lions in northern California. His place-based stories and personal essays have appeared, or soon will, in *Prairie Schooner, The Antioch Review, Resurgence*, and other magazines. He teaches at George Mason University. "The Hank Williams Dialogues" is part of a collection of stories set in the same gentrifying neighborhood.

Fiction

by Jaren Watson

The first sign of the moose came two weeks earlier when I'd seen a couple of heart-shaped tracks at the edge of the carrots. Ellie and I tend a quarter-acre garden in the back yard that keeps us and her parents stocked through the winter. It's a lot of work, but we enjoy it. Especially as there's not much wiggle room in our budget and the garden cuts food costs.

"We had a moose in the garden last night," I had said to her.

"Really?" she said. "I love moose."

"Yeah, they're pretty."

"Pretty?"

"You know what I mean."

The next morning after emptying the garbage I noticed that the tracks reached halfway up the rows of peas and carrots. When I got home from work they went to the end of the row. Globs of kicked-up earth spotted the grass from the garden to the edge of our yard, where the lawn gives way to aspen trees. The leaves weren't as green as they are most years. It hadn't rained for weeks.

Our yard is at the corner edge of a 50-acre tract of land that has been left wooded. It's owned by an out-of-state doctor who's supposed to be developing it, but so far he's left it alone. A dirt road borders the woods and runs from our property down to the river. Small and white and one-story, ours is the only house for a half mile in either direction. We like the quiet.

I came back inside from the garbage can and said, "It looks like our friend is back."

"Who's that?"

"The moose. It was here during the day."

"Darn it. I missed him?"

It took until the end of the week before either of us saw the moose. I slept in Saturday morning and was taking off my pajamas when Ellie yelled to me from the kitchen.

"Dave, he's here. Hurry!"

My shirt was on the floor and my pants were at my ankles. "Just a second, hon."

"No, quick," she yelled. "You'll miss him."

I stumbled into the kitchen, my pants trailing. Ellie was pressed against the window. I came up beside her but the yard was empty.

"He was right there," she said, pointing to the raspberries. "You should have seen him. He was huge."

I stood next to her, looking at the garden, as if by looking where it just was, I'd sense something of it. "Are you sure it's a he?" I asked.

"Oh yeah. It had antlers like this." She spread her arms wide, her fingers outstretched. She was smiling. "He was huge," she said again. "I've never seen anything like it. Why didn't you hurry when I said to?" She pouted her lips, pretending to be sad.

"How big was it again?"

She reached out again, and I slipped my arms under hers and lifted her up, hugging her body tight to mine.

Sunday, we had just come home from church. We pulled the car into the driveway, and the moose was standing in the backyard. Ellie hadn't exaggerated. It was a monster. Spread out to either side of its football-shaped head were two massive antlers. They looked big enough to cradle our Volkswagen. It just stood there, looking at us with wet, dark eyes. I opened the car door and when I got out, it walked slowly back into the woods.

"Ellie, did you see that thing?"

"What an animal."

We walked to the backyard and into the garden. A section of peas about ten feet long had been pulled from the ground. The vine knotted around itself and bunched up like a tumbleweed.

"That'll die," I said.

Of the other rows of plants in the garden, the rest were untouched except the raspberries. We had a row of raspberry bushes stretching the length of the garden and near the end, the moose had eaten a good part of it. The branches had been chewed or broken halfway down the stalks.

Ellie asked, "Do moose eat raspberries?"

"Looks like it."

"What should we do?"

I wasn't sure. I hadn't seen many moose before and seeing one that big in our own backyard was kind of exciting. "I don't know. But we have to find a way to keep it from eating these raspberries." The peas were okay, but the raspberries were my favorite. We had so many that what we couldn't eat fresh or bottle, Ellie sold in town. We used the raspberry money to buy each other gifts for our birthday, which is on the same day in September. When we tell people we share a birthday they ask if we're twins.

That night we made love. Ellie likes to lay with her head on my chest afterward so we lay there for a while, listening to the wind in the trees through the open window. Ellie lifted her head and there was a little pop of suction when her ear left my skin.

"I think we should name it," she said.

I laughed. "What did you have in mind?"

"I don't know. How about Lefty?"

"Why Lefty?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. It's cute."

"If you say so."

Lefty was in the raspberries again when I came home from work on Monday. He'd ravaged another big section. Broken stalks littered the ground around him. I went into the yard, unsure what to do. I thought walking toward him would scare him off but I'd gotten to the edge of the garden and he still stood there, munching raspberry stalks, the dewlap beneath his throat jiggling as he chewed.

"Shoo," I said. I lifted my briefcase over my head to appear larger. Lefty was unimpressed. He stood there and munched away.

It was the closest I'd ever been to a moose. His mass dumbfounded me. I'm six foot three and only came to Lefty's shoulder. I watched him chomp a raspberry stalk with the sideways chewing that cows have. His upper lip was so large it looked cartoonish. It flapped over his teeth and waggled as he worked his jaws. I was close enough to smell him. He needed a bath.

"Get out of my raspberries!" I waved my briefcase at him. No response. "Come on Lefty, get the hell out of here." At this he emitted a strange sound, almost a moan. Then he resumed chewing. I didn't know what to do. I looked around the yard and spotted the garden hose. I walked over and opened the tap, the hose bending and bulging as it filled with water. The end of the hose was capped with a trigger spray. I dragged the hose to where I figured the spray would reach and said, "You asked for it," pulling the trigger.

As soon as the water hit him Lefty bolted for the trees, running awkwardly fast on his gangly legs. I stood in the garden looking at the damaged raspberries. A third of the row had been destroyed. Something bright lay at the base of the ruined stalks. An orange.

I dropped the hose and turned to walk to the house when I saw Ellie looking at me from the kitchen window. I shook my head, as if that explained everything. When I got inside she said, "Have fun watering the moose?"

"How long was he here?"

"Most of the afternoon."

"And you just sat here watching him?"

"No, I didn't just sit here. I tried to scare him off. He wouldn't budge. I threw an orange at him."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing. I missed."

"Well, we have to call somebody. We can't have him here anymore."

"I already called."

"Who?"

“The Fish and Game.”

“What did they say?”

“That they were busy.”

“Are you kidding?”

“No. They said they were busy and that somebody would come out tomorrow. They asked if the animal had acted threatening and when I said no they said if no one was in danger the soonest they could come was tomorrow.”

“That’s great.”

“They said not to go near it.”

No one showed up the next day. Ellie called again and was told there wasn’t anyone free to deal with a moose that had done nothing but eat a few berries. “Make some loud noises,” she was told. “Moose don’t like that.”

We made some loud noises. We banged pots and pans. We blew whistles and air horns. We aimed stereo speakers out the window, cranked up the volume, and blared opera. That was Ellie’s idea. But Lefty wouldn’t be dissuaded. He ate and mashed the raspberry bushes for three days. I wrapped the bushes with chicken wire, but he hoofed it to the ground.

On Friday, when there was only a few feet of berries left undamaged I was so exasperated I picked up a rock the size of a coconut and hurled it at him. As the rock was still in the air, I regretted throwing it. It whacked into Lefty’s shoulder. I winced. He turned and walked into the trees.

Ellie had been watching from the kitchen. “Do you think you hurt him?” she asked when I came inside.

“I don’t imagine it felt good.”

He got his revenge that night. We woke Saturday morning to find the garden in shambles. The rest of the raspberries were mangled. The three rows of peas were uprooted, the vines ripped and tangled on the grass. The corn was trampled. The only thing that survived was a row of carrots and they were only safe for being underground. I was furious. So was Ellie. Aside from all the ruined food, food we counted on, the garden represented two months of evenings and weekends planting, watering, and

pulling weeds.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“I don’t know. But if he comes back I’m doing something. I just wish I knew why he won’t leave us alone.”

“It’s because of the berries.”

“Obviously, he likes those.”

“No, it’s not that. The guy from the Fish and Game said that because of the drought, what he normally eats isn’t around. He said they’ve had lots of calls about moose and other things looking for food.”

“Well, he’s not getting any more of ours, that’s for sure.”

It took me until lunchtime to clean up the mess. I moped around in the garden, cursing Lefty as I picked up shredded plants. Ellie had a sandwich waiting for me when I finished. I ate it and went in to the bedroom to take a nap.

As soon as I lay down I heard something banging. I didn’t know what he was doing, but I knew it was Lefty. I jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen. Ellie was at the window.

“I don’t see him back there,” she said.

We stood in silence and then we heard the banging again. It sounded like crashing cymbals or clanging garbage can lids. And it hit me. “The car!”

I raced out the back door and sure enough, Lefty was standing next to the car, hammering the hood with one of his hooves. I screamed at him, waving my arms. He stopped pummeling the car and stood there, staring at me. The muscles in his neck and shoulder bulged with his breath. I screamed again. In response, Lefty huffed at me, sounding almost like a dog’s bark, but deeper, raspier. And then he took a step toward me.

In that moment, something changed. Until then I was willing to give Lefty a little slack. He’d destroyed the garden. He’d mangled my car. But those were just things. As frustrating as it was, I allowed the fact that Lefty was a moose, a wild animal, and he was just staking out his territory. But when he took that step toward me, when he threatened me, I thought: this is my territory. No one threatens me in my own yard.

I backed away slowly, and went into the garage, where I keep a small gun cabinet. I’ve always meant to start a collection, but so far I only own a .22 caliber rifle. A small-game rifle for sure, but it would get Lefty’s attention. The rifle is semi-automatic and I have a high-capacity clip.

I got the gun and the clip and walked back into the yard. Lefty was pounding the car again. I'm calm in most situations, but I wasn't calm then. I engaged the clip and took aim. "This is your last chance, Lefty. Get out of here." He didn't even look at me.

My plan was to shoot Lefty in the rump. A little .22 shell would sink into that mound of muscle, not causing any real damage, but would sting like hell.

I was so mad I was nervous, and the gun wouldn't keep steady. When I pulled the trigger I must have jerked, because two rounds fired off by mistake. I lowered the gun. Lefty stopped scraping the car. Two fine holes pierced his belly, far from his rump. In seconds, twin streams of blood pulsed from the holes and ran down his side. He just stood there. His hind legs quivered.

I stared at the moose, don't know how long. I couldn't believe what I had done. The implications of having shot Lefty in the guts were just dawning on me. I looked around the yard, as if I'd find some answer there. Ellie's head was poking around the corner of the house. She looked stunned.

"What did you do that for?"

"I didn't mean to. I was just going to shoot him in the ass."

"Nice. He would have liked that a whole lot better."

"I said I didn't mean to. I don't believe this. What are we going to do now?"

"We? You're the one who shot Lefty."

She was right. I don't know what I was thinking. A moose isn't something you can just shoot. But I had shot him. And he was badly hurt.

"Do you still have the number for Fish and Game?"

"I wrote it on the calendar by the phone in the kitchen. But you can't call them."

"Why not?"

"Because they said whatever we do, absolutely do not harm the moose. They said you could go to jail."

"Jail? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Because I didn't think you were going to shoot the poor thing."

"You were standing right there. Why didn't you stop me?"

"I didn't know. I thought you were going to give it a warning shot or something."

That wouldn't have been a bad idea. But I wasn't about to say so. Instead, I said, "It's too late for that, so help me figure out what we're going to do."

Lefty interrupted us by backing away from the car and onto the grass. His legs shook, the muscles twitching. And then his hind legs folded under him and the back half of his body sagged to the ground, blood still spurting from the holes in his side. His front legs were rigid, holding up his chest and head. He started to wheeze. I felt sick.

"What's he doing? Why doesn't he run away?"

"You must have hit something bad in there," Ellie said. "He doesn't look good at all."

"I don't believe this. It's a .22 for hell's sake."

"Well, it did something, that's for sure."

As long as Lefty stood on his front legs, I felt that he would be okay. That he would stand up and walk into the woods. That the problem would just go away. But when he collapsed completely, it was clear he wasn't going anywhere.

Ellie walked over and stood by me. We watched him lying there on the grass, blood pumping from his belly, him watching us with one glazed black eye. He breathed with his mouth drooped open, as if he had just been running. There was a rattling to his breath. Ellie cried. I'm not sure how long we stood there. I remember being afraid, desperate for her not to name the truth I knew was coming to both of us. But she did.

"Dave, you have to put him out of his misery."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I mean look at him."

I sighed, resigning myself to the task. I aimed the rifle at Lefty's chest, gauging where his heart would be. His gravelly breath barely moved his body. Other than his breathing, it was so quiet there in the yard. His eye swiveled to watch me as I moved.

I justified what I was about to do. I would have taken it all back if I could. But he'd been shot and no amount of wishing on my part could erase that. Clearly, he was in pain. He was dying. I took another

deep breath and nestled my finger on the trigger. But I couldn't pull it. I willed myself to do it, but it was as if my finger was disconnected from the rest of my body, as if that one part alone were paralyzed.

"I can't do it," I said, lowering the gun.

"What do you mean? You have to."

"No. I can't."

"Dave, you have to. Look at him, he's suffering."

"I know, but I can't. You're going to have to."

"I'm not doing it." She put her hands up, like I was pointing the gun at her.

"Please, Ellie."

"No way. You started this. Have the decency to finish it."

"Ellie, please."

"Don't make me do this, Dave. I've never killed an animal in my life."

I knew she hadn't. I also knew what it would mean for her to do it. Before our marriage, when she heard I'd shot birds and squirrels as a kid, she was appalled. She didn't even like me having the little rifle, as if owning it alone were an act of aggression. But still, even knowing what it meant for her, even after I had already shot Lefty, there was no way I could bring myself to kill him.

"Honey, I just can't," I said.

"Please don't make me do this, Dave."

"Ellie."

"Fine. Give me the gun, coward."

I handed her the gun. She aimed it at Lefty. "Where do I shoot?"

I pointed to a spot behind the shoulder. "Right there."

"I'm sorry Lefty," she said, and she closed her eyes and pulled the trigger. The bullet sank into Lefty's side and immediately blood shot from the hole. Lefty moaned and raised up on his front legs.

"Oh no. What's he doing?" Ellie asked.

"It's okay. I think you got the heart. He'll be dead in a second."

But he didn't die. He just sat there, half standing, his front legs taut and quaking. Pink froth poured from his new wound but Lefty didn't die. My chest was tight.

"Shoot him again," I said. "To make sure."

Ellie fired another round. The bullet lodged somewhere in the great cavity of Lefty's chest and blood erupted all over his side. I was going to vomit. It wasn't the blood. I've seen blood. It was the awful ending of this gigantic animal. This huge and living thing. But he still didn't die. I couldn't look at him anymore and I turned to Ellie. "Shoot him again," I said.

"You shoot him again," Ellie said. Tears streamed down her face. "I'm not shooting him again."

"Ellie, you have to. Please."

She stepped around to face Lefty. She leveled the gun between his eyes and fired. His front legs buckled. His body collapsed on the grass. His whole frame quaked and then he was still.

Ellie dropped the gun on the lawn and sobbed. I walked over to her to put my arms around her but she flinched and said, "Don't touch me."

I just stood there for a minute and said, "Now what do we do?"

Ellie looked at me, her eyes red. Her arms clenched across her chest. She looked small. "You're going to have to get rid of it."

"How am I going to do that?"

"Take it to the river, genius." With that she walked into the house.

Taking it to the river was no easy task. I really could have used Ellie's help but I knew better than to press the matter. I ended up tying a rope around Lefty's antlers and the other end to my battered car and dragging him down the dirt road to the river. When I got him untied I tried pushing his body into the water, but he wouldn't budge. He was too heavy. I shoved against his still warm body and couldn't get the word *coward* out of my head. I tried for half an hour to get him in the water before coming back to the house to get my saw.

As terrible as cutting him up would be, I knew I could do it. I wasn't thinking about Lefty. I was

thinking about how I'd hurt Ellie. Things weren't perfect before, but they were good.

As I neared the house, clouds pillowed in from the west. It looked like we would finally get some rain.

The lawn was horrible. A pool of blood had collected on the grass. I was too tired to deal with it. My legs and stomach were also soaked with blood from wrestling Lefty on the riverbank. Though I would be getting a whole lot messier before it was finished, I hosed myself off as best I could and went inside to get the saw. Ellie was at the kitchen window, looking at the trees. It was starting to rain. I couldn't tell if she was still upset or what she was thinking. I just wanted to hold her. But I was soaking wet and wasn't sure she would let me. "Ellie, I didn't mean for this to happen."

She didn't answer, didn't move. My eyes wandered to the calendar by the telephone and, as if by instinct, focused on the inked digits of the number Ellie had written days before. After all that had happened with the moose and with my wife I didn't have it in me to be scared. If anything happened, I deserved every bit of it and more. I moved to the phone and dialed the number. When a man's voice answered, "Fish and Game," I said, "This is Dave Allen. My wife called you a few days ago about our having a moose problem."

"Yes, I think I remember hearing about that. We've been meaning to send someone out your way. Is it still giving you trouble?"

Ellie had turned around and was looking at me as I spoke. I couldn't read the emotion in her face. Was it fear, or warning? "Well, you better come on out, though I wish you could have made it sooner. You see, I've gone and killed it."

Jaren Watson lives in Tucson with his wife and their three children. More comfortable outside than in, he has enjoyed the landscapes of the areas in which he's lived: Idaho, Kentucky, and southern Arizona. He gives thanks to the BHC, his long-time writing group.

Fiction

by Jeffrey Stevenson

The first I heard about the ghost, I was standing in line at Safeway. It was early morning and I stopped to pick up a frozen meal that I could eat at lunch. The cashier—he looked as if he had been up all night—methodically scanned each item of the order in front of me. He wasn't paying attention to what he was doing. He stood there, mid scan with something in his hand—at first a loaf of bread, then a box of freeze dried noodles, then a bunch of bananas—and told his story.

"I'm telling you, it was about three in the morning, we had just finished lunch. At first I thought it was someone else on the crew, standing at the end of my aisle," he said. His back was to the cash register, his weight on his right leg as he leaned against the scanner. He was talking to the bag-boy who was filling the plastic bag stand at the end of the counter. "When I looked up, it was just standing there, as clear as day, pointing at me. Its hand was shaking." Even though he was speaking to the bagger, it was obvious he wanted everyone to hear.

"This sucks. The closing carry-out is supposed to fill these bags. It's bad enough getting up this early. But having to do two jobs? I'm going to quit." When the bagboy was done with the plastic bags, he started on the paper ones.

It sounded like a lie to me. The guy was probably hallucinating. Who wouldn't, that late at night? As I stood there watching the cashier—he had finished scanning the order and was holding $13.57 in one hand, the other hand was poised above the keyboard, index finger extended but not typing—I decided that next time I'd just go get something from McDonald's at lunch.

"As fast as that, man, it was gone. One second it's pointing at me like it's calling me out, the next, like I changed the channel, it just disappeared. I started stocking the shelves as fast as I could. I don't think I'm gonna stock that aisle anymore."

If a ghost made this guy work faster, I wished one would have appeared right then and there, hovering above the belt and my frozen lasagna. Then maybe I'd finally get out of there.

It was the time of the year in Pinetop when the tree colors were beginning to change. People from the valley (Tucson and Phoenix mostly) would spend an entire weekend just driving around and pointing out the trees that were the brightest orange, yellow, and red. The mornings hinted at frost and the nights turned our breath to mist.

I worked at the bank in the same shopping center as Safeway. If Pinetop had a downtown, it would have been here. Safeway was next to the Hallmark which was next to the dime store, which was next to the two-screen theatre, the Lakeside Cinema. At the end of the center was the town's only ice cream shop. The bank was a freestanding building in the parking lot, to the south was KFC and next to that, McDonald's.

That day, after hearing about the ghost while standing in line at Safeway, I heard about it again from a customer at my window. Hearing things more than once was pretty common for me. In a town as small as Pinetop, it's almost impossible to work a job that has a lot of public interaction—like a bank teller—without having to listen to repetition.

Mr. Jenkins came into the bank everyday. He'd bring his mail in and stand at the deposit table while he opened and sorted it. There was an eccentricity about him that was severe enough to keep people from asking about his life, but engendered a certain amount of compassion. I was his favorite teller because I was sure to face all of his bills the same direction when I counted them out to him. I also reserved the crispest bills for him so he didn't have to ask me to replace any that were crumpled or torn.

He was visibly shaken when he started telling me about what he had heard.

"I was having breakfast at Eddie's Country Store. A young man came in and started talking about a ghost in Safeway. He said it had attacked one of his co-workers last night." His withdrawal slip was immaculate, as usual. But the piece of paper where he'd written the breakdown of denominations he would prefer had at least three spots where he scribbled through a mistake. Any other day, he would have re-written his request until it was error free."When it vanished, it left a burn mark on the tile where it had been standing." He wasn't even watching as I counted the money to him."Apparently, the young man was so shaken that he had to spend the rest of the night in the breakroom. If I were him, I would have gone home and never returned," he said.

In the four years I had been waiting on Mr. Jenkins, this was the most he had spoken to me. It was also the first time his discussion had deviated from banking matters. "And the worst part, the burn mark won't go away. The floor technician worked and worked, but it won't clean off. It's really a shame. The floors in that store are always so shiny, although I don't like the new tile pattern since the remodel. It used to be the most symmetrical red and white checker pattern. It's too contemporary now. Too lopsided."

I wasn't sure if I should tell him what I knew. He sounded so sure of himself. Besides, I had learned quickly that customers don't like to be corrected about anything by a teller. Even if it is something as trivial as a rumor about a ghost. I also didn't want to lose my status as Mr. Jenkins' favorite. I wasn't sure exactly which aisle the alleged sighting was on, but I didn't remember seeing

any floor damage earlier. Still, it bothered me to see him as upset as he was.

"I'm sure it's nothing. We'll probably find out in a few days that it was just a prank," I said. I wanted to be reassuring without being contradictory.

He waved his hand across his face and leaned closer to me."If it was a prank, who's responsible for the floor?" With that, he patted the counter, turned around, and snaked his way through the partitions that zigzagged through the lobby.

The rest of the day was uneventful, but I couldn't stop thinking about the ghost. Something inside me wanted it to be true. Even though I was sure the rumor was something that the workers made up—possibly to cover up a practical joke that got out of hand involving some lighter fluid and matches from aisle 12—I hoped the ghost would return. I didn't even want to see it, necessarily, I just wanted to know if something like that existed. The thought of it made me feel lighter in a way. Like something solid inside me had broken up. At lunch, in the small kitchen in the back of the bank, I heated my lasagna and thought about what the ghost would look like. Would it shimmer and move in glitches, would shadows form around it as it moved? When I took the top off my box of lasagna, I expected to see the ghost in the puff of steam that came out.

A few days later, on a day that was covered in clouds and an unusually still air, Officer Reidhead came in to make a deposit. The check was from Safeway and handwritten by the store manager. Officer Reidhead was the type of customer who liked to tell me odd things about the community that he learned through his patrols. He's the reason I was one of the first people to know about Mr. Westing, the high school economics teacher, when he had been arrested for locking his wife in a closet for an entire weekend. Officer Reidhead was also the reason I knew that the mayor's son had been picked up for drunk driving seven times, but had never been charged for any of them. This time he had information about the ghost.

Apparently, the manager of Safeway, upon hearing about the incident and seeing the smudge at the end of aisle six—that part had been true, although it came off the next night when the floor guy used wax stripper—called the police. He was convinced the ghost was a homeless person hiding in the back warehouse of the store. The police chief had refused to waste the time of his on-duty force to scour the store, so Officer Reidhead volunteered to go in on his day off. He spent the entire day on Saturday climbing over pallets of laundry soap and toilet paper. The only thing of substance he found was a stash of coffee beans that the manager thought had been stolen, and four rather large rat nests.

I had been thinking a lot about the ghost. When I slept, I would dream of a tall entity sitting on a

tree stump in the middle of a field. I wouldn't walk up to him. Instead I would rush toward him—or maybe he would draw to me, shifting the field and surrounding trees around me—as if my eyes were camera lenses zooming in on him. In these dreams, my insides felt as if they were no longer in my body. I would fear that, without something to rest on, my skin would fold over and I'd be left at the feet of this man, a misshapen pile of flesh. I'd concentrate as hard as I could to make my skin as rigid as possible so I could figure out who this man was. I couldn't see his face. His body language didn't suggest that he was aware of my presence, but every time I reached out to see if he was real, his skin would float away as if he was made of dandelion seeds. When I would wake up, I would lie in bed as still as possible, fearing that my skin had hardened over night and if I moved, it would splinter apart and whatever was inside would drizzle out. Even though I knew these were just dreams, I began feeling as if I was emptying out a little bit each night. Every morning I felt as if I had lost some of my mass.

During the day I would look into the darkest corners of my apartment hoping to catch a glimpse of the ghost watching me. I wondered why it had appeared in Safeway and not somewhere else, like the old brick jailhouse near Woodland Lake, or sitting in a chair in one of the antique stores, or even at the bar of the Lion's Den—where the most lawless of Pinetop's population conspired. It shouldn't, I thought, only be Safeway's ghost. If it existed, we should all get to share.

"I think it's real," Officer Reidhead told me. He leaned close to the counter to say it. The leather of his gunbelt creaked as it shifted on his hips."None of those boys are smart enough to come up with a story like that. If one of them made that mark on the floor, the rest of them would have ratted him out before the manager even saw it. No, it exists. I felt like I was being watched the whole time I was in there. Like I was on its turf. I'm not a psychic. I don't have knowledge of, you know, the other side, but I felt its presence."

There weren't any customers in the bank and I could tell the rest of the tellers were eavesdropping. I thought I should try to offer him overdraft protection just so I wouldn't appear I was gossiping. The last thing I wanted was to get in trouble for talking about a ghost."What do you mean?" If they said something to the supervisor, I'd tell him that I was trying to relate to the customer so I could sell him something even better, like a loan so he could spirit-proof his house."Was it like the movies where the hair on the back of your neck stood up?"

"No, that's a bunch of crap. It was more like I felt bad for looking for it. Like if I really understood why it was there, I'd wait for it to come to me. I felt like I was letting it down. I'm not sure if it could hear me, but when I left, before I started my car. I told it I was sorry."

When I was growing up in Pinetop, I had never thought about what else was out there. I never

understood the rest of the kids my age when they would complain about how there was nothing to do in such a small town. I never cared much to meet the summer kids when they came with their families to stay in their cabins, fish on the Reservation, or golf the exclusive courses. I didn't dream of leaving Pinetop someday to seek some fortune or make my name famous. When I was really young, I would spend time in the woods behind the house making forts out of fallen tree branches, damming the creek with rocks, or shooting things with my pellet gun.

I once shot a snake I came across. By that time, I had moved from the pellet gun to a .22 caliber rifle. I don't think the snake was poisonous but it seemed an appropriate target at the time. When it was dead, I uncoiled it and noticed three perfect lumps about halfway down its body. I felt no remorse seeing the lifeless body. I didn't feel bad as I took out my knife and began to cut the skin open. When I got to the lumps, I cut the skin as carefully as I could so as not to touch them with my blade. The snake neatly filleted, I took the three lumps—by then I'd realized they were bird eggs—and inspected the blue-flecked shells to see if they could be salvaged. They were all cracked, oozing the clear mucus that should have been their sustenance. They didn't belong there.

I skimmed the ground and found a few twigs and pine needles. As best as I could—with snake blood and egg fluid on my hands—I made a small nest. After placing the eggs (by then they were barely more than hollow shells) in the nest, I climbed a few feet up a tree and balanced the nest on one of the branches. I went back to the snake carcass. Ants had already started to crawl over it, nibbling bits of flesh. I took the carcass by the head and carried it to the base of the tree where I had placed the nest. I lay it down, put three stones inside the body as close to where the eggs had been as I could remember, folded the skin back over them, and re-coiled the body. After that day, I rarely went into those woods again. Eventually, they were developed into an extension of the neighborhood. Trees fell and houses grew until I lost track of where the tree had stood. I always hoped it had been one of the lucky ones to survive the construction.

The next Friday, I decided to go to the high school football game. It was late in the season and the townspeople were already talking about the playoffs. If Blue Ridge could win the next two games, they'd be conference champions—for the third season in a row—and would have home field advantage for the first round of the playoffs. When I had been a senior—nine years ago, which felt like a lifetime—we had gone undefeated. The state championship banner hung in the gym next to the soccer, track, and basketball banners.

Football games were a town affair in Pinetop. The games were not only places where we went to cheer for the team. They were also places where people made business deals and where would-be politicians campaigned.

I turned into the parking lot half an hour before kickoff. The parking lot was already packed. I found a spot toward the back, close to the main street, and began walking to the field. The gym rose ahead of me—flashbacks of the emotions I experienced before a game, the adrenaline, hope of making the game-winning play, fear of making the game-losing mistake, rushed back. To the right of the gym, the football field glowed, a mixture of the stadium lights and frozen air. I passed through the gates: cheerleaders lined both sides of the walkway trying to sell programs, candy, purple and gold blankets with a Yellow Jacket stenciled in the middle. The stands were just as crowded as the parking lot. The only open seats were toward the top, behind the band where the wind bit the hardest. I probably could have squeezed in with some of the people I usually sat with, but I knew the night would be spent soaked in nostalgia. They would talk about how good the team had been when they were playing. How Coach Monroe loved to make them run sprints after a big win, just so they wouldn't get prideful, how the teachers had helped them through the toughest classes so they could retain their eligibility. It's not that I didn't like to talk about these things—I even had some of the best stories to back up the claims—it just seemed that there were more pressing things.

The game started with the usual fanfare and Blue Ridge scored on the first drive with a big run from the running back. After the cheering subsided and the crowd settled into the game, I began hearing things, seeing an anxiousness that wasn't normal. People were huddled in small groups, one person talking while the rest listened. I heard snippets from the groups around me, "it's because of all of the new construction," or, "it's a sign that we're not living right," and, "you can't live this close to the reservation without eventually experiencing some sort of evil."

At halftime, I left the stands and made my way to the gym. I wasn't sure if it would be open, but I had a theory about the ghost. It had been seen by a single person, at night and in an open space. I figured the gym was the closest to Safeway in the middle of the night as I could get. Maybe if I concentrated hard enough, or if my footfalls were rhythmic enough, I could conjure it up.

One of the side doors to the weight room was unlocked and I was able to get to the gym from there. I went into the old gym, the one where I used to play when it was the only one in town. As the basketball team became more successful, they built a bigger, more modern court with three times the seating as the old gym. It was nice, but I felt more at home in the older, mustier one. The court hadn't changed since the last time I played on it. The hollow spots in the floor were still where I had memorized them. Part of our home court advantage had been corralling the opposing team's point guard to one of those spots where we knew the ball would take an odd bounce.

I wondered if we were like that court. If we wore down over time until we were empty at points, until we were just shells after everything else had drained out. What if the ghost was just a really old person who had worn completely away?

I heard the crowd as the football team retook the field. I went to center court and laid down on my back, spread-eagle. It was in this gym, a few years earlier, that I learned about my father's cancer. He had called me on my cell phone from Phoenix. The headaches and dizziness that had perplexed the Pinetop doctors took the doctors in the valley mere minutes to diagnose as a tumor. Maybe I should talk to someone from out of town about the ghost, maybe they'd be able to explain it without

hesitation.

I must have dozed off at some point. A slamming door startled me from whatever state I was in. I could hear footsteps crossing the floor toward me. At first, I thought maybe it had worked. Maybe this was it. I was going to meet it. What would I ask it? What if it was like a genie and I only got three questions? I wasn't scared, I figured that would come when I saw it. At least I hoped I would be scared.

The footsteps stopped and the gym lights came on with a loud snap. Even though the lights came on slowly, ramping up to full brightness, I was momentarily blinded by the sudden light. When my eyes had adjusted, I saw my old basketball coach crossing the far end of the court. He hadn't seen me until I sat up.

"John? What are you doing here?" He was sort of crouching and squinting to get a better look at me.

"I don't know, just needed a quiet place, I guess." I stood and began walking toward him. We had kept in touch since I graduated. He would open the gym for me and some friends every so often. From time to time, he would even play a few games with us."What about you? Shouldn't you be in bed by now?"

My first varsity season had been his first at Blue Ridge. We were dismal that year. I'm not sure if we won any conference games. The following summer, he took the team all across the state to play any team we could. He hadn't had a losing season since then.

"Things just don't feel right anymore. Did you hear it was spotted on Porter Mountain Road? It was standing in the middle of the road on one of the corners. Alan Velázquez said he drove right through it."

"Come on coach. You know Alan was probably coming back from a party up there. I guarantee he was as high as usual." I'd heard the story a few days ago, but had discounted it based on Alan's reputation and the fact that no one else in the car had substantiated it.

"I just don't like the thought of it out there. I thought I'd come here and shoot some free-throws, get things back in line." He was a believer in the process and structure of the free-throw. No matter how crazy a game got, he would say, a free-throw could always bring it back to the foundations. Fundamentals and control. For him, it was the eye of the storm, the moment of clarity after the first punch is thrown in a fight.

We stayed there until one in the morning shooting free-throws.

Ghost fever was taking over. It had been a month and a half since the initial sighting. Since then, people had claimed to see it on Porter Mountain Road (no matter how hard I tried to discount this one, most everybody accepted it as valid), floating over Fools Hollow Lake, knocking books off the shelves at the library, stealing slices of pizza from Joey's Pizza, rearranging furniture in room 14 of the Bear's Paw Motel, and turning the lights on and off during Mr. Thomas' English class.

Most people thought the ghost was to be feared. Because of this, they began referring to it as Skippy. They hoped that giving it a silly name would somehow make it more tame, that by naming it, they knew it and could therefore categorize it. They even took to spray painting a stick figure on the road where the city limit sign stood. The image had an oversized head and a toothy smile. Its arms were in the air and the legs were spread, frozen in a jumping-jack. Underneath it, block letters read SKIPPY!, a heart where the dot of the exclamation mark should have been completed the caricature. The high school made Skippy the honorary mascot for the state championship football game. After winning the game, the student counsel proclaimed the following Monday, Skippy Day. They sold T-shirts with the stick figure on the front and the final score on the back. Under the score, tiny letters read, *Thanks, Skippy*. They sold out of the shirts before lunch.

I was still waking up feeling lighter than when I went to bed. I wouldn't feel hungry, but I began fixing myself giant breakfasts. I couldn't eat eggs—every time I cracked one open, I felt as if I were on borrowed time—so I cooked bacon, sausage, potatoes, and pancakes from instant batter mixes. This lightness spread to my possessions. When driving to work, my car felt as if it was floating above the road. Rounding corners, I expected to continue straight and crash into a stand of pines. Eventually, I found some large stones in a field and put them in the trunk to weigh it down.

I bought a map of Pinetop and posted it on my living room wall. This ghost was here to help and I needed to find it. I was sure it would be able to fix whatever was causing my leak. Tiny push pins stuck in the spots where the ghost had been spotted. As far as I could tell, there was no pattern that could predict where it was going to appear next. The sightings were becoming more frequent and more detailed. The last one, in Mr. Thomas' class, lasted a minute and a half. Most of the students agreed on what took place. It only materialized during the brief moments when the lights went out, a strong pine smell filled the room after the encounter, and it seemed angry.

When Mrs. O'Neil, the school's administrative secretary, came into the bank, I asked her about the incident. She just rolled her eyes and said, "Kids." Apparently Mr. Thomas had neither confirmed nor denied the occurrence.

"If you want to know what I think," she said, "this whole town is going insane. Spirits only exist in Heaven or Hell. If these people went to church every once in a while, they'd know that."

In fact, local churches were capitalizing on the ghost atmosphere by putting catchy phrases on their marquees like, “Don’t Get Caught Here Like Skippy. A Sure-Fire Way To Avoid Limbo For Your Soul. Sunday, 9 and 10:30 a.m.”

People began to accept the ghost as if it were simply another tourist attraction. They began attributing inconsequential things to it—like not being able to find their keys, or a pen leaking on a shirt, or a car battery going dead. I continued my search. I checked books out from the library. Books that referenced ghosts as spirits that are bound to the earth because of some unfinished business, or their loved ones needed protection. Some books took the stance that ghosts were simply evil spirits that stayed around just so they could pick on people. Most of these theories felt off to me. This ghost seemed to me to be a reflection of ourselves, or maybe it was here to show us what we really looked like—a mirror that showed us what was on the inside. Something that illustrated our voids so we could work on filling them. I didn’t think this ghost was here for its own purposes; it was here for us and it was our job to figure out how it could help us.

On one of my days off, I drove over to White River—a town about 40 minutes away that served as the heart of the Apache Reservation. I had gotten in the habit of buying my shoes from an Apache man named Albert Kinney. Albert ran a store that sold a little bit of everything. It had begun as a gas station, but he had expanded it to sell clothing, shoes, hunting equipment and a small selection of books. There was also a restaurant off to one side. I found out about Albert and his store when I was in high school. I could buy the newest and nicest pair of football and basketball shoes at a fraction of what other stores charged, plus I didn’t have to pay sales tax since he was on the reservation. I’d been buying shoes from him ever since. He loved to talk to me about his latest shipment of supplies. He would also tell me about how he planned on expanding his store even further.

It had been a couple of weeks since the last real sighting and I was beginning to wonder if the town had run the ghost off by not giving it the right kind of attention. When I pulled into Albert’s store—the sign above the door was hand painted and said, *Everything’s Inside*—I thought about how inconsequential the store looked. The building didn’t look like it could house as much as it did. If I didn’t know what was inside, I would have driven by without ever considering what it had to offer.

Inside, Albert’s wife stood behind a counter that was lined with candy, maps, sunscreen, mittens, and first-aid kits. She told me that Albert was downstairs and to go on down.

The stairs were old and felt as if they could give way at any time. Walking down them, I was reminded of the old gym floor at Blue Ridge. I wanted to stomp through one of the steps to see if anything would come billowing up. I wasn’t sure if the step would break, or if my leg would crack apart.

Albert stood on a stool, hanging some shirts over a shoe display on the back wall. As basements go, this one was huge. It was deeper than most, which made it feel like it was above ground, and the walls looked like they were farther apart than the upstairs. Walking down there felt like walking into a different dimension.

"What new stuff do you have for me?" I startled him and he wobbled on the top step of the stool before regaining his balance.

"Only the finest for my customers." He finished hanging the shirts and climbed off the stool.

"When are you going to hire someone to do that for you?" I asked. Albert had been working here everyday since he had bought the place, 15 years earlier.

"Right, and watch all my profit fly out the window? People don't come here for what I sell, they come here because of me." He was probably right. I didn't drive that far anymore just because of the savings. I had come to look forward to Albert's energy, his passion to move beyond who he had been the day before."What can I interest you in?" His arms were spread as wide as they could go. He reminded me of a carnival announcer.

"Got anything that'll help me catch a ghost?"

"I'd probably sell it if they made one. So you're caught up in the hype, too? I'm surprised."

"Not like the rest of them," I said. I didn't want to make the ghost into something I could know, I wanted to change myself into the type of person that would comprehend it.

"I don't know why you're all so interested in this thing. There are all kinds of spirits around here. All this uproar over one. Doesn't make sense."

"Do you just ignore them? Do you even pay attention anymore?" We were walking slowly down the long wall that held most the of the NBA jackets. Every so often, I'd stop and run my finger along the fabric of one of them, or test the smoothness of a zipper.

"Never. But we learn to live with them. One of the first stories we tell our kids is about the Dark Man."

"Dark Man? Isn't that a movie?" I asked.

"Dark Man is one of the most powerful entities there is. He always appears just on the corner of your vision. But when you try to look at him straight on, he disappears. If you ever do look right at him, it's said that you'll die."

"Stop screwing with me. You really believe that?"

"It's a kid's game. But the older people do believe it. My mom, before she died? She told me she

thought he was waiting for her to look at him. She wasn't scared. And she wasn't senile either. I think she really saw him." I wondered why it was so easy for the children and elderly to accept something like that, but the rest of us just threw it aside."I'll tell you what, though, just because you may die if you look at him, he's not evil. Us being alive, or us being dead doesn't mean anything to them. It's like us painting a wall navy blue, or black. They see it with the same detachment as we see a snake shedding its skin."

I nodded my head in agreement, even though I wasn't quite sure what he was talking about. How could something that caused death not be evil? Albert walked from one rack of jackets to another, adjusting something every so often.

"I think I've outgrown this place. It may be time to think about moving into something with a little more room. There's so much in here, I feel like we're sinking a little deeper with every shipment. Either that, or these walls are just going to split open one day."

I couldn't wait any longer. I'd been patient. The ghost had chosen to appear to other people. People who had been less reverent, more flippant about its existence. As I waited, bits of me had seeped out until I began tiptoeing around my apartment in fear of grazing against a desk leg or table corner and losing the little bit I had left inside me. I knew what was happening, and Albert had been wrong. They all had. I had emptied that snake years earlier and now I was being drained too. I knew where I needed to go. The ghost would be there. It had been waiting there the entire time.

The neighborhood that had once been the woods behind my house was quiet and neatly kept. Most of the houses were owned by families that lived out of town and only came up a couple times each year. The few houses that had year-round occupants were bunched together toward the end of the street. When I drove into the neighborhood, the houses seemed to melt away until I saw the woods as they had once been. I picked my way down the street until I came to the area where I guessed the tree had stood. I parked my car and began walking slowly past the empty houses, inspecting the trees as I went. After passing a few houses, I saw the tree. It had grown over the years, but its shape remained the same. The same gnarled branches that allowed me to climb it all those years ago still hung low to the ground as if there were an invisible weight pressing them down.

I expected the sky to cloud over and blot out the sun, but it didn't. I was sure I would have been able to see the ghost at night, sitting on one of the branches, beckoning me closer. As I approached the tree, I felt the strange weight of the snake in my hand. The ground around the tree wasn't landscaped. It looked the same as it had the last time I was there. I circled the tree, trying to remember from which direction I had approached. Once, twice, on the third time I stopped where two giant roots split the trunk before they dug into the ground. There, in the hollow between the

them, lay three round stones in an outline of where the snake had been coiled.

I picked up the stones and began to climb the tree. The ghost had emptied my body so I could be filled with something that would last long after the skin crumbled away. Once I got to the branch where I had envisioned the ghost, I shimmied about halfway out. I sat there, my legs dangling from the limb, the stones cradled in the palm of my hand.

Jeffrey Stevenson lives in Tucson, Arizona, where he received his creative writing MFA from the University of Arizona in 2006. In March, he and his wife welcomed their first son. "Stones" is part of a linked collection of short stories set in Pinetop, Arizona (where Jeffrey grew up). He is currently finishing work on his first novel.

Article

To Wit, to Woo
The Silence of Owls

By Kathryn Miles

> I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognised. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day the sun has shone on the surface of some savage swamp ... but now a dismal and fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of Nature there.
> — Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

A Greek coin showing Athena's owl. Image courtesy the Smithsonian Institution.

The barred owl arrived in the full light of morning, silently landing on an ash branch at the edge of my yard. There she sat for the better part of a day, draping belly feathers over her otherwise bare feet and closing her eyes against the shrill wind. I might have overlooked her entirely, had I not risen from my desk to answer the phone or make another cup of tea or whatever else it was that caused me to stir at precisely that time. But, because I did, I caught the settling movements of this raptor. And I was captivated.

Owls seem uniquely suited to prompt this response in us. As I sat on my kitchen table, watching this one fill the canopy of the ash tree, my mind flitted from a sense of immediate wonder to the complex mythic associations an owl brings each time it lands in the company of humans. I thought about Thoreau's barbed celebration of owls as harbingers of a nature we are inclined to miss. I recalled that Athena—the Greek goddess of wisdom and justice—bore the symbol of an owl, as did Lilith—the dreaded Sumerian goddess of death. And that, more recently, women from Brittany and Saxony believed that owls bring fertility and healthy childbirth, while their counterparts in Morocco and Malaysia alleged that owls kill newborns and steal the souls of children. Even today, many Cameroonians call owls "the bird that brings fear," while their neighbors in Indonesia and Japan respectfully disagree,

insisting that an owl call remains the best predictor of when it is safe to venture outside.

It must be tough business maintaining so many mythic associations in so many places. Throughout that first morning the barred owl sat in my tree, I thought a lot about these contradictions and more, wondering how such a quiet animal manages to shoulder them against an unforgiving wind.

Only later in the day did another thought surface.

For all the disparity in the collective mythology of owls; these stories nevertheless share one very important quality: they are set at night. And with good reason. Over 125 owl species exist worldwide, and the vast majority of them are nocturnal. Of the twenty types of owls present in North America, only five are considered diurnal, or daytime, hunters. The barred owl is not one of these five species. Instead, this bird has evolved in such a way that it functions best under the cover of almost absolute darkness. There, its keen eyesight and nuanced auditory system offers the barred owl great advantages over daytime dwellers, who tend to stumble around in a place made foreign by lack of illumination. Not so the barred owl. It knows every inch of this unseeing landscape—and it seems at least to intuit that darkness deprives other animals this knowledge. This attribute made me all the more intent on monitoring my unexpected morning visitor. And so I watched for hours that first day, worrying about what her presence might mean.

Admittedly, barred owls are not uncommon in the wooded foothills of Maine, the place I currently call home. To the human eye, this is a liminal landscape: a daytrip away from both the rocky coast celebrated by Rachel Carson and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Mountains, where John Burroughs and countless other nature writers sought inspiration. Unlike those more iconic places, my landscape is one of intersection and contrasts—where hard-scrabble farming and a waning timber industry meet emerging enterprises like biotechnical labs and guided hunting tours. Life here tends to be scruffy, and it bears little resemblance to the New England featured in glossy brochures and guidebooks. Nevertheless, it is a habitat members of the *Strigiforme* family seem to love, what with its savage swamps, mixed-coniferous woods, and vole-thick meadows. In fact, this place is what scientists at the Audubon Society like to call a “hot spot” for owls, and species like the barred have flourished here since long before any human arrived.

When my husband and I moved to Maine eight years ago, we were captivated by the overwhelming presence of this place’s owls. Lying in bed at night, we’d hear the cry, rendered by Shakespeare as “tu-whit, tu-woo,” rise up and out of the dark woods. As we listened, I had no difficulty understanding why generations of people across the globe have associated such calls with the underworld: it seemed such a ghastly voice to my untrained ears. Since then, I’ve grown to love that eerie crescendo piercing the still blanket of night. And I happily side with Thoreau in thinking that this cry somehow heralds a just reminder: that there is a nature we do not recognize or even acknowledge. Perhaps this dark unknowability has been why the mythic role of the owl continues to woo us with the implicit wit in its call. Perhaps it is why the literal owl has remained a welcomed and comfortable mystery for us, occupying as it does those dark and unknown places we can imagine but never really see. On many a call-filled night, I certainly have thought so.

And that, I think, is why I found my quiet daytime visitor so troubling. Because, in truth, she should have been unnoticeably absent—a disembodied voice calling out of the wilderness of night. Or at least a hidden form napping in the cavern of a dead tree or a church steeple somewhere, protected from the elements and waiting out the light until it was time for her shift to begin. Nevertheless, she stayed on that ash branch for hours, still as a secret and unprovoked by the nuthatches sharing her tree or the curious human creeping across the yard for a better look. And that was where she remained, day after day at the edge of my yard. Her continued presence signaling, with its lit silence, that something in the world is amiss.

But what is that something?

Perhaps the most unsettling truth of all is that no one knows for certain. While we may love that which is unknowable about owls in story, most ornithologists say that mystery can be frustrating as hell when it comes to science. What little they do know is that the diurnal appearance of an owl usually indicates the bird is food-stressed. They also say a lot of these hungry birds have been making appearances throughout the northern United States lately. For the past year, avian listservs and blogs have been humming with reports of daylight sightings of owls like the barred, as well as the surprise appearances of great gray, snowy, and boreal owls—three species normally found far north of the continental U.S.

Barred owl, *Strix varia*.

Biologists are taking notice. They say rehabilitation centers are filled beyond capacity with sick and injured owls. Reports of dead owls found on roadsides are rising as well. Accidents between raptors and vehicles aren't all that unusual in and of themselves. But the growing frequency of these incidents is. So, too, is the rising number of owls breaking the boundaries of what we consider normal habitat and behavior: like foraging at a Dunkin Donuts dumpster in Burlington, Vermont; nesting on the fields of Boston's Logan Airport; or dropping down from Canada to hang out in places like downtown Missoula and Seattle. A couple of years ago, an unprecedented 5,000 great gray owls—North America's largest and most mysterious *Strigidae*—moved from Central Canada to Northern Minnesota. This unexpected arrival brought at least as many birders, who traveled from as far as Eastern Europe to observe these raptors. Some were content to take photos of the great grays. Others, however, came to ask what the presence of these normally boreal birds might mean.

Similar questions are being asked where I live, too. Earlier this season, a great gray appeared on the edge of our town and claimed a nondescript powerline as his perch. There he, like my barred, sat day after day, patiently enduring the gaze of birders and curiosity seekers who drove down the

otherwise lonely gravel road to catch a look. Like me, they were spellbound: enraptured by mythology and life-lists and the cognitive dissonance created when anything—creature or otherwise—is utterly out of its place. It's a difficult and complex thing to stand, gazing upwards, and scrutinize an animal who, distressed, was forced to cross so many natural borders. And, yet, in some real ways it seemed as if all we could do—or rather, what we *needed* to do—was bear witness.

This, of course, is a human conceit—and one that risks anthropomorphism in some serious ways. Wild animals don't want witness. Our local bird expert says he thinks the owl came here because it wanted to die alone. That assumption probably butts up against anthropomorphism, too. But then again, it probably also gets closer to the owl's instinctive response.

And, in the end, it's what the owl got. A week after the great gray arrived, he was found dead on the ground near his perch. As far as we know, no one was there when he died, since it was at least a day or two before his body was found. Once it was, state wildlife experts conducted a post-mortem study, hoping to determine what brought this visitor across several discrete ecosystems and eventually caused its death. Their findings were sobering.

As best as the biologists can tell, the owl died precisely because it crossed ecological borders. More specifically, it died of an infection known as aspergillosis, which is caused by a fungus commonly found on dead leaves and dried grains, as well as compost piles and bird feces. In humans, the condition can cause an acute respiratory condition for people with asthma or compromised immune systems, though most of us fend off the fungus with no noticeable effects. Most resident predatory birds do, too. In both cases, that's because we've adapted to this landscape and the microbes that share it. Those owls coming down from northern territories, however, are far more susceptible to the disease since their lungs haven't acclimated to the presence of the fungus.

Normally that's not a problem, since owls prefer to stay put: a predilection that makes the current movement of these raptors all the more beguiling—and dangerous. Most frustrating of all, no one knows for certain why these owls are now, uncharacteristically, leaving their own landscape for potentially compromising ones.

For if anything, the presence of these raptors seems to signal the very real boundaries of modern scientific knowledge. And none of the standard ways of talking about avian behavior or movement is sufficient for this current predicament. Take migration—that bridge linking summer and winter habitats for most birds. There is a regularity—in terms of specific habitat, path taken, and moment of travel—that ties this movement from year to year. Not so with the barred and great gray owls. Instead, their shifting relocations seem more akin to avian irruptions, which unexpectedly and irregularly cause a large population to move *en masse* from one landscape to another.

There are many reasons why these mass movements occur, but in the case of owl relocations, global climate change and human intervention are probably to blame. Most northern owls prefer to maintain territories deep in the boreal forest. This massive swath of canopied land covers over 1.3 billion acres in central Canada, creating what was once an untouched haven of mature needleleaf trees. A rapid increase in the number of forest fires over the past decade, coupled with increased logging pressures, has changed all of that. It also caused the collapse of food sources for northern owls, thus pushing them into my region. This same irruption theory may explain why other northern owls are appearing in densely-populated downtown cities like Minneapolis and Chicago, and why a barred owl now spends her days in my tree: they are competing with too many other owls during nighttime hunting. The added population pressure has exceeded the carrying capacity of the landscape, and the owls are hungry.

This hypothesis makes a good amount of sense, but so far science hasn't been able to find much conclusive about the owl irruption phenomenon—except that it is increasing. Meanwhile, much of what scholars thought they knew about the range of owls is changing as well. With or without the increased forest fires, climate change is beginning to redistribute territorial ranges for a variety of species, and that is making it increasingly difficult to classify basic population shifts in a scientifically meaningful way. Much of this difficulty comes down to shifting notions of borders and the spaces they separate.

Take my backyard visitor. If you draw the number seven across North America, beginning with a horizontal bar across Southern Canada, and then a thick diagonal slash cascading from Nova Scotia down to the edge of Louisiana, you'll have a pretty good sense of the barred owl's range. That wide, zigzagged territory makes discussing latitudinal shifts of the species difficult. In its strictest sense, the term "irruption" applies to the appearance of a species in a biome where it is not normally found. But barreds have been calling my landscape home for centuries. We don't have a word for what it means when there are suddenly a lot more of them in this area. Or what to call it when they begin to push further westward, taking over territories normally held by their close cousin, the spotted owl.

In fact, we don't have words for many of the things happening to North American owls right now. Even when you commit to studying them, owls are maddeningly allusive, scientifically speaking. Masters of camouflage, these birds of prey are usually difficult to locate during the day, when their cryptic coloration mimics the texture of tree bark and limbs. At night, they are adept at nearly soundless flight, thanks to a unique layering of feathers on their wings. Both factors make tracking and observing owls downright difficult—even for trained experts. To make matters worse, wide variances in natural populations from year to year complicate any attempt to parse out trends in total owl numbers once you find them. If you then add in the fact that most formal ornithological research is restricted to a single bioregion (thus precluding a thorough understanding of an irruption from one region to another), you have a recipe for spotty knowledge at best.

Herein lies the greatest irony of the 21st century owl: although much loved by amateur birders and pop culture aficionados alike, these birds have been tremendously difficult to study. As a result, we know a lot more about their place in comparative mythology than we do in place-based ecology.

This is a particularly bitter pill for me to swallow. Like a religious novice, I find great solace in the sanctity of science: its elegant simplicity, austere language, and perhaps most importantly, its implicit belief in the knowability of the natural world. Linnaean taxonomy provides the rubric through which I have come to know the trees and animals in my forest. The principles of ecological niche theory explain the degree to which I might live within—or take from—that locale. I'd like to believe that these scientific concepts and not only help me understand my place within this little biome, but also give me the tools I need to make it a sustainable one. So how can it be that biology cannot explain the place of owls in this same landscape?

The answers are as varied as the symbolic representations of owls across the globe. When I contact Susan Gallo, a wildlife biologist for the Audubon Society, she speculates with me about possible causes. One reason for our lack of uniform answers, she says, might stem from our all-too human suppositions about landscape. Gallo says that she and other researchers have always known that they lacked crucial information about the status of owl populations, but for a long time, committing to a formal investigation seemed too daunting. It was, she admits, a kind of statistical inertia across the country.

According to Gallo, ornithologists within any given region knew that they needed to be studying owls, but they just couldn't build momentum in the scientific community for a collective survey. She adds that, in the past, this lack of initiative didn't really seem like a problem. For most state wildlife departments, the decision not to track owls was based on a long-held assumption: most endemic owl species were both common and secure. Now, though, the increased sightings and mortality rates are forcing these same scientists to wonder if their assessments remain valid.

Luckily, says Gallo, owls do offer one advantage: they are among the most vocal of all birds. The usual accoutrements of bird communication like showy plumages or elaborate mating dances don't do much good in the dark, so owls have adapted verbal ways to telegraph these messages. They use that haunting "tu-whit, tu-woo" to vocalize territorial concerns, invitations to mate, or just as a constant audio transponder announcing their presence to anyone who might be interested. Recording these solitary voices in the night may be the first step towards solving the emerging owl population crisis. And so, across North America, groups like Bird Studies Canada and U.S. Audubon chapters are launching new owl monitoring programs intended to glean a better understanding of how many owls exist where.

I tell Gallo that I find a kind of salve in knowing that this research is happening. I've been watching the barred owl in my ash tree for a week now. Each morning, she arrives without a sound and sits, well past when I've had my lunch and while she presumably looks for her own. I want to know more about her and other owls. I want to hear them once again during their nocturnal hours and understand what little information conservation groups are gathering. I beg permission to join a group of monitoring volunteers. Happily, Gallo agrees.

Barred owl on winter birch.

And so later in the week I join resident ornithologist Dave Potter and nine volunteers rendezvousing in a frosty parking lot just after midnight. The volunteers look half-sleepy, half-wary in the dark of night. Most stay in their cars, staring at an invisible point somewhere on the horizon. Others lean against the van we'll be taking, looking like they appreciate the security of a boxy, lit vehicle. Dave laughs at our timidity and reminds us that we're on owl time now. That means we'll probably be out until 4:00 or 5:00 a.m., depending upon the whims of the nocturnal birds. It is surprisingly cold (about 23° F by Dave's count) and disappointingly windy. I am wishing I had one more layer on top of the five or so I am already wearing. Dave, who is sporting four brightly-colored flannel shirts and a brand-new stocking cap, seems undeterred by these conditions.

Tonight, Dave's accomplices range in age from their late teens to early forties, though it's hard to tell for certain with all their cold-weather gear. A few admit they are Dave's biology students and hoping to garner extra credit—or at least their professor's favor. All say they are avid birders and repeat participants in the study. Once inside the van, they laze around with comfortable experience and a vernacular to match. These birders love rhyme: they refer to the count as an "owl prowl," to themselves as "bird nerds." Eight of the ten volunteers are women, which Dave says is a typical demographic for his research expeditions. When asked, he says he would prefer not to speculate why. The women look relieved by this refusal.

By way of orientation, we lean towards the driver's seat of the van while Dave plays the standard CD issued by Audubon. The disk begins with several minutes of silence (time to assess ambient noise). This deadtime—which we will learn to rue while standing in the pre-dawn chill several hours later—is then followed by a series of three owl calls: long-eared, barred, and finally the great horned.

As we listen to the 13-minute recording, the other volunteers identify all of the owl calls before Potter announces them. Miraculously, they can also make out the sounds of Canada geese, nighthawks, and other seemingly imperceptible calls comprising the background noise on this recording. I am impressed. And deeply intimidated. I say as much and get the impression this pleases my new friends.

As we drive to our first of ten stops, Dave explains that, when we return sometime just before dawn, he will feed our information into a new international database on raptor populations. The data-point provided by our inky time outside will hopefully help to answer the question of how seriously climate change is changing avian populations—and the places these birds call home. He says he

also hopes it will tear down some of the boundaries science has erected for itself.

"The question of owl movements isn't going to be answered by researchers and scholars. The long-held belief that only they can solve natural conundrums is an outmoded myth of the most dangerous kind," he says. "The only way we're going to get answers is by engaging the public in citizen-based observations. Not by relying on hotshot researchers. The sooner we get rid of those distinctions, the sooner we can learn something."

I tell him about my own observations of the barred owl who has been spending her days in my ash tree. Dave nods silently, then says that he has a barred owl spending its days in his yard, too. His, though, is smaller than the shape I approximate with my outstretched hands. Based on that guesstimate, he thinks his barred owl is probably a male. Dave's wife, Lonnie, keeps track of the owl during the day, and he thinks the two have formed something of a bond. She's named the owl Ernest. Dave says he likes to start some of his classes with updates on Ernest to get students thinking about applications for the otherwise abstract theories they are learning.

This prompts much commentary from the back of the van. All of our fellow volunteers, it seems, have something to say about on-the-ground inquiry. They rave about the experience of cataloguing these owls, in spite of the cold and the quizzical looks from passers by and even, on at least one occasion, a nearby homeowner who responded to their CD with a shotgun blast. They say that, each year, they swear they will never do this again. But the mystery and the romance of this singular bird keeps them coming back for more.

I share with them what little I know about owl symbolism. I also admit that, interest in comparative archetypes aside, I am a child of the early 80s. I was reared on ads featuring wise Mr. Owl determining how many licks it takes to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop. Or Woodsy, reminding us to give a hoot about protecting against litter and vandalism. That's my personal brand of owl romance: one based on a somewhat preachy, but nevertheless well meaning, knowingness.

"You know," I say. "An avian after-school-special."

The volunteers give me a polite stare. Most are too young to remember this kind of cultural iconography. Or maybe they just don't like my frivolous allusions.

"There's so much magnetism involved with owls," says one of them after a moment's pause. "That's what I love most. Even if you've heard them a hundred times before, you understand why once you hear your first response call. It's magic," she promises me. "You'll see."

I want to tell her that I think the mystery here is part of the problem. But, instead, I simply say that she's probably right.

The first of our stops takes us to a gravel road sandwiched between a demolition derby race track and an industrial composting facility. It is a place far from the mystical scenes described by the volunteers when they waxed poetic about depictions of owls. The remaining stops are similar: below flashing traffic lights, tucked inside a much-decorated cemetery, or along an overpass near a highway. Even in a working landscape like ours, these are compromised, well-worn spaces: far more akin to the parking lots of Dunkin Donuts and the tarmacs of major airports than the ideal habitat I had imagined for a nocturnal raptor.

I ask Potter about the nature of these stops.

"Mostly we just pick places where it looks like an owl might appear," he says. "But that's just based on our best sense of things. The places where nature and civilization meet are the only places where we have data. It's about access, really. We just don't know what's happening deep in the woods."

He and other scientists are hoping that the composite results of surveys such as ours might begin to change that. Once completed, our statistics will be added to two new databases: one created by Bird Studies Canada and another housed at Cornell University. These web-based clearinghouses integrate the information gleaned from other surveys fledging across North America, and they represent the first organized attempt to think beyond local research, at least where owls are concerned. Minnesota and Wisconsin have just started their own citizen-based survey, organizations in Connecticut have begun investigations, too. In time, all of these programs will hopefully provide the databases with enough information for scientists like Potter and Gallo to finally determine concrete trends in owl populations across the continent.

Getting that kind of statistical information is an exercise in patience and chance, though. At our first few stops, we volunteers lean into the wind, hoping to hear a call. A faint chirp in the background at our first stop elicits an audible gasp, followed by hopeful speculation that it could have been an owl. We really, *really* want it to be. I wonder aloud if this desire affects survey data. Potter shrugs and says he isn't too worried about that. He knows there are owls here—he just doesn't know how many.

At our third stop, the volunteers' prediction proves right: a mournful barred owl somewhere just out of view joins our CD in a long duet of call and response. The sound has an effect no less than that of a strong electrical charge. It and more distant calls sustain us for the first several hours of our trek. Still, and even with our collection of coffee and hot cocoas and snacks, we are a weary group by the sixth stop. Even with the dramatic rise in population, owl calls are sparse this year. The volunteers seem disappointed. By the seventh or eighth stop, a few of them opt to stay inside the van. By the ninth and tenth, not even the novelty of hearing a great horned owl can keep people lingering by the portable radio after the recording has ended. Our crew is ready to go home.

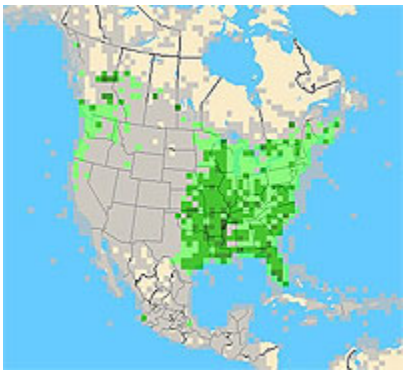
As we make the cold drive back to our awaiting cars, I ask Dave about what we did—and did not—find on our trek. He speculates that we could be witnessing early signs of a crisis brought on by overpopulation and a subsequent lack of food. Then again, it could have just been a quiet night for some reason we don't yet understand. In the end, he says, there is still way too much that we don't know about the predicament of resident owls. But one thing remains certain, he says: through their silence, these owls are trying to say something crucial about our environment.

I tell him about Thoreau's depiction of owls in *Walden*. There's a certain foreboding in Henry David's description: the idea that owls speak to a kind of dissatisfied netherworld, or that their calls announce "a dismal and fitting day" and "a different race of creatures" about to emerge. Am I being melodramatic in thinking that we're proving this description right? Or that there was a prescience in ancient representations of owl as both wise and ominous?

Dave says he doesn't know. But we both agree on one thing: if nothing else, the dawn of a new century has unequivocally changed our discourse not only about this landscape and its inhabitants, but also the categories we use to understand it. For the first time, current generations are collectively acknowledging what some have long held true: our climate is changing. Along the way, it is also redefining everything we thought we knew about the natural world, particularly when it comes to the systems we use to make sense of it. So far, too many of our stories and scientific theories are lagging behind this change. It takes examples like the plight of the barred owl to recognize as much. Maybe this acknowledgement is, in the words of Thoreau, both dismal and fitting. Maybe it takes something as silent as the daytime appearance of a hungry owl for us to heed that call and answer it with one of our own. Or, even more importantly, to shift our own sense of tidy boundaries and edges—especially where knowledge is concerned.

These are the thoughts that accompany me each subsequent morning as I look to my ash tree for a sign—or at least for that now familiar presence filling the canopy. I find neither. And yet I keep looking, torn between whether or not I want my owl to return and yet very much wanting to know what has become of her.

The weekend after our trip, Dave emails me with results from the survey: just as he and other scientists suspected, the barred owl population appears to be in trouble. I tell him that my visitor, though once continually present for about ten days or so, has not returned in over a week. I had considered playing the Audubon CD to see if I could woo her into responding, but I worry I might inadvertently send a message about food or territory that would only complicate matters further. I still don't understand what these calls mean—at least, not what they mean to a fellow owl. I ask Dave if he thinks her absence makes my barred owl a casualty or a survivor. He says he doesn't know—that we may never know. In the meantime, though, Ernest remains vigilant in his perch at the edge of Dave's property—looking very much a mythic figure. Maybe, Dave speculates, this silent owl will eventually explain what we cannot.



Observed range of the barred owl. Click image for larger view, with legend.
Graphic courtesy eBird.

Barred Owl

The barred owl, *Strix varia*, is a large typical owl. It goes by many other names, including eight hooter, rain owl, wood owl, and striped owl, but is probably known best as the hoot owl.

At up to 18 inches in length and with a 44-inch wingspan, the barred owl has a pale face with dark rings around the eyes, a yellow beak and brown eyes. It is the only typical owl of the eastern United States which has brown eyes; all others have yellow eyes. The head is round and lacks ear tufts. The upper parts are mottled gray-brown. The underparts are light with markings; the chest is barred horizontally while the belly is streaked lengthwise. The legs and feet are covered in feathers up to the talons.

Breeding habitat is dense woods across Canada, the eastern United States and south to Central America; in recent years it has spread to the western United States. Recent studies show suburban neighborhoods can be ideal habitat for barred owls. Using transmitters, scientists found that populations increased faster in the suburban settings than in old growth forest.

The diet of the Barred Owl consists mostly of mice of many species, but it also feeds on rabbits, chipmunks, foxes, Opossums and also birds such as grouse and doves. It occasionally wades into water in order to capture fish or terrapins.

The Barred Owl hunts by waiting on a high perch at night, or flying through the woods and swooping down on prey. It generally hunts near dawn or dusk, though it may also hunt on cloudy days. It may fly even in full daylight when disturbed. Of the North American owls, it is the species most likely to be active during the day, especially when raising chicks.

Source: Wikipedia.

Kathryn Miles is the editor-in-chief of *Hawk & Handsaw: The Journal of Creative Sustainability*; she also serves as director of the environmental writing program at Unity College. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications, including *Ecotone*, *PMLA*, and *Best American Essays*. Most recently, she is the author of *Adventures With Ari: A Puppy, a Leash, and Our Year Outdoors* (Skyhorse/W.W. Norton). You can find her at www.kathryn-miles.com.

Article

Text by Joan Maloof
Photos by Rick Maloof

View online slideshow of 12 old-growth forest photographs by Rick Maloof at www.terrain.org/articles/24/maloof.htm.

Ken Wu, Victoria Campaign Director, Western Canada Wilderness Committee.
Photo courtesy CanWest Media Works Publications, Inc.

Are photographs useful in the struggle to preserve beauty and diversity in the natural world? Consider the story of Ken Wu. When Wu was a young boy in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, his parents bought him *The Illustrated Natural History of Canada* book series. In the *Pacific Coast* edition Wu found a photograph that fascinated him. It was an old black-and-white photo from the Public Archives of Canada showing four couples, in the old-fashioned dress of that era, waltzing on a tree stump. Wu had never seen a tree as large as the one that must have been taken from that stump. He had no idea that such trees even grew in Canada. He read in the text that the Pacific Coast once contained many trees that huge, but that most of them had already been removed by loggers. The only places where one could still see the gigantic trees were in parks or remote valleys that the loggers hadn't yet reached.

Wu wanted to see those trees with his own eyes; he started pestering his parents to take him to British Columbia to see the old-growth forests. His parents obliged, and he was not disappointed. In fact, he was entranced.

When the time came for Wu to pick a college, he chose the University of British Columbia so he

could be close to the ancient forests. While in college he learned that the trees he loved so much were still in danger of becoming stumps. The logging of the giant trees had been ongoing—at least since before the black-and-white photograph was taken.

Wu knew that he must do something to work to save the trees that remained. He joined the campus Environmental Youth Alliance, and was involved in the first major logging protest on Vancouver Island. He was only 17 at the time. Five-hundred people showed up, even though they had to drive for hours on a bone-jarring dirt logging road to get to the site of the protest.

Protestors weren't able to save all the trees but they saved some of them. Wu has been working to save the rest ever since. He has been at it now for 17 years. He graduated from UBC and joined the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, an organization whose main focus is saving the remaining old-growth forests. Now the logging protests draw thousands of people and Wu is the one at the microphone.

The day I met him led a group of writers and environmental literature critics on a tour of the old growth. He encouraged us to spread the word about these beautiful ancient forests and about the ongoing logging in British Columbia.

Because it was photography that sparked Wu's passion for the forest, it seems fitting to answer his request with photographs. These photos were taken on June 7, 2009, in an old-growth forest in the Upper Walbran Valley of Vancouver Island. This area is public land ("crown land" in Canadian parlance) but it is not protected from logging, and it is under immediate threat of being logged. We welcome you to join the movement to save this forest, and all other remaining old-growth forests. We'd rather dance under the shade of the canopy than on top of the stumps.

Vancouver Island's Walbran Valley

The most spectacular and diverse stands of ancient trees in Canada grow in the 13,000 hectare Walbran Valley, a three-hour drive from Victoria. The Walbran is located south of the Carmanah Valley, adjacent to the West Coast Trail. The 7,500-hectare Upper Walbran Valley is unprotected, while the Lower Walbran Valley and part of the West Walbran Valley lies within the Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park.

The Walbran contains perhaps the most geographically extensive stand of cathedral-like ancient redcedars, the Castle Grove — currently unprotected. Incredible stands of giant Sitka spruce lie within the protected part of the West Walbran Valley. Sprinkled throughout the valley are the occasional giant ancient Douglas firs. Logging by Teal Jones and Western Forest Products are heavily fragmenting the valley right now.

Source: OldGrowthPlaces.org.

View online slideshow of 12 old-growth forest photographs by Rick Maloof at www.terrain.org/articles/24/maloof.htm.

Joan Maloof is the author of *Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest* (University of Georgia Press, 2005) and the forthcoming *Getting to Old Growth: Visiting the Ancient Eastern Forests*. She is associate professor of biology and environmental studies at Salisbury University on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Rick Maloof has been an active photographer for over 50 years. Often described as a "philosopher / photographer" he frequently donates his work to non-profit agencies and art admirers. One of his current projects is photographing old-growth forests in western North America.

Article

A HOLE IN TIME

by John Lane

"I'm pretty confident I'm in the Pleistocene," Terry Ferguson says when I ask how deep in time he's standing. Terry is in an excavated pit. The dirt walls are straight, angular, and stair-step steeply downward toward the past like a drawing for a book explaining Euclidian geometry. The Pleistocene, the geologic epoch Terry invokes, ended about 13,000 years ago when glaciers covered about 30 percent of the earth and the climate here in Pickens County, South Carolina, was cool as Minnesota. Terry says the visual scale of time he's etched on the dirt walls of this hole shows how "about every ten inches we go down, we're back another thousand years."

When not deep in a vanished epoch, Terry works with me at Wofford College where he's had academic lives as a geologist, an archeologist/anthropologist, and an instructional technology expert. Now the two of us, both in our mid-fifties, have changed jobs. We anchor the new environmental studies major, an interdisciplinary program where people like us from different disciplines explore environmental problems together.

Tommy Charles and Terry Ferguson drawing excavation unit profiles.
Photo by Jeff Catlin.

This "dig" is some of Terry's ongoing professional research and there are plenty of environmental questions to work on here—how exactly did people from different ages live in this place, being one of the big ones. We're hoping we can find several ways that this place and the ongoing work Terry's doing here can fit easily into our new environmental studies program.

There are six of us onsite today, myself included. I'm observing, asking questions, sitting up in the Holocene, the present epoch, on a shovel-carved lip of dark Southern piedmont alluvial soil just

above the Oolenoy River. My feet rest ten or twelve inches deeper on tawny sediments. It's about 1,200 years to the bottoms of my boots, according to Terry's onsite time scale.

Though fixed solidly in time, I feel a little out of place. Everyone but me is a regular, here to work. This morning Terry shares this pit with Tommy Charles and Wesley Burnett. Tommy's soon to be retired from the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology in Columbia, and this is one of the many projects he is still tending. Tommy and Terry are the professional archeologists on this project—officially known as 38PN35, scientific code for the 35th site investigated in Pickens County—and they've been digging together here for four years. Wes is a retired Clemson geography professor and seasoned archaeological volunteer. When he's not down in the hole he's sitting on top of an overturned bucket reading a long history of the Middle East, one of his geographical research interests.

Below the seat of my jeans, in a space about the thickness of the book Wes has been reading, all our American/European history disappears downward—the Iraq War (the present-2004), the Summer of Love (1968), World War II (1945-41), the Civil War (1865-61, what some unreconstructed locals still call "the late unpleasantness"), the American Revolution (1781-1776), the founding of Charleston (1670), Desoto's journey inland to the Mississippi River (1540). Below that, it's Native American occupation—Cherokee, Mississippian, Woodland, Archaic, Paleo—ten feet down to Terry's clammy Pleistocene floor.

Terry loves research, and he discovered early on that he was good at it. He arrived at Wofford in 1971 thinking he wanted to major in psychology, but he quickly found out that the behaviorists were in power. "I wanted Jung and depth psychology, and I wasn't very interested in running rats," he's said. He tried physics, but after working on Broad River rock shelters during a January term sponsored by Wofford's legendary geologist John Harrington, he became interested in archaeology and geology. The summer before his junior year he worked at an archeological field school in New Mexico and used his nine hours credit to anchor a major in sociology. Even after he choose sociology, Terry's intellectual interests stayed broad, including upper-level English classes where he studied James Joyce. "I've always been interested in the mind of man," Terry says, "but I ended up looking at the mind of the earth."

Transit and view of horse farm and surrounding hills.
Photo by John Lane.

For his master's work at the University of Tennessee Terry wrote about soapstone quarries in northwestern South Carolina. His Ph.D dissertation at Tennessee was on prehistoric settlement patterns on the Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee and Kentucky. Back at Wofford in the mid-eighties Terry continued John Harrington's tradition of teaching geology as a liberal arts science, though he never lost touch with his love of "depth" in any intellectual

form.

More important than our professional affiliation, Terry and I are good friends and this trip to the Pleistocene is another scene in an on-going conversation that goes back over 20 years. I know just enough about science to keep Terry interested, and he's read most of the authors I admire, particularly the early modernists. Maturing in the age of Freud, the modernists pioneered the idea of depth in literature through the metaphor of conscious/unconscious. "I should have been a ragged claw scuttling across the floors of silent seas," T.S. Eliot wrote in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Terry's no ragged claw deep in his hole, but the idea of going down in order to get enlightenment or knowledge is something that engages him as well as me.

Our conversations often wander backward in time—to past cultures, past extinctions, past problems. Terry knows that the human mind, and the culture it's created, has always served as its own pit worthy of excavation. I'm no scientist and he's no poet/literary intellectual, but in our shared worlds we often find a place to stand together.

This excavated hole in time is such a land surface. It charges Terry up intellectually and it gives me a place from which I can dream all the way down to a vanished epoch. "You can't get there from here," is the old adage for those lost in a foreign place. The pit is some place I can go and leave the present behind. Down where Terry stands there were families, alliances, and conversations 10,000 years before now. We'll never know exactly what they said, but I can come close to the spirit of it all by listening to what's been discovered here. "It's a layer cake," Terry says. "Shadows upon shadows. Each inch contains four generations. Same spot, but different people."

Terry works to find the metaphor to explain it all. "I see dead people," I want to interject humorously into Terry's dissertation about the Early Archaic period, but I know I shouldn't.

"Time's arrow," Stephen Jay Gould calls the horizontal way mortals often view our passing lives. In this metaphor the present is the head of an arrow shooting through space into the future, pulling the lengthening shaft of the past behind it. Yet it seems when time is viewed on a mythic or religious scale it's almost never horizontal, with heaven above and hell usually below. Here in Pickens County, Terry's metaphor for time is mythic, a deep stair-stepping hole in the earth, the bottom of which is about the size of a phone booth.

One of the frequent site visitors.
Photo by Jeff Catlin.

The site of Terry's hole, the Foxwood Horse Farm, is truly a pastoral spot in this upcountry South Carolina world turning quickly suburban. The farm's setting is a broad valley up against the Blue

Ridge mountain front where the Oolenoy and South Saluda Rivers come together. The long farm road into the site runs through fertile bottomland fields, and the flatness of the flood plain carries your eye not down but out until it stalls against a sharp line of blue sky and the green ridges confining the rivers.

As Terry narrates from below, I watch Wesley use a large kitchen spoon to remove a "feature" about two feet above where Terry stands. Wesley puts spoon after spoon of dark alluvial dirt in a large white cloth bag for later analysis offsite. Above their heads, in the present, horses graze in adjacent pastures. They're kept out of the archeological site by electric fences. A chestnut stallion keeps vigil at the back fence where volunteer Roger Lindsay mans the screens. He examines every bucket of dirt they pull out of the hole for small flakes of worked stone.

Roger's a retired paint contractor who now lives nearby, and he has been with the dig from the beginning. His interest in prehistory is quite practical—as an avocation he's a "flintknapper" who makes projectile points and replica stone tools for his own pleasure and understanding. He's so good at primitive technology that his replicas are in museums, and he's won contests for throwing accuracy using an atlatal, the ancient "throwing stick" used for hunting and warring, the forerunner of the bow and arrow by tens of thousands of years. In his pickup truck Roger always keeps a full array of bows, arrows, and atlatals made from the similar local materials that the originals would have utilized. "He knows so much about the way they worked I think Roger's channeling these people," Terry explained to me once.

Jesse Robertson, who owns land across the river, sits in an old deck chair and observes the scene as I do. Jesse is another loyal volunteer who has also worked this site since 2004. Jesse contributes much more than his volunteer labor to this project. He has arranged a metal carport over the site to give it shade and protect it from the rain, and it makes a nice place to take a break or observe.

A few years earlier Jesse had been clearing this bottom for his brother while Terry and Tommy were working the land on the South Saluda River just downstream from its confluence with the Oolenoy. He'd yanked up a tree trunk and tangled in its roots was a sherd of 4,500 year-old fiber-tempered pottery. He collected it, and told Terry exactly where it was found. Fiber-tempered pottery had never been reported this far from the Savannah River, so the team secured permission to move the excavation to this terrace above the Oolenoy. The site has proven rich in artifacts and information, with evidence of settlement from historic time all the way back 10,000 years.

Just to Jesse's right is a line of holes where a Woodland Period palisade, or log fort, surrounded a village here about 700 years ago. Seven holes are exposed and survey flags mark the location of several others behind us. We sit and watch from just outside the walls of that old Indian log fort. Seven-hundred years is a long time, but it's not much on a deep time scale. Figuring 20 years a generation, the people who felt secure behind this stockade were separated from the people at the bottom of Terry's pit by the passing of around 550 lifetimes.

Everyone's excited today because 30 inches higher than the floor Tommy and Terry stand on is a perfectly excavated tabletop of silt and sand around a formation of 16 stones placed there by

deliberate human hands 10,000 years in the past. The stones look a little like a patio, though no larger than a living room end table. Chris Clement, a colleague of Terry and Tommy's, had been working this site when the feature was discovered two years ago. Jesse says that the stone feature was such an unexpected surprise that those working that day joked it had to be a landing pad for a prehistoric space ship. Tommy and Terry have been asking their colleagues across the Southeast what that thought it could be, and nobody has a clue. Today's the day Terry and Tommy plan to remove it.

10,000 year-old stone-covered feature.
Photo by Terry Ferguson.

"It's something someone placed here," Terry says when I ask him to explain. They know the feature's date because the team has already removed a third of the stones and underneath they found charcoal from conifers and hardwoods, and a hickory nut fragment. Radiocarbon dating gave them the 10,000 BP (before present) date associated with the feature, one of the oldest culturally-associated radiocarbon dates in South Carolina. That places the stones near the beginning of what's known as the Archaic Period of human prehistory.

As Terry and Tommy's work on this site demonstrates, archaeology is a science balanced between theory and method—"find, excavate, analyze," as Terry explains it. As a science it's very different from the image we get watching Indiana Jones movies. Literary romance is often hard to come by amidst the dust and sweat of hard work with shovels, trowels, and dental picks. They've been at it here for four years, and this hole in the ground, several tons of excavated soil, and a few hundred small plastic bags of artifacts and carbonized botanical samples are all they physically have to show for their labor.

When I ask about the slow pace and stop-and-start nature of this project, Terry points out that many in the archeological profession are in cultural resource management, hired gun masters-level researchers working on contracts to meet the needs of a government permit for construction projects. For the most part CRM archaeology is good, but it's always done within the constraints of a particular project. Once the project is finished, the reports generated often end up as "gray literature," information not available to the public because the results belong to who paid for them or few find the funds or time to publish the results.

The kind of archaeology Terry's been conducting in Pickens County is another side of the profession, what he calls "purposeful research," and it has none of the constraints of CRM work. "You pick a particular site that will answer particular questions," he explained to me as we drove over to Pickens this morning, "and you work it repeatedly when there is time and money."

"Is a feature an artifact?" a large man with a Santa Claus beard asks. He's standing opposite from

me above the pit. He's shown up this morning to see what the scientists are doing down in this Pickens County pit. He's been introduced as a serious artifact hunter, and he's curious as to what they've turned up so deep in the earth. 38PN35 has been known since the late 1800s as a location rich in artifacts, and people have been "surface collecting" the fields and pastures for over a hundred years. What they all found "arrowhead hunting" is mostly lost to the professional archaeology community, scattered among a thousand private collections.

7,000 year-old quartz crystal projectile point.
Photo by Jeff Catlin.

"No, a feature's a feature," Terry clarifies. "It's something we find that's human-made. It could be the site of a fire, a cache of decayed plant matter, a posthole, or something else. Somebody dug a pit here where the soil's dark. And somebody laid these stones on top of it. Actually, a feature can tell us a great deal more than projectile points can."

I can see this man's mind processing what Terry has said. He spends his time looking for artifacts on the surface of bottomland fields like this one. He collects projectile points—what everyone used to call arrowheads—also pot sherds, ground stones, objects. The sort of systematic archaeological exploration of a site that is underway here is something he hasn't thought about much. The past for him is the leftover (and often valuable for trade or commerce) detritus of occupation, like a landlord cleaning out a rental house and selling what's left behind at the flea market.

What Terry's interested in is the layers of the occupation. "It's not the artifacts," Terry's said. "It's where the artifacts are." Terry knows that there is so much information available to a careful researcher, things that an artifact hunter could never know about a long-vanished cultural moment, in this case the beginning of the Holocene, 10,000 years before the present.

"I can't imagine 10,000 years into the future," Tommy Charles adds, musing suddenly about time in the other direction. He's shoulder to shoulder with Terry looking up out of the ten-foot-deep excavation pit. "I know there will be blue sky, clouds. What else? That's about as far as I can get."

I write down Tommy's words in my notebook and think for a moment about my own sense of time. I'm in the humanities, a creative writer, but I've been on enough archaeology sites like this one and taken enough geology classes to have what some would consider a well-developed sense of the past—what I like to call "deep time." I'm never at a loss when thinking back 10,000 years, and I especially like time when it's layered in depositional sediment like it is on the Oolenoy, an inch for every hundred years.

I'm 53 and my half-inch of time/sediment shows up quite well here at the surface of this site, though it looks precarious on the lip of the dig, as if it my life could blow away or be scooped up without

much effort.

But the future? I can't get much further than Tommy. My sense of future time plays out too often in Jetsons fantasies of flying cars and personal convenience, but most times I have no idea where the arrowhead is flying. "The future," as I heard one prognosticator say recently, "is always someone's fiction."

Jessie Robertson, Wesley Burnett, and Tommy Charles mapping exact locations of rocks in the feature.
Photo by Terry Ferguson.

What does the story of the next 100, much less 10,000 years hold for valleys such as this one in the fast-growing piedmont of South Carolina? My interest in the future usually focuses on land use and environment and population, and here in the valley of the Oolenoy the stories the prognosticators are floating are not all happy—more people and pollution to come. Less biodiversity. Global warming.

So what can the past tell us about the future? The band of Archiac nomads who laid these stones probably included at most 30 or 40 individuals. There may have been more than one band in a watershed, or maybe there was only one. We know that they moved seasonally up and down river systems searching out available food. They may have crossed into other watersheds for resources, such as stone for making tools. They hunted and gathered shellfish, berries, roots, and such. Their way of life was appropriate for the area's resources and probably persisted for many thousands of years with little change. With modern Holocene humans like us our lives are changing daily, and our supply lines grow shorter every day.

I look down from above and try to find my own pattern in the intentional arrangement of the Archaic stones. I grasp for some hint into the Stone Age mind that placed this pavement here. These people who lived 10,000 years ago had the same mental capacities as I have. They weren't "primitive" in the way we've always meant that word—backward, under developed, haltingly simple. Their evolved culture had pushed their technology and hunting/gathering as far as resources allowed. It's sites like this, rich in information, that can slowly help fill in some of the blank spaces.

I like to imagine that this arrangement of stones was recreational—almost like the Stone Age patio it resembles—or a ceremonial or religious spot. It could be a sweat lodge or altar or an old-time geocache. I can sense how pleasant it would have been to sit on what Terry's excavation has discovered was a small bluff above the river 10,000 years ago.

Terry makes sure I understand that poetic revelries are fine, but they don't know what's below the stones. He can see that something was buried there because the excavation has already taken off the side third of the feature, exposing the faint outline of a pit filled with discolored soil. "It could be a

cremation or a bundle of artifacts. It could be something else," Terry says. He says they may find out what it is when they remove the remaining stones, or the answer could be found when they excavate down to the bottom level of the small pit, or they may get some clarity when the data comes back from botanical analysis months later—or, as Terry admits, "We may never really know."

Later in the day as Terry removes the first of the sixteen stones, I remember when I sat in a Crazy Creek camp chair in the Cirque of the Towers high in Wyoming's Wind River Range many years ago and watched as my archeologist friend and his brother John ascended a 2,000-foot rock pinnacle, a remnant of the Ice Age, carved by Pleistocene glaciers. It took them all day, and I watched through binoculars. What was it? Sixteen years ago? It was a long time for time's arrow to fly on anybody's personal time scale.

Wesley Burnett, Terry Ferguson, and Tommy Charles working on features in deep excavation unit.
Photo by John Lane.

All day Terry, the geoarcheologist, and his brother, the geophysist, climbed hard rock higher and higher through the clear Wyoming summer air, and the poet took notes below. The irony of it all was that when they arrived on the top of their spire, they were standing, as Terry was now, on the Pleistocene.

As I reassemble that long-ago trip I remember how we fished most days for trout in high alpine lakes, and what we caught we kept fresh in a snow bank left over from the winter before at 11,000 feet. Up there in the high Cirque we were hunter/gatherers for two weeks. We caught our own meat, camped in temporary shelters, talked around campfires. Instead of furs we wore expensive petroleum-based designer fleeces to keep warm. Instead of discussing kinship we talked of books we'd read and past trips into the wilderness.

In reality it was hard to leave the Holocene behind. No matter how much we wanted to be Romantics about our time in the Wyoming wilderness we knew there were two or three dozen other climbers who possessed permits and had also hiked ten miles into the Cirque over two 12,000-foot passes to camp and scale the famous wild peaks.

This federally designated wilderness was under the same types of population pressures as Pickens County is projected to suffer from down the line. A ranger told us not to drink unfiltered water from the wilderness lake at the center of the Cirque because the bacteria levels—particularly fecal coliform—were disturbingly high that summer from all the human activity of the climbers.

As I sit by this hole in time I feel like I know these Archaic campers, and I think of them as a band

of Stone Age brothers and sisters. I know this is dangerous, that now is now, and then was then, but I can't help it. It's my natural inclination. It's the mark of my tribe—to imagine, to teleport back and forward to all ages, to see through time.

Labeling and bagging individual rocks and artifacts from the 10,000 year-old feature.
Photo by John Lane.

Back in the present Terry and Tommy remove the pavement of stones from the feature. They bag and number each stone in its own freezer bag, then label with site number, location, and date. As Terry picks them up they often crumble in his hands. He puts all the pieces in the bags. They take dozens of pictures. Each time they take a picture they place the little striped black and white plastic arrow for scale, always pointing north, and write the relevant scene description on the small white marker board they call a mug board.

The most exciting moment for me comes when Terry pries up one stone with his trowel and it's clear that it's been split perfectly in half to make it level with the others. One edge has also been chipped away so it would fit perfectly with the stones next to it. Someone did this 10,000 years ago. Someone cared that the pavement of stones was level.

"Was the leveling aesthetic or practical?" My question doesn't seem to interest Terry much, and he continues to remove all the remaining stones.

After two hours 35PN38's mysterious early Archaic feature, carefully exposed for the first time in 10,000 years, finally disappears into two peach crates. "Archaeology's actually a little sad," Terry says as he places the last stone and climbs out of the pit. "It destroys the past in order to understand it."

We pack all the equipment in two wheelbarrows and push them across the horse pasture to our vehicles. One more day and this crew of scientists and volunteers will shut the site down since they're down to the end of their current funding.

In order to limit their impact on Jesse's land, Terry's research team has brought in a Porta-John, and it sits just outside the last fence next to the parking area. Tommy goes to take a leak before he hits the road back to Columbia.

Roger's chatting with the arrowhead hunter sporting the Santa Clause beard about the tools he's made, and as illustration he walks to his truck to retrieve them. He returns with three atlatals and some six-foot long "darts" that fit on the throwing sticks. The atlatals are about 18 inches long, and he's fitted each with rawhide loops for two fingers. The throwing stick lengthens the arm. They remind me a little of those plastic tennis ball throwers dog owners use. As we look at Roger's handiwork, he hooks his fingers in the rawhide loops and points out with pride how one of the counter weights on this, his favorite atlatal, was shaped from soapstone to the same pattern as one found right here on the site.

"Turkey feathers," Santa Clause says, running his finger over the guide feathers on one of the darts.

"The shafts are made from river cane cut right in this valley," Roger says, placing the six-foot long dart on the throwing stick.

"Throw it," Santa Clause says, and points at a clay bank 50 yards away.

Roger Lindsay throwing a spear with an atlatal as was done for thousands of years.
Photo by Terry Ferguson.

Roger hops a couple of times and lets fly. The dart sails, flutters a little, and sticks soundly in the clay bank. Roger smiles with pride, and all of us watching give a little tribal *whoop*.

As Roger retrieves his ancient dart from the clay bank I look around the valley of the Oolenoy, and it's obvious why these ancient people shaking free of the Pleistocene camped here on their long migrations up from the Atlantic coast—the land is rich in natural beauty. Surely resources such as beauty mattered to them.

No matter how many Holocene humans move into this watershed it will still be beautiful. There will always be this bright blue summer sky, and a tree line in the distance. That much we know. The rest of our lives will disappear into the ground or the atmosphere.

Even the pit Terry and Tommy have excavated won't last. Jesse has a backhoe ready to cover it up once the archeologists are done with it. But those post holes still visible from that 700-year-old stockade show me that if you want to leave a mark on the land, dig a hole. So I dig the toe of my boots into the ground at my feet. I've pushed down 500 years or so before Terry bids his friends and colleagues goodbye for the day. I left no artifacts behind to mark my visit to the Oolenoy, and the feature I make with my boot won't last out the decade, much less Tommy's 10,000 years.

John Lane teaches environmental studies and writing at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. This fall he begins his work as director of the Glendale Shoals Environmental Studies Center outside of Spartanburg. His latest book is *The Best of the Kuzdu Telegraph*. For more of John's work see www.kudzutelegraph.com.

Article

Title photo of border wall with art in Nogales, Mexico, by Steev Hise.

By Tom Leskiw

The American Southwest is a place of astounding beauty and biological diversity. How, one wonders, can such abundance flourish in a land with scant water resources? The ecological bargain struck long ago by humans and wildlife alike was one of movement and migration in order to escape extremes of heat and cold and to procure the resources necessary to survive. These movements were generally north-south or upslope-downslope, in response to changing seasons. In addition, seemingly random movements in search of food, cordage, and plants used for medicine occurred—the irregular, mosaic-like distribution of resources reflecting geology and soil type, slope aspect, localized rainfall, and more.

Bosque wetlands on the Rio Grande River south of Socorro, New Mexico.
Photo Simmons Buntin.

Long before the concept of political borders emerged, human and wildlife movement was tied to *natural* borders: desert and oasis, oak woodland and grassland, forest and brush field. Mountain ranges—later termed "sky islands"—were linked to valley "seas" of grass and brush by the riparian corridors of the Santa Cruz, San Pedro, and Rio Grande Rivers. The health of the landscape depended upon connectivity and movement—of birds and creatures such as coyote as agents of seed dispersal, of fire to periodically cleanse the grasslands of competing vegetation, of fish migrating upstream or down in search of more

favorable conditions, and of water, to transport and deliver wood, sediment, and nutrients.

For millennia, these peregrinations continued unabated—as evidenced by the presence of palm trees at isolated oases and human trails worn a foot deep along the path used to procure salt from the Gulf of California. Today, the media portray trans-border movements as a one-way highway, always northward. However, a substantial number of Catholics on the U.S. side still make a yearly pilgrimage to the old mission community of Magdalena de Kino, some sixty miles south of the Arizona-Sonora border, for the Fiesta de San Francisco.

In 1854, the Gadsden Purchase was ratified by the U.S. Senate. It included lands south of the Gila River in Arizona and in southern New Mexico. The revision of the U.S.-Mexico border was part of the negotiations needed to finalize issues that remained unresolved from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848.

For a number of years, the newly drawn political boundary affected neither the movement of wildlife nor that of borderland residents. Indeed, as recently as 1930, some members of the Tohono O'odham—formerly known as Papago—had no knowledge of the redrawing of the boundary and believed they lived in Mexico.

With the opening of the West, however, came railroads, vast water reclamation projects, roads, and utility lines. Since then, the overarching theme of Southwestern settlement has been the elimination or degradation of the connectivity so vital for the health of ecosystems and their denizens. Half of southern Arizona was formerly grassland. Historically, the U.S. Forest Service encouraged overgrazing to reduce grass, which carried ground fire. As a result, the current boundaries of vegetative communities—mesquite, introduced grasses, and tamarisk—bear little resemblance to historical distribution. Livestock fences also cut upon traditional migration routes of wildlife, including pronghorn antelope, javelina, and bison.

Javelina near new border wall just east of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area in Arizona.
Photo by Matt Clark, courtesy Defenders of Wildlife and Northern Jaguar Project.

Predators like the Mexican wolf were extirpated while populations of jaguars, ocelots, and jaguarundis were reduced or eliminated from the Southwest. Conservationist Aldo Leopold, an avid wolf hunter early in his career, grew to realize that "[o]ne of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds."

Overuse of ground and surface water adversely impacted water courses, springs, and riparian vegetation, resulting in population declines for many of the 80 percent of vertebrate species in the

borderlands region dependent on streamside areas for at least part of their life cycle. The wounds inflicted upon aquatic resources were noted by Leopold in 1937: "Somehow the watercourse is to dry country what the face is to human beauty. Mutilate it and the whole is gone."

In the wake of 9/11, the security of the United States' borders has come under increasing scrutiny. Owing to the influx of undocumented workers from Mexico, one "solution" now under implementation is the construction of a wall along our southern border. In 2006 Congress, in response to a national outcry about our porous border, approved the Secure Fence Act. The law authorized the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to construct 845 miles of double-layered fencing along the southern U.S. border, which spans nearly 2,000 miles. The wall carries a price tag of $49 billion for construction and 20 years of maintenance. Impact from the wall is exacerbated by associated infrastructure: access roads, cameras, sensors, and stadium-style lighting in some locations.

Not only is the wall the latest in a long series of actions severing the connectivity between wildlife and its habitat, but it also bisects some of the most biologically rich areas in the U.S.

Opponents of the wall have voiced a number of concerns, which include:

- 36 laws, including the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, were waived to expedite certain segments of the wall.
- Erecting a wall along 42 percent of our southern border is simply not a viable method for strengthening our border.

The following four case studies examine impacts—hydrologic, biologic, cultural, and economic—from four segments of the wall's construction, as one would encounter them, west to east:

Spring blooms at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.
Photo Simmons Buntin.

Case Study: Organ Pipe National Monument, Arizona

In 2006, DHS proposed the construction of a 5.2-mile-long fence in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, along the U.S.-Mexico border. Comments in the Draft Environmental Assessment included concerns that the structure could impede floodwaters and that debris could be trapped by the wall, leading to backwater pooling and lateral flow that would damage the Border Patrol road and other infrastructure in both the U.S. and Mexico.

The response to these concerns in the Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact was that "the wall would be …designed and constructed to ensure proper conveyance of floodwaters and to eliminate the potential to cause backwater flooding on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border." In addition, Kiewit Western Co., the contractor building the fence, furnished a handout that stated the design (6-inch x 24-inch openings in the wall where it crossed drainages) would "permit water and debris to flow freely and not allow ponding on either side of the border" because the drainage crossing grates "met hydraulic modeling requirements."

The wall, finished two weeks prior, received its first test during a July 12, 2008 storm, where one to two inches of rain fell in 90 minutes. Fine and coarse sediment and debris plugged the grates in least five arroyos, creating stream diversions (lateral movement of water beyond their respective floodplains) ranging from 100 feet to 1,110 feet. Headwaters Wash flowed over 200 feet to the east along the wall and through the international port of entry at Sonoyta, Sonora, Mexico. Floodwaters damaged private property, government offices, and commercial businesses in Lukeville, Arizona, and Sonoyta, Sonora.

Flooding at the Lukeville, Arizona border entry following a July 12, 2008 storm.
Photo courtesy U.S. Department of Interior.

Concerns voiced by the wall's opponents proved to be well-founded, as the rainfall received on July 12 was not unusual; statistically, it is estimated to occur at least once every three years. Based on precipitation records that span 60 years at Organ Pipe, the rainfall intensity experienced on July 12 occurs every:

Amount of Hourly Precipitation	Estimated Frequency
> 2"	once every 5 years
1.5 - 1.99"	once every 3 years
1.0 - 1.99"	nearly once every year

Case Study: Nogales, Arizona

Male jaguar photographed by a southern Arizona camera trap in 2004.
Photo by Emil McCain, courtesy Jaguar Conservation Team.

1996 and the one photographed February 2006 in the Animas Mountains of southwestern New Mexico are different individuals.

Policy changes in the 1960s and 1970s led to a sudden decrease in jaguar reports in this region. In 1969 it became illegal to kill jaguars. Establishment of the Endangered Species Act in 1972 resulted in fear of federal restrictions on private property and general animosity toward endangered or threatened species. Put simply, the sudden decrease in jaguar reports gave the false impression that they'd disappeared from the Southwest.

The conservation of wildlife populations at the periphery of their range is now considered extremely important to the long-term survival of endangered species. The preservation of sufficient core and connective habitats to avoid population fragmentation is seen as crucial to reducing the probability of extinction for species such as jaguar. Therefore, the construction of a nine to 15-foot-high fence across approximately 70 percent of the Arizona border does not bode well for the small, northernmost population of jaguars, as it will isolate them from the larger

The Atascosa Mountains lie just northwest of the border town of Nogales, about 70 miles south of Tucson. I'm among those that were surprised to learn that a wildlife study has documented the presence of two jaguars in the area. An adult male jaguar, dubbed Macho B, was photographed north of the border for over 11 years, and he resided in Arizona continuously and year-round from 2004-2007. A jaguar named Macho A was also photographed during this time frame in the same study area.

Analysis of spot patterns confirms that at least four jaguars have been recently photographed in the Southwest, as the jaguar in extreme southeastern Arizona in

University of Arizona graduate students explore the San Pedro River 20 miles north of the Mexico border.
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

source population in northwestern Mexico.

Case Study: San Pedro River, Arizona

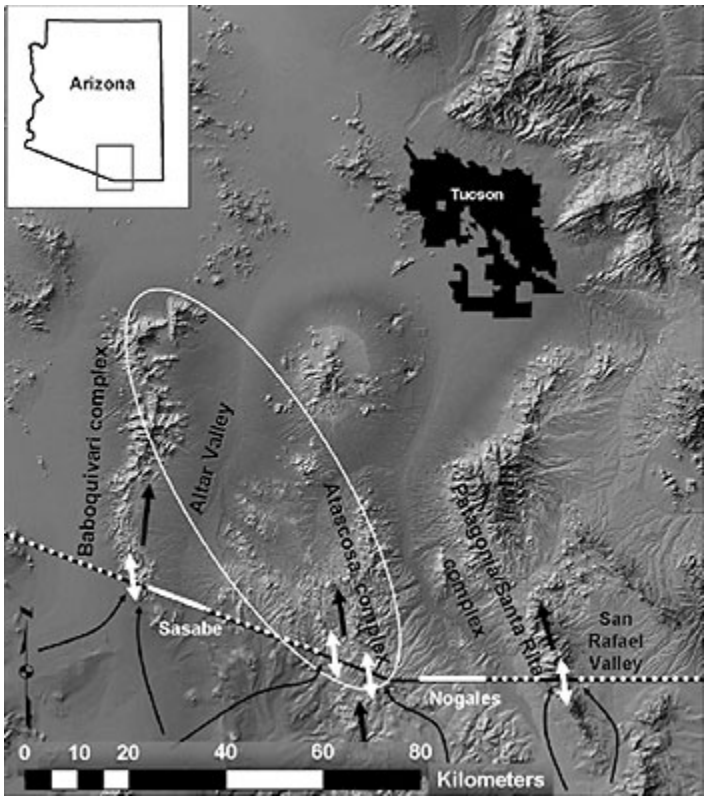
The San Pedro River is unique because it flows south-north across the border, connecting the ecologies of the tropics and the Sierra Madre Mountains with those of the far north. Biologists estimate that 400 bird species, 83 mammal species, and 47 amphibian and reptile species inhabit the San Pedro, the longest undammed river in Arizona. The San Pedro was the first site in the Western Hemisphere to be designated as an Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy. It hosts some 4 million migrating songbirds each year.

Ten percent of the roughly 530 species on the federal endangered species list can be found along the San Pedro. It is home to more mammal species—including jaguar, coati mundi, and javelina—than any place on Earth, except Costa Rica.

The cottonwood-willow forests that were once common along Southwestern rivers have been greatly impacted relative to pre-settlement conditions.

In the late 1800s, fur trappers removed an estimated one million beaver from the San Pedro watershed. The extirpation of beaver—a keystone species—in 1900 was especially devastating to the watershed, as their dam-building had reduced the river's erosive power. The resulting stair-stepping watercourse buffered the watershed during seasonal floods. Large pools spread the water outward, fostering a network of wetlands that were effective in recharging ground water.

The devastated rangeland, shorn of grasses by too many horses and cows, had lost its ability to hold soil in place when a multi-year drought ended and the rains returned in 1893. The once stable, slow-moving, marshy perennial river



Topographic relief map of the study area, showing United States–Mexico border (solid black line), general observed minimum "range" of adult male jaguar Macho B from May 2006 to April 2007 (white oval), important cross-border corridors for jaguars and other wildlife (heavy white double-arrows), 4- to 5-m-tall steel pedestrian fences (existing or under construction; solid white lines), increased border security with vehicle barriers, chain-link fences, virtual fencing, surveillance towers, and agent patrols (white dashed lines), and funneled illegal immigrant and resulting law enforcement traffic (black arrows).
Map courtesy Emil McCain.

transformed into an unstable, flood-prone, intermittent stream. Stream downcutting largely eliminated the wetlands, resulting in a lowering of the water table. In 1870, Arizona rancher H.C. Hooker had described the San Pedro River Valley as "having an abundance of timber with large beds of sacaton and grama grasses. The river bed was shallow and grassy … its banks with luxuriant growth of vegetation."

His description of the same area in 1900 told a different story: "The river had cut ten to 40 feet below its banks with its trees and underbrush gone, with the mesas grazed by thousands of horses and cattle." Recognizing the importance of beaver to watershed health, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management reintroduced them to the San Pedro in 1999.

More than 350,000 people travel to Arizona annually to view birds. They bring in an estimated $1 billion, making bird watching Arizona's most lucrative tourist activity, according to Joe Yarkin, watchable wildlife manager for the Arizona Department of Game and Fish. "Economically, it ranks above golf and the other big boys of tourism."

Opponents of the wall voiced concerns regarding its construction across the San Pedro River, its floodplain, and over 60 seasonal streams and desert washes in the vicinity. In late 2008, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed a "temporary" vehicle barrier across the San Pedro. This new placement follows roughly two miles of fence already existing within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Project photos depict a Normandy-type beach fence that cuts across the river bed and an access road that has been graded to the river's edge.

Looking south into Sonora, Mexico from the Atascosa Mountains—prime habitat for hundreds of species. And jaguars, too?
Photo by Simmons Buntin.

Opponents question whether federal officials will be able to remove the barriers, as promised, during high-water periods such as the monsoon season. BLM managers have little power in light of the waiver of environmental laws for the wall's construction. The Borderlands Conservation and Security Act of 2007 (H.R. 2593), sponsored by Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), sought to force DHS to create a strategy that had the dual goals of securing the border while best protecting public forest and park lands along it. The bill never became law and, because it was introduced in a previous session of Congress, no more action can be taken.

Case Study: Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas

Four climatic zones converge in south Texas, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified

11 distinct habitats in the lower Rio Grande Valley. More wild cats—ocelots, jaguars, and jaguarundis—live here than anywhere else in the United States. Because of the Rio Grande River's sinuosity and the need to construct straight fences, some segments of the wall are slated to be constructed 2 .5 miles from the river—in effect, ceding to Mexico portions of prime wildlife habitat that include the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge and the Audubon Society's Sabal Palm Preserve.

In late December 2008, a property owner in the Lower Rio Grande Valley received notice that DHS had filed suit to condemn a portion of the property. The complaint stated that the amount of $114,000 offered by DHS was deemed "just compensation" for the slightly more than 8 acres the 18-foot-tall, concrete-and-steel barrier wall will occupy—a 60-foot-wide strip of land slated to cross 6,000 feet of the landowner's property.

The owner felt that the amount offered was grossly insufficient compensation for a property purchased in 1999 for $2.6 million. The fence, slated to be constructed 1.5 miles from the Rio Grande River would, in effect, cede more than 700 of the 1,034-acre property to Mexico. Most importantly, the full-time caretaker's residence and all the property's facilities are located on what is to become Mexico's side of the wall.

The Nature Conservancy owns the subject property: the Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve. The site harbors a native plant nursery that supplies reforestation projects throughout South Texas, a compatible agriculture demonstration, a rare sabal palm forest, and habitat for Texas' highly imperiled wildcats, the ocelot and jaguarundi.

Kayakers at the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon on the Rio Grande River, Big Bend National Park in Texas.
Photo by Eric Leonard, courtesy National Park Service.

The preserve also serves as a living laboratory for university students and researchers from various parts of the country who spend periods of time living on the property while they study its unusual birds and amphibians. Despite repeated requests to the DHS for information about access and safety issues that will arise once the fence is built, Conservancy staff have not received a response.

"The financial offer we received from the federal government is shortsighted and only takes into account the footprint of the border fence itself," said Laura Huffman, the Conservancy's Texas state director. "It doesn't begin to make up for our inability to manage the more than 700 acres of our preserve that lie between the proposed fence and the Mexican border."

Science makes clear that the wall will impede the movement of animals such as ocelots, jaguars, and

jaguarundis through the borderlands. The wall—yet another "agent of fragmentation"—will adversely impact the genetic viability of wild cats such as ocelots, which are thought to number fewer than 100 in south Texas. As Fritz Knopf, Roy Johnson, and other authors conclude in their paper *Conservation of Riparian Ecosystems*, "Vertebrate conservation within riparian ecosystems, especially, needs to be based upon the perspective of whether local management programs create or sever dispersal corridors."

The wall's opponents fear that its construction will serve to isolate wide-ranging and John□species in nonviable habitat islands. As Michael Soule Terborgh have written, "Connectivity is not just another goal of conservation: it is the natural state of things." Furthermore, owing to the impacts of global warming, the preservation of migration corridors is critical so that species can adapt to changing climatic conditions.

There is also an environmental justice aspect to the wall's construction. The *Texas Observer* reported that in south Texas, the wall will end abruptly at Sharyland Plantation, a 6,000-acre gated golf community owned by Dallas billionaire Ray L. Hunt, a close friend of George W. Bush, who donated $35 million to help build Bush's presidential library.

As of February 2009, 601 miles of the 845-mile wall have been completed at a cost ranging from $200,000 to $15 million per mile. DHS has admitted—albeit obliquely—that its waiver of nearly 40 laws to expedite construction has come at a price to the environment. DHS has since given $90 million to the U.S. Department of the Interior to restore wildlife habitat and cultural sites damaged by construction and maintenance.

Property owners who've resisted the construction of the wall across their property have found themselves subjected to condemnation lawsuits filed by the U.S. Government. The terms and conditions of these legal rulings are onerous: the government need only pay for the land on which the barrier sits, regardless of how much property winds up inaccessible or uninhabitable. Eloisa Tamez, for example, is a 72-year-old woman who still lives on a portion of the 12,000 acres her ancestors received in a Spanish land grant. In the 1930s, the federal government condemned more than half her holdings to build levees—she still has not received compensation.

New border fence and access road west of Nogales, Arizona.
Photo courtesy Department of Management Information Systems, University of Arizona.

In August 2007, a U.S. Border Patrol agent told Tamez her land was in the path of the proposed wall

and that she needed to sign a release form so engineers could survey her land. She refused to sign the paperwork, her courage inspiring 300 other Texan property owners—political progressives and property rights advocates alike—to do the same. Tamez received less than $14,000 for the wall that now bisects her property. Similarly, on Leonard and Debbie Loop's 1,000-acre farm, 800 of its acres will be exiled to the "Mexican" side of the wall.

During his February 21, 2008 debate with Hillary Clinton, candidate Barack Obama stated that the wall was ineffective and counter-productive. He later pledged to evaluate whether or not to continue the wall's construction in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Opponents of the wall had hoped that once President Barack Obama took office, plans to build fencing along the Rio Grande Valley's wildlife corridor would be suspended. However, an Obama spokesperson recently told *TIME* magazine that the president supports the fence "as long as it is one part of a larger strategy on border security that includes more boots on the ground and increased use of technology."

In January 2009, the government allocated an additional $50 million for wildlife mitigation. According to Rick Schultz, the U.S. Department of the Interior's national borderland coordinator, it will likely be spent in the lower Rio Grande Valley to restore or recreate the habitats of native species. But there's a catch: the mitigation efforts must compensate for the impacts to resources "managed, protected, or under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior," according to federal documents. That stipulation excludes Brownsville area sites that are privately owned, such as Sabal Palm and Southmost Preserve.

On July 8, 2009, the Senate adopted an amendment proposed by Senator Jim DeMint (R - S.C.) that requires the completion of 700 miles of fencing along the Southwest border. The amendment passed by a 54-to-44 roll call vote. The amendment was added to the 2010 Homeland Security spending bill and requires the completion of the fence by the end of the 2010 calendar year.

The Southmost Preserve in south Texas, home to sabal palms and rare animal species, is threatened by the border fence.
Photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy.

Chicana poet and activist a□Gloria Anzaldu characterized the U.S.-Mexico borderland as "*una herida abierta*"—an open wound. Clearly, the issues associated with our borderlands are murky, tangled, complex. Illegal immigration is an issue that needs a solution. The question is: Are we seeking appropriate, valid solutions—ones that minimize impacts to irreplaceable natural and cultural resources? As former Arizona governor and current DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano has stated, "The voters of my state understand that building a fence is not a solution. Indeed, what I'm fond of saying is, you show me a 12-foot fence

and I'll show you a 13-foot ladder."

What are taxpayers to make of a project initially estimated to cost $49 billion, and plagued with huge cost overruns, for which one of its chief proponents, former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, admitted in 2007, "The idea that we are going to solve the problem by simply building a fence is undercut by the fact that yesterday we discovered a tunnel. So the idea that fencing alone is a solution I think is overly simplistic."

History is full of examples where ideology trumped a more carefully considered course of action… and reason. Clues—metaphorical breadcrumbs left by our forefathers to help us find the way—are there for those who wish to follow the advice of Socrates "to lead an examined life." Opponents of the wall near Lukeville, Arizona, were assured that it would not allow ponding on either side of the border because the drainage crossing grates "met hydraulic modeling requirements." And yet the wall failed catastrophically during its first rainy season. Does this not underscore the need for fresh models, literally and figuratively?

Some politicians and resource managers exercise humility, acknowledging that not all sociopolitical problems have technological solutions. As long-time borderland resident Elizabeth Garcia says, "We have coexisted for so many years together. *La frontera* [the border] is both sides of the river, not one side or the other."

For decades, south Texas wildlife proponents have worked to turn fragmented habitat at sites that include the Sabal Palm Audubon Center, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge, and the Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve into an interconnected whole by maintaining wildlife corridors between the sites. The construction of the wall is a giant leap backwards, severing the string of pearls— and their attendant biodiversity.

Arroyo at Franklin Mountain State park, just north of El Paso, Texas.
Photo Simmons Buntin.

The future looks increasingly murky. Border wall stadium-style floodlights are disorienting the migration of birds, bats, and butterflies. Are we bequeathing a world where our offspring will be able to see jaguars and ocelots—if only for an instant in the shadows of dense cover? Will beaver continue to ply the waters of the Southwest, their dams slowing the awesome force of runoff from mid-summer thunderstorms? Are we up to the challenge of water conservation and reuse—so that trout, beaver, and all aquatic organisms can find refuge during times of drought?

This false separation—that the fate of the human and non-human worlds are not intertwined—has proved our undoing. Aldo Leopold and Gloria a both characterize the Southwest borderlands as a region of Anzaldu wounds. That wildlife biologist and social activist share similar assessments is a clear statement that any proposed solutions to the ills of the borderlands must be inclusive. Solutions must spring from an interdisciplinary framework that sees the human-wildlife-landscape links for what they truly are: inseparable and inviolate.

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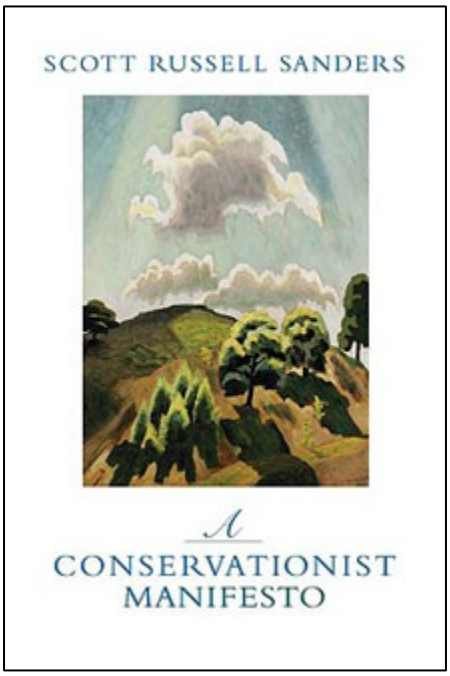
Tom Leskiw recently retired from a career as a hydrologic/biologic technician for Six Rivers National Forest in northwestern California. His essays have appeared in *Birding*, *NILAS, Watershed*, *Pilgrimage*, *This Watery World: Humans and the Sea,* and elsewhere. New work is forthcoming in *The LBJ: Avian Life, Literary Arts.*

Review: A Certain Harmony, a Definitive Hope

Simmons B. Buntin reviews *A Conservationist Manifesto* by Scott Russell Sanders



In his preface to *A Conservationist Manifesto* (Indiana University Press), Scott Russell Sanders writes, "As an antidote to this culture of consumption, extravagance, and waste that dominates America today, we need to imagine a culture of conservation." *A Conservationist Manifesto* is about that imagining, a book that sets out to map "the practical, ecological, and ethical grounds for a conservation ethic" by arguing—in a series of 15 eloquently linked essays—that the practice of conservation is both a personal and a public virtue, that the fate of our built and natural communities, in all their integrated constructs, ultimately comes down to each of us, and to all of us.

It is impossible to consider a "conservation ethic" without drawing a parallel to Aldo Leopold and his classic, *A Sand County Almanac* (and essays on conservation from *Round River*). And let me say from the get-go that *A Conservationist Manifesto* is as necessary, beautifully written, and important as *A Sand County Almanac*. It may not be as groundbreaking as Leopold's collection of essays, perhaps, but it is just as essential.

The single (but not overwhelming) criticism I've read of *Manifesto* is that its content is not fundamentally new. But Sanders is not after the fundamentally new in a literary context. Rather, he's after a fundamental shift in the way we—that is, predominantly Americans—coexist on the planet. It is about speaking to readers as more than mere consumers, which is often how we act, but as conservationists. "The book does not set out to reinvent ecology, conservation, or the land ethic," he told me recently. "It sets out to articulate those fundamental ideas and values in fresh ways, not only for the audience that is already concerned about the state of the planet, but for the larger audience that is either oblivious of or hostile to such thinking." Sanders' book is a finely crafted manifesto for getting from here to there, as Leopold's classic is a manifesto for understanding the earth and so subscribing to a land ethic.

"Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land," writes Leopold in *Round River*. "By land is meant all of the things on, over, or in the earth. Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left." How, then, can we create and sustain an ethic of harmony with the land?

"By building arks," replies Sanders in his first essay. "The question," he says, "is not whether we

should use the earth, but to what degree and to what end." Like Leopold, Sanders understands that harmony is a delicate yet critical balance between humans and the land, between the land and our machines—technical, emotional, and otherwise. We cannot pretend that humans are not a part of nature, nor can we assign absolute dominion over nature to humans.

The religious reference is deliberate, and also given Sanders' oft-moderate, sometimes-evangelical audience, important. Much of *A Conservationist Manifesto*, in fact, seems aimed directly at conservative Christians—the parallels of "conservative" and "conservationist" duly noted and further explored in the book.

Which brings us back to the ark: its symbolic gathering and restoring. In an age of growing despair, Sanders' important body of community- and place-based nonfiction provides hope, and *A Conservationist Manifesto* likewise delivers: "Building an ark when the floodwaters are rising is not an act of despair; it's an act of hope. To build an ark is to create a space within which life in its abundance may continue."

Hope can be a fleeting bird, but perhaps no one knows that feathery species better than Sanders, whose *Hunting for Hope* itself is a manifesto for our time of global environmental threats, especially for parents and teachers. But hope itself is not enough. Working toward a more environmentally equitable future will take work, from each of us. And it won't be easy, as substantial change rarely is.

Near the end of *A Conservationist Manifesto*—following a series of essays that ebb and flow, as luring and refreshing as lapping water over a cool morning beach—Sanders presents his 40-point manifesto, a culmination not just of the book's previous essays, and not even of Sanders' life spent in writing about and researching place-based community, but of a call for a more responsible existence with the land from before the days of Henry David Thoreau. It begins, "The work of conservation is inspired by wonder, gratitude, reason, and love," and ends, echoing Leopold, "Conservation arises from the perennial human desire to dwell in harmony with our neighbors—those that creep and fly, those that swim and soar, those that sway on roots, as well as those that walk about on two legs."

There and in between is a grounded philosophy of hope that blooms with Sanders' welcome wisdom. For example, No. 31: "We cannot all be native to the places where we live, yet we can all aspire to become true inhabitants. Becoming an inhabitant means paying close attention to one's home ground, learning its ways and its needs, and taking responsibility for its welfare."

But what about that segment of society that doesn't believe in hope? Or, more fairly, doesn't believe that global climate change, the rapid rate of global species extinction, worldwide poverty and starvation, and the rapid loss of indigenous cultures and languages much matter? How do we get a book like this into their hands, and how do we get them to read it?

Those are the questions I had in my mind before a recent family reunion, when I would be visiting

with my conservative father, brothers, and cousin. All evangelical Christian, or close to it, all staunchly Republican, and most career-fed through the military, these are not the like-minded liberal environmentalists I usually run with! Which is not to say we do not get along; we just don't talk politics.

Because I had just finished reading *A Conservationist Manifesto* two days before the reunion, it occurred to me that I should purchase four copies of the book for my conservative family members. I had hopes both of helping them understand my perspective—I nodded my head in agreement with *Manifesto* so much I felt like a bobblehead doll—and, more importantly, in guiding them toward their own conservation ethic and harmony with the land.

So I called my local independent bookshop. "No, haven't heard of that one but we can order it," the owner said. That was the response echoed across every bookstore in Tucson, from the university bookstore to the large chain stores like Barnes & Noble. Not one bookseller in Tucson had *A Conservationist Manifesto* in stock.

I was blown away. Scott Russell Sanders' latest book not in stock?! How could this be?

So I asked Scott, who I met just over a year ago at the Wildbranch Writing Workshop in Vermont. "I'm not surprised," he said as we gathered for lunch in Prescott, Arizona. He was in town for an Aldo Leopold conference, and I couldn't pass up the opportunity to drive north a couple hours to visit him.

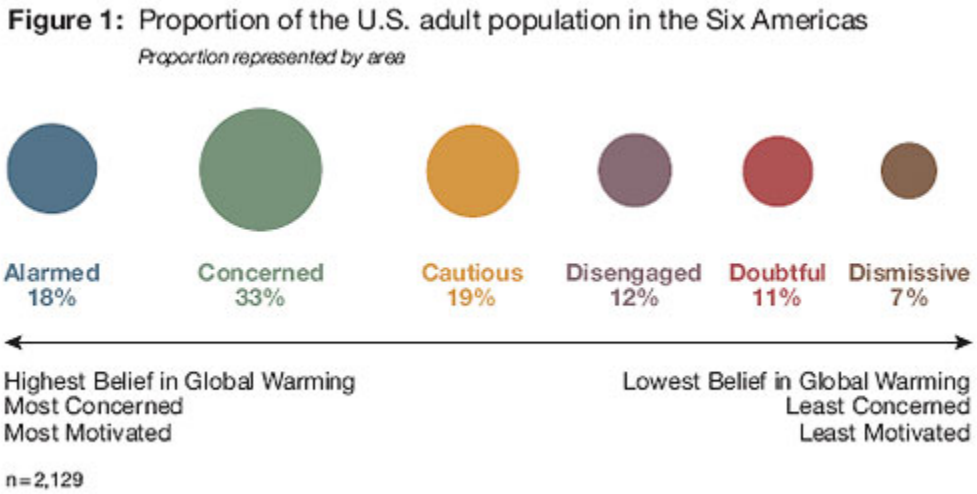
Not surprised? I thought it was a downright crime. "The book has not received the reception I was hoping for," he said, noting that it had so far been included in only a few reviews, even in the environmental literature.

Certainly *Manifesto's* lack of exposure isn't due to the quality of writing. But, in a way, it is due to its content, for the book is about the necessary change from consumer to conservationist. In our consumer-based society, that's a tall order, apparently. The challenge, of course, lies beyond one of marketing (i.e., How can we market this book to conservative evangelicals who otherwise aren't interested? Or: If I give the book to my father and brothers and cousin, will they read it?). The challenge is one, it seems, of changing ideologies, and that's no small task for a singularly important book like *A Conservationist Manifesto* or for a whole segment of society that strongly believes in the need for change, and is willing to work for it.

Change is an issue that many environmental advocates contemplate regularly. *Hawk & Handsaw* editor Kathryn Miles, who recently published an essay by Scott Russell Sanders in the new series subtitled *The Journal of Creative Sustainability*, tuned me into an audience segmentation analysis titled *Global Warming's Six Americas 2009* when I mentioned my conservation with Scott.

The comprehensive report published by the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University identifies and analyzes "six unique audiences within the American public that each respond to [the] issue [of global climate change] in a different way. It is based upon an extensive nationally representative survey of American adults conducted in the fall of 2008."

The groups, identified in the graphic below, range from "Alarmed" to "Dismissive." It notes that "the American public does not respond to climate change with a single voice—there are many different groups that each respond to this issue in different ways. Constructively engaging each of these groups in climate change solutions will therefore require tailored approaches."



So, how do we communicate to the 40 percent of the American population that is "Disengaged," "Doubtful," and "Dismissive," the latter into which my father, brothers, and cousin most likely fall? The analysis of *Global Warming's Six Americas 2009* provides some insight but, of course, no definitive answers. The analysis of "Trust in Information Sources," for example, reports that those considered "Doubtful" are most likely to trust their own family and friends (63 percent, though only nine percent strongly trust them) and scientists (61 percent, but only five percent strongly trust them). Political representatives of their own party follow; in this case, John McCain was trusted by 46 percent of the Doubters, whereas Al Gore (87 percent) and Barack Obama (86 percent) were strongly distrusted—as were the mainstream news media (84 percent) and environmental groups (78 percent) as sources of information about global warming.

The Dismissive are an even more paradoxical bunch, many believing they are very well informed and simply choosing not to believe in global warming. According to the analysis, "The Dismissive strongly distrust most sources of information on global warming." They most trust family and friends (67 percent, 14 percent strongly trusted, though another 14 percent strongly distrusting family and friends). And they distrust Gore, Obama, mainstream media, and environmental organizations even more strongly than the Doubters.

One conclusion must be that confronting this segment through the mainstream media, elected Democrats, and environmental organizations may in fact work against the message. Family and friends make the biggest difference; that and FOX News, Bill O'Reilly, and Rush Limbaugh. Given my odds, it looks like I better send those books, after all—even if I do fall into the "strongly distrusted" family member role. Maybe my status can change for the better?

Keep the faith, says Sanders; hope must prevail. He concludes *A Conservationist Manifesto* with the

essay-letter titled “For the Children.” In it, he writes:

> Because of the way my generation and those that preceded us have acted, Earth has already suffered worrisome losses—forests cut down, swamps drained, topsoil washed away, animals and plants driven to extinction, clean rivers turned foul, the very atmosphere unsettled. I can’t write you this letter without acknowledging these losses, for I wish to be honest with you about my fears as well as my hopes. But I must also tell you that I believe we can change our ways, we can choose to do less harm, we can take better care of the soils and waters and air, we can make more room for all the creatures who breathe. And we are far more likely to do so if we think about the many children who will come after us, as I think about you.

And ultimately, it seems, that must be the approach: thinking about the children who come after us, beginning with those around us, with our own children and the children of our place—regardless of ideology. Sanders’ *Manifesto*—encouraging people to get out and know their place, to foster an ecological education for their children, to promote understanding and hope, to be respectful of our natural and cultural graces—resounds with harmony. And balance is sorely what we need.

He reminds us in the lovely essay “Stillness” that balance is a constant and deliberate pursuit: “This everyday realm is deep and vast and subtle enough for me; I wish to live here with full awareness. There are wonders enough in rivers and hills, in libraries and laboratories and museums, in alphabets and birds, to reward a lifetime of seeking.”

Reward your lifetime of seeking by reading *A Conservationist Manifesto*, then sharing it with your children, your neighbor, your dismissive brother or cousin. Then we may all find a certain harmony, a definitive hope.

A Conservationist Manifesto

By Scott Russell Sanders

Indiana University Press
2009
238 pages
ISBN 978-0-253-22080-6

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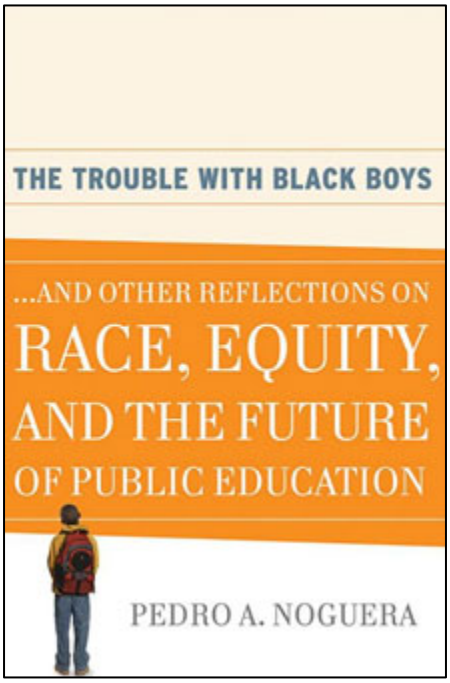
Review: Walking the Perimeter

Heather Killelea McEntarfer reviews *The Trouble with Black Boys and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education* by Pedro A. Noguera



True story: the parents of a teenage boy are separating. The boy's father tells his son that he wants to kill himself; he instructs the boy to remove the family's gun from the home. The boy, who earlier that summer had helped stanch the blood from his grandmother's wrists after *she* tried to commit suicide, does as he's told. He's going to school, so that's where he takes the gun. He's rattled, so he shows the gun to a friend and shares the story.

And next thing you know, he's at an expulsion hearing, sharing the story with his principal and his school board. Now, taking a gun to school is a serious offense. But the board members hear the story. They learn of the boy's excellent academic record and how his teachers describe him as "respectful, honest, hardworking, etc." They ask how he would handle the situation differently if it happened again. He is not sure; perhaps he'd hide the gun in the bushes in front of his home.

The board members lecture him on gun safety. Then, they expel him. "We need to send a clear message that guns on campus will not be tolerated," his principal says.

That's the outcome many post-Columbine readers would expect—and yet in his book, *The Trouble with Black Boys and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*, Pedro A. Noguera argues convincingly that it's also indicative of the "gulf in experience" between many poor and minority students and their middle-class educators. A consultant for the boy's school at the time, Noguera was in the room at that expulsion hearing. Where, he wondered, was any sense of empathy for a boy and his father sharing intimate details from their lives? Where was any understanding that the boy had at least faced a difficult situation? How, Noguera wanted to ask the board members, would *you* have handled the situation in his shoes? And to what degree did the desire to "send a clear message" trump the specifics of one boy's case—before that boy was thrown out of school for good?

Noguera performs a sort of close reading on this story and others that he presents throughout his book, a collection of articles published in academic journals between 2001 and 2007. Throughout the book, he calls for educators to bridge that gulf, to understand the lives of poor and minority students and to respond with more empathy to their needs. In several articles on student discipline, for

example, he acknowledges the very real need for safety, but offers examples of schools where teachers "question the tendency to punish through exclusion and humiliation and… see themselves as advocates of children, not as wardens and prison guards." In one school, a local grandmother served as a monitor, admonishing out-of-line students the way grandmothers do. This was "the only junior high school in the [Oakland Unified School District] where no weapons were confiscated from students."

With a background as a professor, urban sociologist, and school consultant, Noguera draws from a deep well of experience with schools. He culls stories from that experience and from his own life as black man and father to two sons, then weaves those stories with educational research, theory, and history. The style adds relevance and specificity to his arguments and lends the book easily to a wide readership. From the boy's story described above, Noguera leaps into a Foucauldian discussion of discipline and power and then into a historical analysis of why American public schools have "traditionally prioritized maintaining order and control over students, as opposed to creating humane environments for learning." (His answers: partly to "Americanize" immigrant children, partly to prepare workers for an industrial economy, and partly to maintain the sanity of teachers who taught upwards of 60 students at a time.) Throughout, Noguera avoids the dense education-ese that can typify the genre.

While he explores the challenges that black male students face, Noguera also rejects the notion that they are "helpless victims." In the title essay, he describes the problems facing black men, including the highest rates of suicide and incarceration and the only declining life expectancy among any group in the U.S. Then he explores the roots of those problems in boyhood: the forces that work against the success of black boys and the behaviors some adopt in response. "There is no doubt that there are some legitimate reasons for young black males to be angry," Noguera writes. "Yet it is also clear that this thinly-veiled rage and readiness for conflict can be self-defeating and harmful to their well-being." Noguera calls for further research on youth culture and identity, as well as on the students who *do* succeed. And all the while, he writes, we must work to change the conditions that cause their anger in the first place. About black students in our worst urban schools, Noguera writes, "With the rewards of education largely unavailable to them, we must realistically ask ourselves why we would expect that students would comply with the rules and adhere to school expectations."

That approach illustrates a strength of Noguera's book: the nuance with which he approaches the complex problems he takes on. The trouble with black boys is complicated, and the answers don't lie in one theoretical camp or another, but in the range of experiences that shape their lives and choices. Noguera approaches other topics with the same nuance. With essays divided into three sections *(The Student Experience*, *The Search for Equity*, and *The Schools We Need*), he addresses the needs of Latino students, critiques No Child Left Behind, and argues that poor schools need not only educational reforms, but political reforms that place information and power in the hands of poor families. He doesn't pretend change is easy to create, but he offers concrete suggestions on how to start.

Those suggestions tend to be directed toward people acting on the local level: parents, teachers, and administrators, rather than those in positions to make systemic changes (i.e., reallocating funding or desegregating schools). As an educational researcher myself, I admit that I tend to be drawn toward

the latter. But Noguera's suggestions are specific and, as he notes, "politically feasible" (p. 187). It seems fair to count that last bit an advantage. What's more, the essays cover an impressive range of issues. They feel as if they've been written by a man who's walked the perimeter of American education, peered from this angle and from that, and offered solutions from each of several perspectives. The trouble with black boys, it turns out, can often be traced back to the trouble with American *schools*, and of those, Noguera offers an insightful and engaging analysis.

The Trouble with Black Boys and Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education

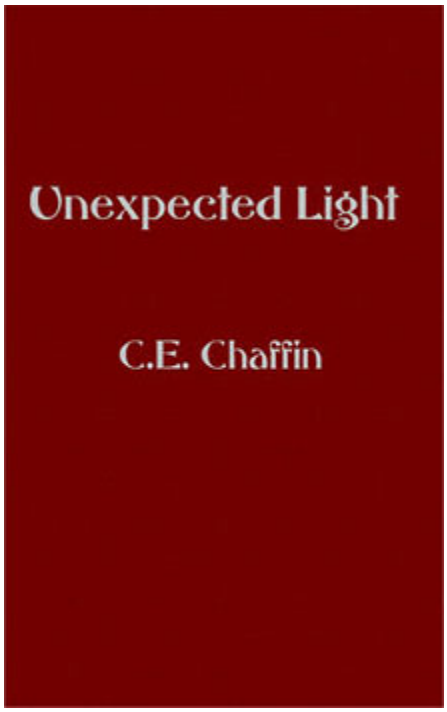
By Pedro A. Noguera

Jossey-Bass
2009
368 pages
ISBN 978-0470452080

Heather Killelea McEntarfer is a graduate student in English education at SUNY Buffalo and has taught college-level writing at Niagara University and the University of Pittsburgh. Holding an MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of Pittsburgh, she has contributed to *Permafrost*, *Terrain.org*, and *River Teeth*.

Review: Uncertain Delights

Kim Barke reviews *Unexpected Light*, poems by C. E. Chaffin



For C. E. Chaffin, it seems, common perceptions often trigger philosophical or political digressions. His lyrical poems tend toward a homiletic style, relying heavily on rhetorical questions and aphoristic judgment. For example, the poem "Chico Creek" ponders the point in space where the eye lands on the creek, ending with, "How can we commit self-pity without laughing?" One of the most compelling poems in this collection, "Details," describes experiences we all share, such as forgetting overdue books and extra cell phone charges, and sums it up as "Capitalism depends on forgetfulness." The rhetorical question in this case is, "Do you really have the energy?"

Of course poems can and have been used successfully to illuminate society regarding moral issues, but it is often the case that the political attempts strain the art in a poem. Edna St. Vincent Millay learned this lesson the hard way, when she attempted to write about the horrors of WWII and discovered that "propaganda was never good art; it wasn't even good propaganda." She felt that the work of a poet is to write poetry and "that is not the same thing as a reporter, an agitator, or a reformer."

What then does it take to write poetry? Helen Vendler says in an essay in the *New York Review of Books* that the function of poetry is "to clothe common perceptions in striking language, not to enunciate striking perceptions." Chaffin does have many moments rich with such striking language. His poem "Queen Melancholy" dazzles with these lines:

She reassures us
in a smoky cocktail voice,
making unendurable pain
immune to reason's solace.
She will choke you
with a noose of accusations
woven from strictest honesty.

Chaffin is a retired psychiatrist and therefore has the ability to write about states of mental illness in uncanny ways. It is these poems the reader will find most compelling. "Split" evokes the idea of schizophrenia, or at least auditory hallucinations, and "Off Lithium" is where he really excelled. In this poem, the bi-polar patient is the speaker:

Drank a twelve-pack and didn't feel it,
slept three hours and woke refreshed
with the marvelous idea of making shoes
with living grass for insoles…
I'm sure a fresh idea
could bust that monopoly I gotta get
a patent lawyer soon.

Here, the inner life of a bipolar patient in a manic state is described in a way that only someone who has spent his life working with patients like this could. The language and images are fresh and vivid—"living grass for insoles"—and nowhere in this poem does he judge.

Poetry and psychiatry rarely meet, and yet the novelty of that marriage is not the reason that Chaffin's book is so engaging. It is his writing, when he's not in a narrative or expounding mood—"if my blood has been desiccated and ground to red pepper, remember me on your pizza"—which offers the momentum to carry the reader through this decade-long collection that spans an eclectic mix of subject matter, from clinical anxiety to the Chinese New Year in L.A.

Unexpected Light: Poems

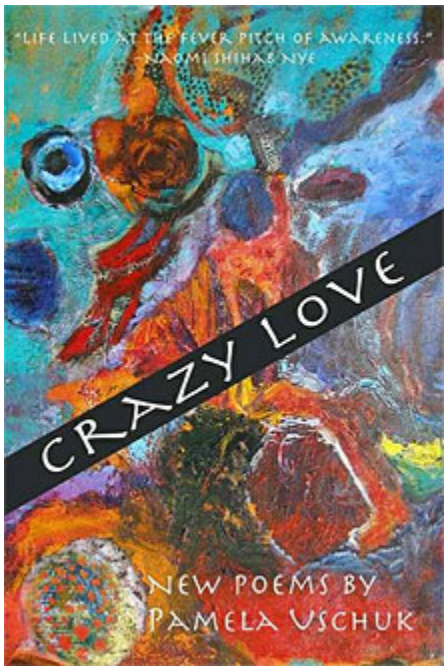
By C. E. Chaffin

Diminuendo Press
2009
174 pages
ISBN 978-0982135273

Kim Barke was born and raised in New York. She earned a PhD in pharmacology and toxicology, and an MFA in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared in *The Chronogram, Ducts.org*, and *CommonDreams.org*. Her first book of poems, *What the Tide Brings*, was published in 2008.

Review: *Crazy for Crazy Love*

Terrain.org reviews *Crazy Love*, new poems by Pamela Uschuk



In the beginning to his song "Peace, Love & Understanding," Elvis Costello croons, "As I walk through this wicked world searchin' for light in this darkness of insanity, I ask myself, is all hope lost? Is there only pain and hatred, and misery?" Then the chorus booms: "What's so funny 'bout peace, love, and understanding…?" It's one of my favorite songs, even if it makes me want to cry into an early morning beer.

For Pamela Uschuk and her newest book, *Crazy Love: New Poems* (Wings Press), peace, love, and understanding are less funny than they are crazy. And perhaps more importantly, while they may involve pain and the wickedness of the world, they are not despairing, nor dark and dreary. Rather, Uschuk's poems cut into the world, and so the reader, with a driving combination of narrative and lyrical verse that makes you want to sing of the world's light despite the darkness. There's no time, nor any longer the desire, to rest your head on your pint glass and slough away the day.

Take, for example, the opening to the poem "Planting Tigritas After Snow in April:"

> Like a Lear jet out of control, wind shears,
> slicing from Silverton ice fields, rattles
> even indignant ravens from
> the frigid chandelier of the blue spruce.

You don't have to know the brute force of Colorado's high-country winds to feel them here, and feeling is what Uschuk's poems are all about. But how are they crazy? Are they mad, delirious perhaps? Sometimes they are:

> What they will say of me after my death—
> she hid her heart in silver foil,
> buried it in a raven's eye,
> blindness beat and beat
> on black wings for love,
> all ways for love.
>
> — from "Dakini"

What appears at first as madness runs, however, deeper, and truer, as passion: passion for life and love and the curiosities—of the flesh, the heart, the mind—that come from living in and exploring any place. Colorado, the setting of many of these poems, can drive you crazy in its beauty, harshness, and organic paradoxes. What it takes to discover the essence of the place, though, is the ability to fully explore it, and *Crazy Love* is, in part, Uschuk's exploration of Colorado and the other places she has lived and visited—and just as importantly the people she has lived with, and lived for.

The collection of 44 poems is divided into four sections—*Crazy Love, Hit and Run, We Thought No One Could See Us, Fighting the Cold*—each named for a poem in its section. But each of the title poems is not necessarily the definitive poem. Rather, the poems as a whole build intricately and sometimes bracingly upon each other so that each section stands, quite compellingly, on its own. And yet they not only work but, thankfully, spire upwards together so that the book itself is a prize like each of the poem-treasures held within.

Perhaps "Peeling the Kitchen," the closing poem to the book's first section, best exemplifies the completeness and yet integrated nature of each section. Uschuk writes, "Beneath everything, the harsh ash-smeared / plaster is the logic that holds." And then she ends:

> Perhaps, this simple work is poetry, to strip
> chaotic layers revealing the buried patterns
> of our stories, charting
> love's labyrinth, the way betrayal,
> faith and fear spin us
> in their webs, awful and light.

It's a lovely metaphor for the process of stripping down the kitchen, but also a fitting parallel to the section and indeed the book itself.

Or take the opening lines to "Geometry Lesson," from the book's second section:

> Just as the universe shifts to sketch
> a new map of stars from the heart
> of gasses bent around particles zapped
> from black holes that would destroy them
> so, falling in love, we invent lips
> on the exact curve of the neck
> most vulnerable to an axe handle blow,
> lips unable to diagram a triangle of lies.

Love—more specifically the passionate feeling of love—is the common element here. And while our Poetry 101 courses may have taught us never to use the word "love" in a poem—or at least mine did—I've read few poetry books that use the term as elegantly and infectiously as *Crazy Love*. These are not your standard love poems, no. But they are poems of truth, and love may be that highest of aspirations.

But let us not kid ourselves that love is always tidy, or beautiful, or even passionate. Moving through

Crazy Love, that harsh Colorado wind of the book's beginning makes its way, in one chilling way or another, into North Carolina ghost stories and rare high desert fog and, in the vivid poem "Saving the Cormorant on Albemarle Sound" into a wild canoe-born struggle to save a "snarled bird" from the rising tide:

> Holding the netted now aloft, you hack
> strand by strand, and with each slash
> the cormorant thrashes, tangling deeper in the gill net
> until we all assume an unnatural calm.

In reading Uschuk's poems [you can read three of her newest poems in this issue of *Terrain.org*], the narrative structure and length, not to mention stunning imagery and language, make it easy to compare her to poets like Elizabeth Bishop. It's a fair comparison. But I've read Bishop in-depth recently again, and wasn't as drawn to her poems this go-around as I was when I first read them, or even re-read them. Why? Because Bishop's poems seem to lack much of what I find in Uschuk's poetry: not just passion, but a searing passion mixed, on occasion, with politics and always driven by the sweet ambition of unconditional love.

Perhaps that's why this book is titled *Crazy Love*—its poems thrum with voice, image, and a constant pursuit of love as beauty, as truth. Love is, the final poem concludes in its title, like "Flying Through Thunder:"

> Leaping from the swing's apogee, what
> I savored most was fear's pure torch
> scalding my body as it arced, suspended
> before the plunge, that moment
> gravity kicked in, and I knew
> what real death would feel like,
> hanging a long breath in space
> astonished at the constellation of my life
> coming into exquisite focus—family,
> friends, ambition, anger, even love—before everything
> like a billowing parachute
> dropped away.

Not even Elvis Costello's rich lyrics and rhythm bring such clarity. *Crazy Love* is a superb collection of poems—the most rewarding I've read in quite some time. Call me crazy for *Crazy Love*. I wager you'll be crazy for this collection, too.

Crazy Love: New Poems

By Pamela Uschuk

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