



# Ai

m a g a z i n e

issue 16. spring 2022

## **IN THIS ISSUE**

Keith Hamilton Cobb

Mark Yale Harris

Mark Hurtubise

+ many more

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# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## John Allen

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



## Alan Bern

Retired children's librarian Alan Bern is an exhibited and published photographer with awards for his poems and stories. Alan is also a performer with dancer/composer Lucinda Weaver as PACES (dance & poetry it to the space with musicians from Composing Together). Find Lines & Faces, his illustrated broadside press with artist/printer Robert Woods, at [linesandfaces.com](http://linesandfaces.com)



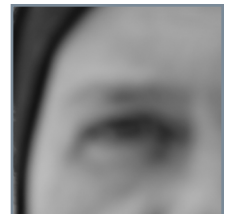
## Oisín Breen

Irish poet, academic, and financial journalist, Oisín Breen's debut book of poetry, *Flowers, All Sorts in Blossom, Figs, Berries, and Fruits Forgotten* was released in March of 2020. Breen is widely published, including in *About Place*, *Northern Gravy*, *The Blue Nib*, *Books Ireland*, *The Seattle Star*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *The Bosphorus Review of Books*, *In Parentheses*, and *The Madrigal*.



## Gaylord Brewer

Gaylord Brewer is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded and for 20+ years edited the journal *Poems & Plays*. The most recent of his 16 books of poetry, fiction, criticism, and cookery are two collections of poems, *The Feral Condition* (Negative Capability, 2018) and *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020).



## Patrick Cahill

Patrick Cahill co-founded and edited *Ambush Review*. He received his Ph.D. in History of Consciousness at UCSC. His poetry twice received the Central Coast Writers Award. His work has appeared in *Otoliths*, *Forgotten*, *Volt*, *Aji*, *Into The Void*, *riverbabble*, *The Other Side of Violet*, *Permafrost Magazine*, *Subprimal Poetry Art*, *Angry Old Man*, and *Doorknobs & Bodypaint*, among others.



# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## Melca Castellanos de ArKell

Melca Castellanos de Arkell an indigenous woman of color originally from Guatemala. She is a refugee, a writer, a mother, a spouse, a friend.



## Nancy Christopherson

Nancy Christopherson's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, *CIRQUE*, *Free State Review*, *Hole-in-the-Head Review*, *Kosmos Quarterly Spring Gallery of Poets*, *Molecule Tiny Lit Mag*, *Raven Chronicles*, *The Cape Rock*, *Willawaw Journal*, and *VoiceCatcher*, among others. Author of *The Leaf*, she lives and writes in eastern Oregon. Visit <https://www.nancychristophersonpoetry.com>.



## Geraldine Connolly

Geraldine Connolly is the author of four poetry collections including *Province of Fire* and *Aileron*. She has taught at the Writers Center in Maryland, Chautauqua Institution and University of Arizona Poetry Center and received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Breadloaf Writers Conference and the Cafritz Foundation. She lives in Tucson, Arizona. [www.geraldineconnolly.com](http://www.geraldineconnolly.com)



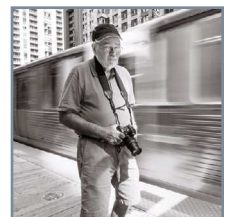
## Lucia Coppola

Lucia Coppola is an ESL teacher who is originally from New York. She has a professional background in dance and body techniques. Her writing is largely informed by nature and traditional storytelling. Some of her work has been read on the radio and published with online and print literary journals.



## William Crawford

Crawdaddy is a prolific itinerant photographer based in North Carolina. He shoots the trite, trivial, and mundane in hopes of elevating his subjects to eye candy. See -bcraw44 on Instagram.

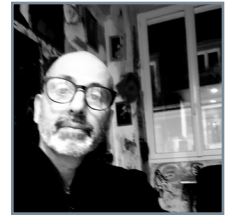


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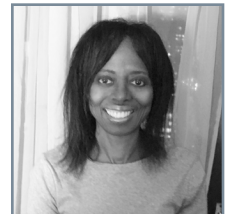
## Ivan de Monbrison

Ivan de Monbrison is a poet, writer and artist living in Paris, born in 1969. He has autistic and schizophrenic tendencies that he has been trying to cope with through art. His writing and art reflect the decadence of today's society, centered on its own vacuity and lack of purpose. He has been published in literary magazines globally.



## Leslie Dianne

Leslie Dianne is a poet, novelist, screenwriter, playwright and performer. Her work has been acclaimed internationally at the Harrogate Fringe Festival in Great Britain, The International Arts Festival in Tuscany, Italy and at La Mama in New York City. Her poems appear in *Kairos Ghost City Review*, *In Parentheses* and elsewhere.



## David Dixon

David Dixon is a physician, poet, and musician who lives and practices in the foothills of North Carolina. His poetry has appeared in *Rock & Sling*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *FlyingSouth*, *Volney Road Review*, and elsewhere. His book of poetry *The Scattering of Saints* is forthcoming in Spring 2022.



## Kelly DuMar

Kelly DuMar is a Boston based poet, playwright and photographer who leads creative writing workshops in person and online. She has published three poetry chapbooks, and her poems are published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Thrush* and *Glassworks*. Kelly produces the monthly Open Mic for the *Journal of Expressive Writing*. Her website is [kellydumar.com](http://kellydumar.com)



## Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being *The Poet's Curse, A Miscellany* (The Poetry Box, 2019). Retired now, writing more poems and working more outside, he just noticed two Cooper's hawks staked out in the yard or rather above it, which explains the nerve-wracked chipmunks.





# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## Sara Fall

Sara Fall comes from the mountains and lives in a house tucked into the foothills of Colorado with her family. She teaches writing and has recently begun to flirt with Ai. Her most recent publications are in the *Sonder Review*, *trampset*, *Otis Nebula*, and *Club Plum* (forthcoming).



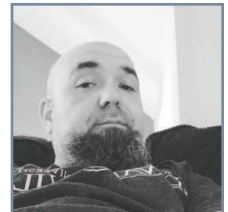
## Phyllis Green

Phyllis Green's art has appeared in *ArLiJo 123*, *Earth and Altar*, *ThereAfter*, *Superpresent Novus*, *New Plains Review*, *CERASUS*, *FERAL*, and soon in *little somethings press*, *CALYX*, and *I 70 Review*.



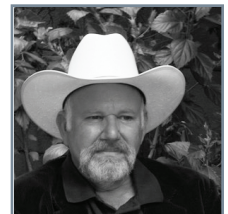
## Dan Grote

Dan Grote is an incarcerated writer who has turned decades of addiction and failure into a fairly respectable stack of published poetry and prose. Anyone wishing to reach out to him may do so by emailing- [thedangrote@gmail.com](mailto:thedangrote@gmail.com)



## Nels Hanson

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



## Paul Hostovsky

Paul Hostovsky's latest book of poems is *Mostly* (FutureCycle Press, 2021). His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and the *Writer's Almanac*. Website: [paulhostovsky.com](http://paulhostovsky.com)



# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## Edward Lee

Edward Lee's poetry, short stories, non-fiction and photography have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. He is currently working on two photography collections: *Lying Down With The Dead* and *Abstracted* (from which these photographs are taken). His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>



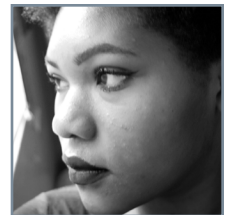
## Galen Leonhardy

Currently, Galen Leonhardy teaches English and humanities courses at a community college in Illinois. Leonhardy has essays included in five books in addition to publishing in a variety of periodicals, journals, and blogs, including *45th Parallel*, *Truthout*, *College Quarterly*, *New City (Chicago)*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the AAUP's *Academe Blog*.



## Aenea Little

Aenea is a preschool teacher and freelance writer living in St. Petersburg, Florida. With a concentration on poetry and prose, Aenea's subjects tend to be identity, mental health, race, and womanhood. Aenea's work can be found in *Neptune Poetry Magazine* along with her own zine publication *Visitors*.



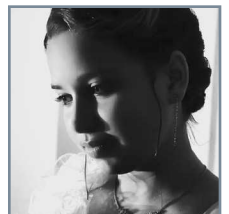
## Christopher Locke

Christopher Locke was born in New Hampshire and received his MFA from Goddard College. His poems have appeared in, among others, *The North American Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *Verse Daily*, *Southwest Review*, *The Literary Review*, *The Sun*, *West Branch*, *Rattle*, *32 Poems*, *Rhino*, *NPR's Morning Edition* and *Ireland's Radio One*.



## Elain Vilar Madruga

Elaine Vilar Madruga is a Cuban poet, fiction writer, and playwright. Her most recent book is the novel *Los Años del Silencio* (2019). Translated by Toshiya Kamei, Elaine's work has appeared in venues such as *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Star\*Line*, and *World Literature Today*.



# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## Joe Milosch

Joe Milosch's *Homeplate Was the Heart & Other Stories* was nominated for the American Book Award and the Eric Hoffer Best Small Press Publication award. He has multiple nominations for the Pushcart, and his books of poetry are *The Lost Pilgrimage Poems* and *Landscape of a Woman and a Hummingbird*.



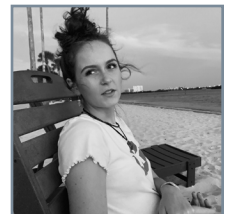
## Francis Opila

Francis Opila lives in the Pacific Northwest. His work, recreation, and spirit have taken him into the woods, wetlands, rivers, mountains, and deserts. His poems have appeared in *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Willawaw*, *Wayfinding*, in addition to other journals. He enjoys performing poetry, combining recitation and playing North American wooden flutes.



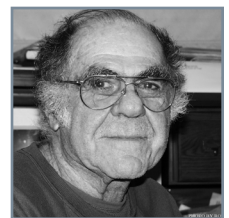
## Karly Page

Karly Page is a senior studying creative writing and literature at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. In 2021, she was nominated for Eckerd College's George P. E. Meese Writing Excellence Award. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.



## Simon Perchik

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



## Zack Rogow

Zack Rogow is the author, editor, or translator of more than twenty books or plays. His ninth poetry collection, *Irreverent Litanies*, was issued by Regal House. Rogow's play *Colette Uncensored* had its first reading at the Kennedy Center and ran in London, San Francisco, and Portland. His blog, *Advice for Writers*, has more than 250 posts. [www.zackrogow.com](http://www.zackrogow.com)





# Artists & Authors

*in this issue*

## David Anthony Sam

David Anthony Sam lives in Virginia with his wife, Linda. Six collections are in print. A seventh, *Writing the Significant Soil*, won Homebound Publications' 2021 Poetry Prize and is forthcoming in 2022. Sam teaches creative writing at Germanna Community College and serves as Regional VP of the Virginia Poetry Society. [www.davidanthonysam.com](http://www.davidanthonysam.com)



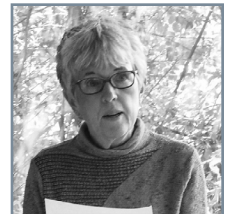
## Sonya Schneider

Sonya Schneider lives in Seattle, Washington, and is currently earning her MFA from Pacific University. Born and raised in San Diego, California, she graduated with a BA in English from Stanford University. Her plays have been produced in Seattle and San Juan Island, and her poetry has been published in *Mom Egg Review*, *Eunoia Review*, and *San Diego Poetry Annual*.



## Claire Scott

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



## Margarita Serafimova

Margarita Serafimova is the winner of the Inaugural Ralph Angel Poetry Prize (2021; selected by Mary Ruefle) and the 2020 biennial Tony Quagliano International Award for innovative poetry for "an accomplished poet with an outstanding body of work."



## Edward Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food*, *Streetlight*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Door Is a Jar*, *The Phoenix*, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet.



# Artists & Authors

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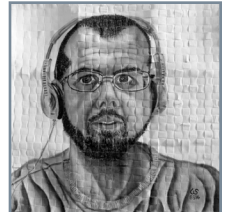
## Wally Swist

Wally Swist's *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012) was selected by Yusef Komunyakaa as co-winner in the 2011 Crab Orchard Series Open Poetry Contest. Recent books include *A Bird Who Seems to Know Me: Poems Regarding Birds & Nature* (Ex Ophidia Press, 2019), winner of the 2018 Ex Ophidia Press Poetry Prize, and *Taking Residence* (Shanti Arts, 2021).



## Sean White

Sean White arrived to prison in 1997 at the age of nineteen. His short fiction and poetry have appeared in a number of journals, most recently *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Rosebud Magazine*, and *the Normal School Online*. He has received awards from PEN America's Writing Awards for Prisoners several times in various genres. His first graphic novel, *Tales of Relatable Cynicism*, was recently published.



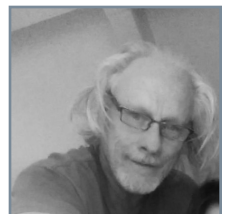
## Zhihua Wang

Zhihua Wang is a poetry candidate in the Arkansas Writers' MFA Program at the University of Central Arkansas. She received her BA from Drury University in Missouri in 2019 with majors in writing and English. She worked as the Managing Editor of *Arkana* from 2019-2020. Her recent poetry and short story were shown on *Currents*, and she is working on her poetry collection: *Faraway Hometown*.



## David Williams

David Earl Williams is a native of Appalachian eastern Kentucky now living in the north as a happy deserter. As a grandson of a graduate of Leavenworth with a federal degree in moonshine (or, like as not, starve), he hopes his writing honors that line born within him that courts the spirits and peddles derangement.









# Editor's Welcome

“Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. . . .” —*Hamlet, Act III, Scene I*

I have a good friend, quite well-intentioned, who truly believes that the point of life is to experience deep joy every single day. Poor Hamlet quoted above—would have had a problem achieving that. Of course, he would have wanted ecstatic happiness every day in his kingdom and with his beloved Ophelia, but alas, he inhabited the same palace as Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude, and thus could not escape the “heartache, and the thousand natural shocks/ that flesh is heir to.”

Can any of us? There’s a joke that compares being alive to being on the deck of a ship in high seas blindfolded, on roller skates, reeling into strangers, loved ones. Maybe the bruises are the point, or at least part of the point, if there is a point? I do not claim to be an expert on the meaning of life. I only know that, like the mayfly’s, human joy is often fleeting, and often follows long periods without light, living in the benthic zone, not much glamour there, yet that existence is essential to those brief periods of flight and transcendence.

Whenever I read *Hamlet*—I’m teaching it again this week—I imagine alternative endings. Of course, he didn’t really want to die. Unlike Laertes, he was a thinker, alienated from the posturing, the oversimplified realities, the unchecked ambition and the power-seeking of others. He would probably have made a good king, and should have been a good king, but that option was unlikely given the choices of those around him. Once his rash sword went through the curtain, unintentionally killing Ophelia’s father, Hamlet’s fate was sealed. What if he had confided in Ophelia, had trusted her? Would he have remained true, or were Polonius and Laertes right in assuming he would never have been free to choose his own wife? Is it twisted to find joy in musing the hypothetical conundrums of imagined heroes?



Among the pages of this issue, you will find writers and artists rushing headlong into what frightens us, diving deep into the mud and the grime to rise again triumphant, if only for a moment. We are honored to be featuring Keith Hamilton Cobb and Mark Hurtubise in this issue, both of whom had the courage to address injustice openly. Likewise, we are honored to be offering readers and viewers an impressive slate of photography, art, poetry, essay, and fiction, exploring the human condition, imagining beyond ourselves into the Other, the unknown.

My sincerest thanks to *Aji* staff, to all who submitted, and to those whose contributions make this spring issue so truly remarkable. Perfect joy may not be feasible on the deck of this ship, nor perfect control, yet there is laughter, openness, insight, empathy, and strength. It is my pleasure—joy—to be here on it with you.

Erin O'Neill Armendarez, Editor in Chief





# BREAKING THE MOLD

## An Interview with Mark Yale Harris

by Katie Redfield

From hotelier to artist and sculptor, Mark Yale Harris is proof that hard work and dedication can take you anywhere you yearn to go. With a wildly successful career in hospitality and business, Harris decided to pivot his creativity toward the arts. He moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, sought out the best mentors in the field and went on to build a prosperous career as an artist.

His sculpture has been included in 80+ solo, museum and international exhibitions and one hundred+ publications have featured his sculpture (books, magazines, newspapers) in the past 10 years.

**Katie Redfield (KR): Were you artistically inclined as a child?**

Mark Yale Harris (MYH): I spent hours as a child enthralled in my own artistic world - drawing, painting, doodling. When young, my artistic skills were evident; I won some awards and art scholarship offers.



But more importantly in my life story is that not only was I artistically gifted, but I also loved creating! It provided great joy and I imagined that “when I grew up” I would be an artist. As often happens, pragmatism stepped in and I ended up following the advice of my parents, who, having lived through the Great Depression, advocated a less risky, conventional career. I supported myself through Ohio State University, earning a business degree.

**KR: I read that you were in urban development prior to devoting yourself to your artwork. What was it like making that transition? What were some of the ways you weighed the risks vs. reward, and did you have a support system along the way?**

MYH: After earning my business degree, I then began 30+ years in the realm of hospitality/urban development - specifically real estate and hotels. In 1972, I co-founded the Red Roof Inns, a successful chain including over 300 hotels across the United States. In 1984, I founded the Amerisuites Hotels, revolutionizing the business model with the new concept of suite accommodations. My career flourished. It was lucrative. I was enjoying the pursuit of excellence in business. At the same time, I had a beautiful family, raising my children and providing a comfortable life for them.

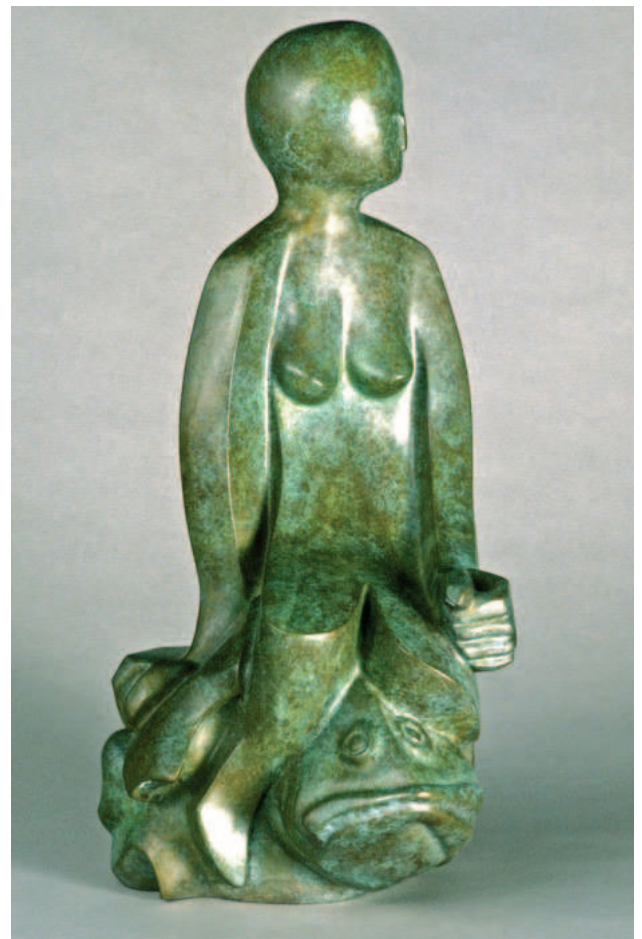
Throughout my business career, I did get to exercise a degree of creativity within the scope of my field. Creative people are curious; that curiosity helped me seek the untried, explore new ways of doing business. I believe that some of my greatest commercial achievements stemmed from ingenuity and imagination. It was gratifying. My passion for art in those years was also sustained as a collector.

However, after over 30 years of success in the business, I felt the need for something more, a more personal expression of my creativity, a yearning for my true destiny. Despite my success, it was telling that I had never forgotten what made me joyful when I was younger. At age 63, I sold my business interests. I chose art.

It was a big adjustment, becoming a “nobody” in the art world. I was humbled.



*Free Rider, 2017, Bronze, 12"x6"x13"*



*The Princess and the Fish, 2001, Bronze, 26"x12"x14"*





*Winston from Churchill, 2002, Bronze, 14"x13"x9"*



*Caught, 2004, Bronze, 7"x5.5"x8"*



*Bear Tango, 2004, Bronze, 14"x10"x8"*

Returning full circle to a childhood/lifelong interest, a field with no guarantee of success, was a risk. But though I took a chance, I managed the radical shift effectively by leading with my heart, while being thoughtful and deliberate, getting trained and working tenaciously. Just as my company had detailed advanced planning on many projects, I conscientiously assembled the necessary elements that would assist me in becoming a skillful sculptor. I understood that when you are an artist, art IS your business. Not only did I have to produce work, but I also had to see to the pragmatic aspect of marketing my work. My business background put me in good stead. While success in the art world always involves a bit of luck, I made sure I entered the arena prepared as I could be. When dealing with the administrative aspects, my business background of professionalism and judgment has served to benefit me. That made the transition, the shift, the evolution of how I define myself, a brilliant adventure!

My family supported my decision. I will admit that when I made the leap to a (hopeful) career in the arts, my friends began to ask me when I was going to get a real job!

**KR: What brought you to Santa Fe? Who are/were some of your mentors?**

MYH: After I sold my business interests, I was living in Texas and taking some art courses. As a self-made man who began with nothing, I understood this enormous pivot required starting all over, learning my craft and earning my respect as an artist. So in 1999, I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico to be mentored by Aleut sculptor Bill Prokopiof, as well as to study with Nez Perce sculptor Doug Hyde (both protégés of the renowned Apache sculptor Allan Houser). They took me under their wings and generously shared their immense knowledge, talent, and vision. Inspired by the geographical region and grounded in the wisdom of my teachers, I dedicated myself to learning how to sculpt. Over the years, I honed my technical skills as well as my artistic vision.

**KR: Has stone always been your preferred medium or did you experiment using other artistic mediums?**

MYH: Stone has been my preferred medium. Over the years I had built up a small collection of art and my preference was sculptural pieces – usually stone. My mentors worked in stone, which is why I sought them out, and that is the medium in which I cultivated my expertise. I carve stone, a very primitive art form, because of the mental challenge. I thoroughly enjoy the cerebral



*Tidbit, 2002, Bronze, 18"x14"x12"*

exertion and concentration that is crucial to bringing something out of the stone, something that you really cannot do with clay or any other medium.

**KR: How do you approach your design? Do you seek out the materials to align with your design concept? For example, do you start with a drawing? Or do you find materials and then let them inform your design?**

MYH: I make art to preserve and distill the beauty of a passing sensory experience. The genesis of each of my figurative sculptural works is an emotion, whether it be the first glow of love, a difficult aspect of a relationship, the happiness I see in my daughter. I reflect upon and contemplate the feeling and sentiment that I would like to depict in tangible form. In my case, attempting to blend form, figure, emotion and gesture often results in a figurative abstraction.

Next comes conceptual visualization – bringing an intangible idea to life, communicating abstract ideas using visual form. Sometimes I reference a live model for inspiration when creating a figurative sculpture. I begin with the act of creating images with rapid gestural figure drawings, seeking poses that express what I am experiencing. I am grasping measurements and creating a convincing silhouette, sketch after sketch, in different poses, in an effort to capture the essence of the spirit I am seeking to sculpt. These drawings are my starting point.





*Teton Vision, 2015, Bronze, 17"x13"x10"*

After drawing the figure out dimensionally, I then make a small clay model before beginning to sculpt. Then I start my work. I measure and measure, then cut, then measure and then cut again, then recheck my drawing - and repeat. Finally, hopefully having made no mistakes, the figure begins to emerge from the stone.

The form dictates the shape of my creation, but then the actual work on the stone in which I am carving also influences the shape as well. There is little margin for error in the reductive art of stone carving. My Native American mentors believed that you quietly observe the shape of the rock, see the image within and it will come forth. Try and fail, continue working through a concept until it feels complete – this is what I learned and always keep in mind as I work. I also realized the importance of editing – not everything is a masterpiece and only my best work should be presented.

**KR: As a follow up, how do you go about selecting which materials to use?**

MYH: My body of work has evolved to include alabaster, marble, limestone and bronze. My art conveys my nonverbal view of life. It evokes our duality - the aggressive hard side of life seen in angular lines and the soft side in curves. I am able to evoke this contrast through the stone I choose. After all these years, I intuitively sense what kind of stone the piece requires.

**KR: Your work has wonderful sense of motion. Can you share with us how your process has evolved to become more refined over time?**

MYH: It takes skill to render fluidity in stone. I am tenacious and, as mentioned earlier, editing is important. Certainly, my proficiency with sculptural tools has advanced over time, as well as my innate sense of what



necessitates broad strokes vs. economy of movement with my tools.

Having first spent the time formulating how I want to bring an initial inchoate abstract idea into visual form, I am clear on the steps to take. After working out my initial renderings, I move on to the stone. I am then quite drawn to the tactile involvement. I measure and measure, then cut, then measure and then cut again, then recheck my drawing - and repeat. Finally, hopefully having made no mistakes, the figure begins to emerge..

**KR: Some of your work is on quite a large scale. Can you tell our readers about the challenges that come with making such big works?**

MYH: Some of my pieces speak best on an intimate scale, while others require a monumental voice. It can be daunting to start work on a very large piece. The practical challenges involve getting a very large piece of stone into the studio and setting up the working stage for access. Then there is the slight apprehension as you are ready to begin work on the stone – you want to make the right moves, so you do not render the stone unusable. Having the right tools for large work is critical. Stone can be difficult – veining can make it fragile, and density can vary throughout the stone, so the amount of pressure used and control with the tools are important.

**KR: It seems you have made a successful career in art, with many noteworthy accomplishments along the way. What do you hope to still accomplish?**

MYH: I have been fortunate to enjoy success in the 20+ years of my artistic career. I suppose I could rest on my laurels, but I consider it fundamental to experiment and challenge myself. To keep my artistry fresh and vital, I seek out new techniques and tools to add to my repertoire.

I have recently begun to use Virtual Reality (VR) programs for creative applications in sculpting. I revel in the total immersion that occurs, plus the speed with which you can sketch an idea in 3D, make modifications and send it to a 3D printer. Right now I view VR primarily as an adjunct to my existing practice, printing small sculptures that become maquettes for further development in stone or bronze. I will continue to refine my technique before attempting a full



*Half Eaten Apple, 2003, Bronze, 18"x6"x4"*



*Recoil, 1999, Colorado Yule Marble, 25"x20"x14"*



*Dance Me to the End of Love, 2012, Bronze, 18"x18"x6"*

scale sculpture using this technology. The file-sharing application in VR programs lends itself to creating with others working from different physical locations connected online and I envision possibly working collaboratively in the future. I wanted to share my enthusiasm about working in VR, so I recently hosted a series of VR workshops in Colorado.

**KR: What other artists work do you admire?**

MYH: Henry Moore's graceful and minimal figures, Constantin Brâncuși's bareness of line and stylized form, this type of expression speaks to me. Brâncuși's quote beautifully captured what I appreciate: "When you see a fish you don't think of its scales, do you? You think of its speed, its floating, flashing body seen through the water. If I made fins and eyes and scales, I would arrest its movement; give a pattern or shape of reality. I want just the flash of its spirit."

**KR: What advice do you have for artists who are just starting out?**

Keep making work – honing your skills and vision. Then refine your work and refine it again until you are happy with it. Look for a mentor if possible or immerse yourself in the company of other artists. Seek out those you trust to give you solid and helpful criticism of your work. You also have to tend to the business side of things in order to get your work out there – whether brick and mortar or through social media, or both. I have also found that researching and understanding my target audience, collectors and venues is key to getting my work seen.





*Claud, 2014, Onyx and Bronze, 8"x16"x6"*



*Cupcake, 2017, Bronze, 21"x 13"x 11" (including horns)*



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# WE ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF EVOLUTION:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KEITH HAMILTON COBB PART I

*Interview conducted by William Nesbitt*

A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in acting, Keith Hamilton Cobb has portrayed a variety of theater and television characters. He wrote and starred in *American Moor*, a complex examination of Black identity within the American theater. Numerous theaters featured the play including New York's off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at Shakespeare's Globe. In the first part of this two-part interview, we discuss *American Moor*, race, America's continued interest in *Othello*, the connections between art and money, and Cobb's ongoing Untitled Othello Project.

**William Nesbitt (WN):** How did you find your way to acting? Was always acting always what you wanted to do?

Keith Hamilton Cobb (KHC): Pretty much. Like the story in *American Moor*, which is in part autobiographical, I was an English major as well. I didn't know what else I wanted to do. I knew I liked to write, and I knew I liked literature. That changed when I began to be exposed to Shakespeare in performance, not only on the page but as I began to see it performed.

**WN:** To introduce *American Moor* to readers unfamiliar with your play, I'll cite the introduction in which Kim F. Hall writes that the play "follows a veteran Black actor auditioning to play Shakespeare's Othello for an unseasoned, white director." You said to Stephen Greenblatt that "*American Moor* is the examination of the experience of the American Black male through the metaphor of Shakespeare's *Othello*." I'll add that much of the play focuses on the actor's thoughts about the difficulties of knowing much more about the role and about being Black than the director and being blocked from expressing those thoughts and experiences and having them recognized and discussed. What would you add to and/or modify about this summary?

KHC: Not much. Among the three of you that pretty much sums it up. This play is about a number of different things. Ultimately what matters is what resonates with the individual audience member. You want each viewer to have their own experience of the play; it isn't meant to be prescriptive. I believe what you just

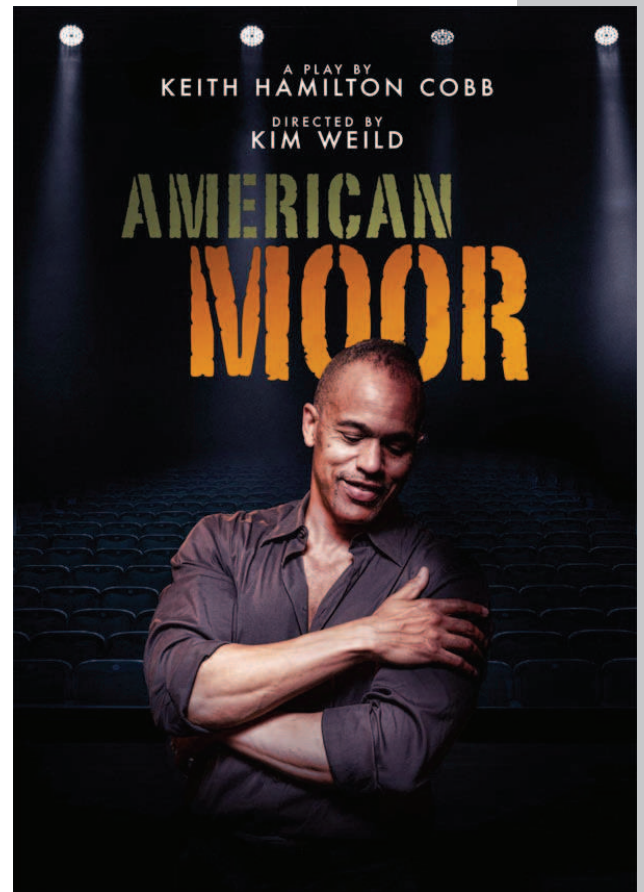
said is the thrust: Black male perceptions of white dominance and control and ensuing Black male reactions to it.

**WN:** You said that “all of a sudden, all of the things that I wasn’t able to say as a man of color because people could not hear it from me given our racial history in this country—if I put that emotion into the words of this poet [Shakespeare], I would be allowed to say it. I would be allowed to infuse all that beautiful language with the depth of my emotion.” At what point did you realize you might not be allowed to do that?

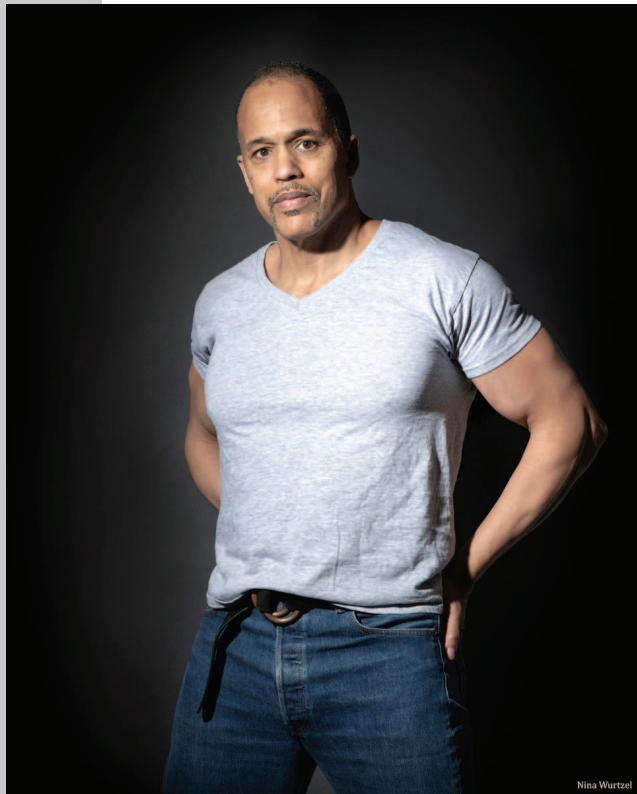
**KHC:** [laughs] I realized I might not be allowed to do it as soon as I began to audition for roles and realized I wasn’t getting cast as Shakespeare’s young, white heroes. Sometimes you have to chalk that up to healthy competition. There are times when there’s somebody better and they get the job, but if we’d like to sit here and deny that there wasn’t also a calculus about who would accept a Black Romeo at that time in history or a Black Hamlet who was not also a celebrity upon whose image you could sell tickets or that there wasn’t some old, entrenched white judgment about who should or shouldn’t play those roles, we’re being delusional. My discovery that I could use my authentic Black voice if I couched it in the language of Shakespeare was one thing. Not mattering at all to a white-controlled business hierarchy was and is quite another thing. White supremacy is so much more about the oppressor than it is about the oppressed, and we have to remember that. So much of what I and all of what Black America does is prescribed and policed by a structure that is not me, for reasons that are not mine by a separate agenda entirely, by a power structure that is less concerned with me than it is with itself. These are just manifestations in my life as a theater major.

**WN:** Later in her introduction, Hall writes that “We are all auditioning, this play reminds us, often for roles that fulfill other’s needs and other’s expectations. Increasingly, we are selling and branding ourselves in hopes of being seen and heard, hired and loved.” Is this always true? Are there any roles that we don’t have to audition for? Are we something more than just an aggregation of the roles we play for the various directors in our lives?

**KHC:** Here in the United States, I doubt that we are. I think the individual experience of domestic relationships can be anything, so who knows what happens there, how much people are having to impress their partners in one way or another to actually have enduring partnerships. Of course, there are individuals we’ll find who tend generally not to appear to be auditioning for anyone or who can be seen to be trying not to audition for anyone to the best of their ability. You really don’t need to look that deeply into the structure of capitalism, which—let’s just say it—is a structure designed to gain and maintain white dominance, to see everyone within the American system in some way playing by the system’s rules. On the simplest, most basic level the human being wants to be accepted. To want to be within the dominant tribe and thus to enjoy the privileges that belonging bestows is a natural







human tendency. People would like to be accepted for who they are, but they'll take acceptance any way they can get it. You asked if this is always true. Well, the culture of celebrity, the wealth gap, and clear inequity of opportunity in America all make it true. It's just another form of scrambling for survival. That's what animals do.

**WN: What about when you write?**

KHC: If we take *American Moor* as a case in point, I wrote a play that I thought was the truth in people picking that play up to produce, and when I say *people*, I mean the structure of whiteness that defines the American theater. It defines everything; let's be honest. It defines the American capitalist system and theater is a part of that system, so people picking up this play can then look at it and say, "Well, I think maybe you should change this or maybe you should change that." And they're saying that to fulfill their agendas, which are

often going to be different than mine because truth needs to remain relative so that people can accept it. Your truth and my truth might be different things. For it to be comfortable for you, you're going to want to see it in a different way or shape it in a different way. There are those people saying to me, "Why don't you change this?" Leave me with the decision to make. Do I adapt it so that they will produce it? Do I remain my authentic self and say, "No, this is what it is even if you do not produce it, even if you put it down and walk away?" We're always confronted with that dilemma.

**WN: Did you have to, did you feel any pressure to, or did you have to make any compromises with *American Moor*?**

KHC: I had to make some, not many, but that was a choice that I made to stand by and support the content in the structure of the play, irrespective of whether or not it was the most lucrative choice for the arc of the work or whether or not that was going to garner me the most attention. Often it didn't. It was to the detriment of the visibility of that work, but I said, "No, we're not changing that. We're not making that something different so that it appeases what your needs are. This play is this play." There's what we would call consistent dramaturgical review, which any good playwright is going to undergo. You're going to get with people who look at your work and tell you about whether or not it works dramatically, whether or not the theatrical mechanics operate as they need to, whether you're making the best play. With some of that you have to use your own scrutiny and understand what they're saying to you and decide if whether or not what they're saying is the truth. Sometimes that process results in what the industry calls "killing your babies," cutting away big pieces of the work that are important to you but are not the best, tightest, most dramatic parts of the play because you believe in the people who are helping you shape it.

But there's also a discernment regarding where other people's comments are coming from. Somebody asks, "Can the white director in the play be a nicer guy? Can there be more of a

dialogue?” And you say, “But there’s not more of a dialogue.” I’ve been thirty years in this business and I’m here to tell you this is how these conversations go. I would be lying to make the play, its characters, and its conversations someone and something else. “Yeah, but can you be less angry in this part?” Well, no, I can’t, because that anger is real and authentic and what’s meant to be expressed. A piece like this is confronting American racial bias, the ongoing sort of stuttering dialogue—if it can be called a dialogue at all—of American racial bias in this country. You’re going to have to make choices about standing behind, supporting, and holding onto your own truth.

**WN: You said, among other topics such as race and love, *American Moor* is about “*Othello* and why that play seems to be so important to America and Americans.” Why does *Othello* seem to be so important to American and Americans?**

KHC: *Othello* is important to America, first, because it’s Shakespeare and Shakespeare continues to be held onto tightly both in academia and American theater as emblematic of white excellence. It just does. And that is generations old. First, it was British excellence. We are, in this country, the descendants of those Brits. You put a British accent on anybody you can sell anything. They love it. There is this fetishization of Britishness in our culture because we are still, as a culture, still so turned on by it. Shakespeare is emblematic of British excellence and thus white excellence. With regard to the play itself, it is the story of white genius triumphing over Black inferiority, which, too, is part of the American narrative and has always been. American culture as it continues along its timeline seldom sees the deep-seated sickness that afflicts it. The hundreds of years of white dominance and privilege and the perpetual injury done to Black humanity in order to maintain it is now just considered the American way of life. We just see it as life. This is what it is. This is how we behave here, but then you look at the incessant recycling of Shakespeare. *Othello* is a toxic melodrama rife with implausibilities. The audience leans into Iago’s asides, his fiendishness, laughing as he seems to dupe everyone in the play purportedly with great facility but really because Shakespeare has drawn every other character like an idiot. He is not a genius. Everybody else is just not real, just not honest, just not authentic. You look at that and it’s not hard to understand why the play is so honored. This is the American narrative. This is the white American male still for the moment the master here. Not much longer. We’re seeing the last gasps of that and all of the manifestations of what that is, the aberrant manifestations in the world of what that is as it browns, as the numbers shift, and non-white people become the predominant faces and, ultimately, voices here.

**WN: Will you talk some about the Untitled *Othello* Project?**

KHC: I would love to. I’m excited about it. I call the Untitled *Othello* Project some of the organic evolution of *American Moor*. *American Moor* suggests that there are minds and voices not native to the cult of American theater making that are perhaps more capable of interrogating Shakespeare’s *Othello* in such a way as to yield a better, more nuanced play in production. Untitled *Othello*

**“American culture as it continues along its timeline seldom sees the deep-seated sickness that afflicts it. The hundreds of years of white dominance and privilege and the perpetual injury done to Black humanity in order to maintain it is now just considered the American way of life.”**

**-Keith Hamilton Cobb**



**“The real premise of Untitled Othello is that only through new, inclusive, and humancentric processes of theater making will we be able to do anything beyond the perpetual recycling of these plays...”**

**-Keith Hamilton Cobb**

begins to investigate ways and means to do just that. How do we allow a group of creatives to work intimately with the text of this play, at the table and on their feet, for an indeterminate period of time, digging deeply into all of the difficult questions about race, gender bias, and religious prejudice that it poses? How do we do that and also pay them a living wage—which actors historically do not get—keep them cared for and fed, honor their voices, give them their voices to speak to every aspect of the play, *every* aspect of the play? So many aspects are just glossed over in the recycling of the work from production to production in America. The real premise of Untitled Othello is that only through new, inclusive, and humancentric processes of theater making will we be able to do anything beyond the perpetual recycling of these plays of Shakespeare’s that the American theater sells us constantly as product. We are a product-based society, product and

profit, but they sell us Shakespeare again and again. How many productions of *Hamlet* do you need to see? It’s just another recycling of an old play that you haven’t done any deep work to understand any better or find any greater depth or breadth in than has been done the million times I’ve seen it in my lifetime already.

**WN: This isn’t strictly a self-contained enterprise. You’re looking for academic collaboration, correct?**

KHC: The Untitled Othello Project is looking at academic institutions to partner with us in hosting residencies where we can engage with students and faculty across disciplines to grow our understanding of who we are with regard to this play at this point in time because it changes from generation to generation from point in time to point in time. How we look at how these plays affect us, how our voices resonate within the play changes, requires time. The protraction of time is what this is about. You can no longer rely on a three-to-five-week capitalist business model to make theater because it will yield you nothing but the same fucking play again and again.

**WN: Can you talk more about what people can learn from the Untitled Othello Project?**

KHC: In this process if we are allowed to partner with institutions that want to help and augment the cost of working this way, hopefully, we can also engage with their students and faculties and expand the mind of young academics and theater makers to consider the purpose of their pedagogy and their theater making and their responsibility to evolve it, to make it better, deeper, ever more challenging of the status quo that leaves us with this perpetual mediocrity. How do we create a more transcendent theater? These are all the efforts of this work. We call the Untitled Othello Project an exercise in creative justice because we’re putting the collaborators, the creators first. This isn’t about some producers mounting a play for three weeks, paying some actors a pittance, taking all the profits, and going away. This is about making a better piece of theater and having all of the various voices collaborate to make that so.

**WN: In America, we're so used to just consuming product and content without realizing, recognizing, or respecting the process and all of the time that funnels into producing the end results. It seems so much of theater is unfortunately and inextricably linked to money.**

KHC: I've been in productions where we rehearsed for two weeks because that's all the time they want to give to actors that they have to pay when money is not coming in, when they're not actually on stage and the institution is not reaping the ticket price. An actor generally looks at that and says, "Well I'm not going to sit out there with egg on my face, so I'm going to start to work the week before. I'm going to do text work. I'm not getting paid for it, but I'm going to come in prepared because I don't want to look bad." And the producer is depending upon that, the integrity of the actor to do this week of unpaid work, because they know, they know that the actor doesn't want to show up and look bad. This is their career. The actor always wants to look good. But even if you have a five-week process, you've had that actor pick up his life, sublet his place to go somewhere in the region, and make maybe \$600 a week after taxes. What that actor will and will not do, how much that actor will and will not lend to what you are bringing, impacts what you are making, impacts the final version of the product. How much is that actor going to do for \$600 a week? You're not paying him a living wage. He's spending half his time there in rehearsal wondering if his rent's getting paid or who's in his place or if he's going to be able to meet these bills because he's walked away from his day job to come do this thing with you.

**WN: Unfortunately, so many things, including literature, art, film, and theater seem to come down to money in terms of both the privilege it affords if you have it and the pressure it creates if you don't.**

KHC: Again, *Untitled Othello*, if at all possible, is about finding the money first to allow the creatives the space to not worry. Yeah, we're going to give you a grand a week, which is still not a ton of money for anybody in this economy to be making, but a hell of a lot better than what the proletariat generally gets. That's one of any number of problems to be resolved in creating something that transcends the capitalist model that runs everything and deeply compromises our theater. It's a mess. A handful of people get to work and thrive and they're working and thriving selling sort of this simple, unevolved entertainment to the masses, to the people who come in from Idaho to see *The Lion King* with grandma. It's fine. *The Lion King* is beautiful. But that's it. That's all it is. It's not doing a thing for us culturally, making a stink, making us grow, making us evolve. We are in desperate need of evolution of up-leveling. Something's got to do it.

**WN: What's going on right now for you and what's next?**

KHC: Well, we never know what's next, right [laughs]? As the spring academic semester starts to sort of get into full swing and all the institutions around the country are trying to figure out what they're doing with their COVID protocols and how they're going to navigate that, I continue to be focused on the work with *Untitled Othello*. We had a remarkable, really just transcendent two-week residency at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut last semester around the project. It was just so rich for everybody involved. I was jazzed by that. I want to do more of that. I'm just looking for ways, the means, to keep up the momentum, find partners who want to take part in this exciting experiment in, as I say, creative justice, and theater making. That's a fulltime job. I'm on the phone. I'm exchanging emails. I'm busy trying to make that go. Part of the reason it is so arduous is because it's not easy for people and institutions to get their brains around new ideas, get away from the old forms, the old entrenched forms. People kind of scratch their heads and say, "So what is it you want to do and why and what is the production?" You tell them, "Well,



I don't know if there's ever going to be a production." We may rehearse for six months, eight months and realize that we can't do any better than anybody else has done and leave it there. Everybody gets paid and goes home. In a product-based society, that's a hard thing to understand. "What do you mean? You want me to give you money, but you don't want to give me a return?" I say, "Well, the return is the engagement with your students. The brain trust that we built and the stuff that is gleaned from these young people having their minds expanded by work like this," which is what happened at Sacred Heart. It's a much harder thing for capitalist-minded institutions to get their brains around.

But whether any of us care to own that or not, it's the only way forward. We have to start to create new processes and new forms.

<https://untitledothello.com/>



*Terrell Donnell Sledge, Keith Hamilton Cobb, Dr. David Sterling Brown, and Robert Manning (left to right)*



*Edward Lee, Some Breaths Only Come After A Struggle Ephemera*



# The Discerning Lens of Mark Hurtubise: Disinfecting DAF's

*Same Beginnings, photo by Mark Hurtubise*

Born in Indiana and grad-schooled in the San Francisco Bay Area, Mark Hurtubise (pronounced herd a bees) in the 1970s was introduced to Haiku by a John Lennon look-alike, who meditated in a headstand during lunch on the campus lawn.

Afterwards, Mark frequented the basement floor of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights bookstore in North Beach, San Francisco and became enchanted by the words that seemed to levitate off the pages from the numerous small press poetry publications. By his mid-twenties, his poetry and Haiku were being published.

But he put aside those forms of expression, while practicing law, teaching, two college presidencies, CEO of a community foundation, and the rewards of family.

After a "four-decade" hiatus he is re-creating again from the Pacific Northwest by balancing on a twig like a pregnant bird – hoping to give multiple births to diverse forms of creativity. Within the past four years, his poetry, nonfiction, microfiction, essays, interviews, and photography have appeared in various locales.

Although during the past few years numerous photos have been published, including an Editors' Photography Pick by *Penumbra Literary and Art Journal* (California State University Stanislaus), an Artist Spotlight by *Aura Literary Arts Review* (University of Alabama at Birmingham), and three honorable mention awards (2020 & 2021) from an international photography contest sponsored by *Monovisions Black & White Photography* (London), he considers himself new to this fine art.

Mark lives in Spokane, WA with his wife, Rowena, of 41 years. They have no dogs, cats, chickens, or fish, but three successful adult children, all of whom have pets, and five inquisitive grandkids.

**Erin O'Neill Armendarez (EOA): How did you become interested in photography? How does your photography express your aesthetic and/or world view?**

Mark Hurtubise (MH): Like many things, inspiration often finds you, which happened to me in my early twenties, when I walked into the Yosemite Valley Ansel Adams Gallery and viewed the majesty of Nature captured in Adam's realistic and iconic black and white photographs of the American West. His luminous images translated what Nature had been attempting to communicate to us for millions of years.

As decades passed, I began to wonder whether I could portray a visual narrative in a photograph. Other modes of art can take days if not years to complete, whereas photographs are only a shutter's click away.

So, in my late 60s, I began trying to photograph various life forms, whose essence, I believe, lives in a universal soul (God) breathing within and around us from every direction, whether in a stoic rock, cascading water, a gesturing tree limb, or human eyes.

I also began wondering could I offer viewers within a photograph a nanosecond of eternity with no beginning nor end, a bit of time locked forever in the present? I realized Ansel Adam, who captured a bit of Nature's soul, achieved this as have other great photographers.

**EOA: Even though you have branched out the past few years into diverse forms of artistic expression, I understand the last six months during your tenure as a CEO of a community foundation, you had a challenging time with your board, which knowingly awarded grants to a white supremacy IRS approved charity.**

MH: Yes, it was difficult. But it did offer everyone involved an opportunity to measure themselves against a moral and ethical yardstick.

For over a decade (2005-2017) I was president & CEO of Inland Northwest Community Foundation (rebranded Innovia), whose service area included Eastern Washington and North Idaho. It was a privilege being a leader of a community foundation which experienced during my tenure innovative collaborative community initiatives, enhanced visibility as a trusted community partner, an expansion of dedicated volunteers, and significant asset growth.

Community foundations are different than private foundations in that they bring together donations from various sources to support nonprofits in their communities. They are analogous to a community savings account, whereas a private foundation typically is established from a single resource, like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In August 2016, I provided the board with 10 months' notice that I would not renew my contract beyond June 2017 in order to pursue other interests. Everything was running smoothly until January 2017. Unfortunately, a seven-figure donor-advisor recommended an anonymous grant from his donor-advised fund (DAF) at the foundation to VDare, a known white nationalist IRS-approved charity.

DAFs are the fastest growing vehicle for Americans to set aside billions of dollars for charitable use. A DAF begins with the donor making a tax-deductible contribution to a public charity such as a community foundation or a commercial national charity (e.g., Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Donors Trust, and Vanguard Charitable), which then creates a separate account for the donor, who may recommend grants from the donor-advised fund to IRS-approved 501(c)(3) charities (nonprofits).

During my last six months as the foundation's head, the VDare matter became contentious with the board and foundation's attorney, whose firm, as it turned out, was at the same time representing the foundation



*Photo of Mark Hurtubise*

**“DAFs are the fastest growing vehicle for Americans to set aside billions of dollars for charitable use.”**

**-Mark Hurtubise**



and the donor-advisor who had recommended the grant to VDare.

This was disheartening, for as CEO of a community foundation, I had pledged to uphold the foundation's mission to be personally accountable to all of the stakeholders: the foundation's founders; the donors, who were financing their dreams to improve our communities; the nonprofits working tirelessly throughout our 20-county service region; and those citizens we were privileged to serve.

I vigorously opposed the grant and provided the board with discriminatory quotes attributable to VDare, whose articles accused blacks and immigrants of having lower IQs, arguing that America was founded explicitly as a "white nation, for white people," blaming Jews for "weakening America's historic white majority," and asserting that "Hispanics do specialize in rape, particularly of children." This kind of language could have been borrowed from Hitler's despicable *Mein Kampf*.

I also provided the board members with numerous legal, moral, emotional, and mission-driven reasons to refuse the donor's recommendation, including that Inland Northwest Community Foundation (INWCF) had the unilateral legal authority to refuse a recommended donor-advisor grant to any charity.

If they denied the VDare grant request from a community member, who, I asserted, would not publicly want to be known as a potential white supremacist, the board members would be celebrated nationally as heroes.

During one board meeting, I went so far as to point out that I assumed most board members were Christian and then stated, "It's easy to say you're a Christian if you never have to be one."

Tragically and unabashedly, INWCF's board voted "Yes" and approved the recommended VDare grant. I refused to sign the check, which awarded a \$5,000 grant to VDare.

**EOA: Did you continue to pursue any action against the foundation after you departed in June 2017?**

MH: When I left the foundation in June 2017, I assumed incorrectly the new CEO and the foundation's board would jettison the donor and stop tarnishing the purity of the foundation's mission by ceasing to fund VDare.

To my astonishment, the foundation's IRS Form 990s (a nonprofit's federal annual tax return) showed otherwise. To my astonishment, Innovia (formally INWCF) continued sending increasingly larger sums to VDare. Since I stepped down as the foundation's president in June of 2017, Innovia sent \$34,500 in donor-advised funds to VDare (2017-2020).

I continued corresponding with the foundation urging it to stop supporting VDare. The scandal also alerted me to the problem that DAFs can raise for their sponsor organizations at the national level. Therefore, I began, as others nationally were already doing, authoring essays and op-ed's regarding DAFs being used by anonymous donors to finance hate, publishing in such places as the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, *Alliance* (London), and *Sludge* (Brooklyn, NY).

A community member suggested if I went public with the Innovia/VDare story, I should avoid a "me against them" scenario, but attempt to associate myself with a well-known organization that would release a DAFs funding hate story as a national issue with Innovia/VDare being one unfortunate example.

After networking with colleagues and organizations such as the Council on Foundations (a national membership association for grantmaking foundations), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), in March 2020, SPLC and CAIR released a white paper titled *Hate-Free Philanthropy* on how charities contribute to hate groups. It highlighted Innovia and VDare under a section titled “Donor Recommends a Grant to a White Nationalist Organization.”

That same month regional newspapers also published articles on the Innovia/VDare controversy. Shortly thereafter Innovia succumbed to public pressure and finally announced it would “never again provide funds to organizations that promote hate.”

**EOA: Can you give us a sense of how big this trend has become recently?**

MH: Surprisingly, millions of dollars are still being funneled anonymously through DAFs to fund charities that don’t support the U.S. Constitutional rights and privileges for all Americans.

According to the latest National Philanthropic Trust report (2021) in the United States, there are over one million DAFs, with total DAF charitable assets surpassing \$159 billion and annual grants to IRS-recognized charities from DAFs exceeding \$35 billion for the first time. The overwhelming majority of these grants went to worthy organizations that improve lives. But there are DAFs financing a growing epidemic of hate and seriously putting American idealism at risk.

In 2019, CAIR published *Hijacked by Hate: American Philanthropy and the Islamophobia Network*. CAIR identified \$18 million given anonymously between 2014 and 2016 by donor-advisors through Fidelity Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, and Schwab Charitable to IRS-approved nonprofits that spread hatred toward Islam and Muslims.

In another study, *Sludge*, which produces data-driven investigative journalism, drew similar conclusions as CAIR’s. By analyzing the tax returns from 2014 to 2017 of DonorsTrust, Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, and Vanguard Charitable, *Sludge* reported that these four large commercial charities donated close to \$11 million via their DAFs to more than 30 anti-Muslim, anti-LGBT, and other hate groups, many of which disseminate their hate doctrines via online social networks, which in many cases indoctrinate marginalized individuals and encourage their loyalty to white nationalist groups.

Vanguard Charitable is a charitable arm of the Vanguard Group, whose assets exceed \$5 trillion. According to *Sludge*, from fiscal years 2015 through 2017, Vanguard Charitable donated more than \$2.5 million on behalf of its donor-advisors to 11 hate groups, including VDare.

**EOA: Do you believe it is enough to just scrutinize DAFs? It sounds like an uphill battle with foundations and charities claiming, “This is a freedom of speech issue protected by the Constitution,” “Philanthropy is cause neutral,” or “You can’t define hate.”**

MH: Foundations (community and private) and commercial national charities (e.g., DonorsTrust) need to search their collective souls and admit that, by remaining silent or donating to charities, which do not endorse the integration into our society all classes of people as defined by federal law are violating their missions and founding principles.



Philanthropy is a multiple trillion-dollar industry, which for decades has existed with little public scrutiny or accountability. The biggest culprit besides foundations and commercial national charities, in allowing philanthropy to speed along on its own race tracks without any warning flags or pitstops, is the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). For decades, the IRS has not been seriously enforcing its own oversight responsibility (i.e., enforcing the law) with respect to charitable organizations it approved for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Annually, foundations are funding IRS approved charities that do not meet all the requirements to qualify as tax-exempt charitable organizations. When the IRS approves a charity (nonprofit) for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, it is for the public good, and there is an expectation the organization will comply with its charitable purpose, including Treas. Reg. section 501(c)(3)-1(d)(2), which states, in part, the intention “to eliminate prejudice and discrimination;” and “to defend human and civil rights secured by law.” Donations are going to charities like VDare that do not meet these requirements.

Typically, foundations and commercial national charities take the following positions as to why philanthropy should be left alone:

“We are cause neutral. Therefore, we have no moral obligation to judge the charities, which receive our donations as long as they are IRS-approved 501(c)(3) organizations.” This is a fallacy. Philanthropy is never cause neutral. Money always has a motive or cause attached to it, even if it is a two-dollar allowance for an adolescent. Besides, when did the IRS become our country’s moral authority?

“Government should stay out of these affairs.” Fortunately, it did not “stay out” of the Emancipation Proclamation, Women’s Suffrage, the Civil Rights Act, etc. Government is already involved in establishing and regulating these matters.

“You cannot define hate.” You don’t need to define hate if the IRS would examine whether the charity is engaged in programs and activities that don’t fulfill the above-referenced Treas. Reg.

“Restricting philanthropy is a violation of first amendment rights, i.e., freedom of speech.” Absolutely, individuals and nonprofits organizations have the right to freedom of speech. But those rights should be reviewed when a charity like VDare violates its tax exempt 501(c)(3) status by violating the above Treas. Reg.

Because the IRS is understaffed and underfunded, even if it had the will to challenge the malignancy infiltrating America’s philanthropic landscape, it might not have the capacity. Therefore, the starting point for a public dialogue concerning these issues and the IRS should begin with Congressional hearings. For in the words of US Supreme Court Justice Brandeis (1856-1942), “Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants.”

**EOA: Here’s a hard question: do you know why the boards of charitable foundations would willingly fund hate groups upon DAF recommendations? Your work succeeded in convincing the Innovia Foundation to stop allowing donor-advised funds to be given to hate groups. It took years, though. Had you not been persistent, the funding most likely would have continued. Is this because of bureaucracy, a lack of concern for equity and fairness, or worse yet, latent racism/xenophobia?**

MH: Aren’t those the heartbeat-away questions? In other words, “Why did Innovia’s new CEO and board

members year after year continue to do it?”

In addition to presenting Innovia’s board members with VDare’s insidious comments concerning race and religion, Washington State’s written statutes regarding their duty of care and loyalty to the foundation’s mission, and opinions from the Council on Foundations, I also, during the first six months of 2017 and for years afterwards, attempted to convince Innovia’s board that funding VDare was not philanthropy, which is the business of community foundations.

Also disappointing was my inability to generate empathy or compassion in the minds of Innovia’s board members for those being harmed by VDare and other hate charities. Nor would they ponder the question “Maybe I am thinking like a racist.”

For some of your readers, Erin, the following might appear harsh in its summary judgment of Innovia’s behavior, but hopefully it will be interpreted as a wakeup call similar to what Thomas Jefferson said about slavery being a “fire bell in the night,” as well as notice this should not be repeated by any philanthropist.

Even though I suggested an experienced professional be retained as a 3rd-party arbitrator, the board didn’t seem to grasp there was a potential conflict of interest with a law firm representing the foundation and a million-dollar donor-advisor (client) at the same time.

This was an example of the “good old boy” mentality and crowd effect. The great majority of board members had relationships with each other they didn’t want disturbed. When I looked around the board room, I could connect the members together with imaginary dots. They golfed, played, and in many cases conducted business with each other.

**“No one wanted to be exorcised from that group, which provided them with personal gain; they didn’t want to step outside their circles of comfort.**

**Even though defending the civil and human rights of others would have been emotionally and spiritually rewarding and celebrated by their families, it was too uncomfortable for them.”**

A COF attorney also contributed to the VDare grant debate when he stated in an email to me that even though the grant was legally permissible (i.e., VDare was an IRS approved 501(c)(3) charity), the foundation’s grant “may cause an objective outsider to believe that the Foundation itself espouses that (VDare’s) cause . . .” Additionally, the board has the legal authority to say “No” to the donor-advisor.

I was asked many times if I believed there were racists on Innovia’s board. I didn’t want to accept that as a possibility. People who participate in active or overt racism typically advocate the subjugation of a targeted group. It manifests itself in numerous ways such as public racial slurs, hate crimes, or intentional profiling.



*Heartbeat Away, photo by Mark Hurtubise*





*Piercing the Veil, photo by Mark Hurtubise*

On the other hand, in Innovia's case, I believe, passive racism was ratified when the board unanimously favored the biases of a wealthy donor, and maybe their own, instead of supporting the advancement of all American citizens.

Passive racism can be more insidious and pervasive. It is a conscious or unconscious belief that contributes to the perpetuation of racism, violence, or oppression. It can be demonstrated by biased behavior, lack of empathy towards another group's hardships, or in the case of philanthropy, awarding foundation grants to organizations advocating white nationalist or discriminatory principles.

**EOA: Do you see any signs that DAF-recommended contributions from charitable foundations to hate groups will be curtailed any time soon?**

It was appropriate for Innovia to alter its course with respect to VDare and similar charities. The public debate and attention on philanthropy funding hate is gaining more attention, including its role in the January

2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Other community foundations have also crisped up their grantmaking policies and donor fund agreements.

In June 2021 the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) published *Extremist and Hate Groups May be Abusing Non-Profit Status*, which pointed out that in 2019 the IRS granted nonprofit, tax-exempt status to Oath Keepers Educational Foundation. On January 13, 2022, a federal grand jury in the District of Columbia returned an indictment charging 11 defendants, including the founder of Oath Keepers, with seditious conspiracy related to the breach of the U.S. Capital on January 6, 2021.

After years of discernment and debate, the Council of Foundations, which has more than 1,700 members, went public with a celebratory position against philanthropy funding hate with its August 2021 report *Values-Aligned Philanthropy: Foundations Resisting Hate and Extremism*. It was my privilege to have played a "small part" in this decision-making process.

With their overflowing money vaults, commercial national charities are the ideal candidates to lead grantmaking out of this morass. If they don't, they need to understand they are relinquishing their moral responsibilities and are becoming accessories with donor-advisers supporting white nationalism. It is better to say goodbye to wealthy donors and charities espousing discriminatory agendas. They have an opportunity to be on the right side of history.

For the IRS to be encouraged to implement its own Treas. Regs. and become an appropriate government player in these matters, there must be Congressional hearings.

We should agree and become proactive in our actions and beliefs that America's diversity encourages a greater talent pool and contributes to our unique beauty. By falling in love with all of humanity, we collectively can bring about amazing results.

**EOA: Have you been threatened or attacked in any way since you decided to call public attention to this growing trend?**

MH: Luckily, no. But my family knows that is a possibility. It has happened to others. My name is now on VDare's Website. I can't imagine why they aren't more complimentary.

There are folks who have said to me: "Why are you trying to harm our regional community foundation?"; "Why portray philanthropy in a negative manner?"; and "Why not just leave it alone and enjoy your family and have fun?" I think that misses the point and is a bit parochial. Besides, I believe, Dante (1265 – 1321) made an attention-grabbing prognostication when he stated, "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crises."

**EOA: Please share with us what you are working on now. Your photography has received favorable critical attention. Are you devoted now mainly to affecting change with respect to DAF's funding hate groups in the U.S., or are you spending more of your time working on your photography now? Which project/s occupy most of your creative/intellectual time in 2022?**

MH: I am fortunate to be able to dabble in multiple forms of exploration and creativity. As you know, artistic examples have no age prerequisite. Just look at a preschoolers' crayon drawings of circular people floating in the air or Mary Oliver's inspirational poems as a passionate, solitary young woman seasoning into a Pulitzer Prize winner.

One day for me it might be microfiction or poetry. Another day it could be something else. I haven't matured enough to know exactly which creative venues to chase.

For 2022 and beyond, I will continue, as should others, writing about and encouraging Congressional hearings on the IRS' irresponsibility in allowing IRS approved charities to publicly engage in non-charitable activities that are harming American citizens; especially those in our country who have historically been discriminated against.

And as COVID abates, the universe awaits to be photographed. Like the pictures accompanying this interview, hopefully the companion storytelling titles, which typically are authored by my wife, encourage the viewer to pause, inhale the moment, and exhale a prayer of gratitude.

Thank you, Erin, for inviting me to be part of *Aji's* eclectic and inspirational creativity and for bringing to your reader's attention a few of the reasons for our society's discord, as well as suggestions for a hopeful future – one person at a time.

**"...they are  
relinquishing their  
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and are becoming  
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charities espousing  
discriminatory agendas."**

**-Mark Hurtubise**

## On Heroism

*"I find this world  
A hard and shameful place  
But I am not a bird  
I cannot fly away"*

*-piece of an old Chinese poem*

Heroism can involve far less than running into a burning building to rescue people trapped or unconscious from smoke inhalation. You don't have to take a bullet to protect students from an active shooter. Heroism occurs in doing the right thing.

Sometimes a simple conversation, or even a few softly spoken words can meet that definition.

Solzhenitsyn referred to the Gulag as a septic system.

In that analogy, society becomes a living being, and all living things eliminate. Despite the current differences between Soviet Russia and contemporary America, our society still needs prisons (though the shape of the system is very debatable). Most of the people I have met in prisons deserve to have spent some time inside. The criminal acts that incarcerated, however, do not eliminate humanity. Prisoners love and hate and struggle to find a place in the world just like every other person on the planet. Sometimes, though, bad choices stack one on top of the other.

Prison has its own cultural ecosystem. What is acceptable and commonly practiced in society often assumes Bizarro World norms behind the fences, walls, and towers. Our society dictates that if you see something suspicious, you should call the police. The opposite holds true to the microcosm of the incarcerated. Rule number one: Mind your own business. And if you see somebody else's business, keep it to yourself.

It shames me to say that I have spent nearly twenty-five years adapting to those rules. At the time of my arrest, with a little more direction, I should have been a college sophomore trying to determine what I wanted to do with my life. Instead, I flushed many futures away pretending to be something I was not. I may not be the villain, but neither am I a hero-- especially in this particular story.

If people snap at you to "mind your business," and "stay in your lane" often enough, you'll eventually fall into line, even if your thoughts run counter-current. Knuckles might even fly at your jaw from time to time, for "dippin". Time passes. Things happen, sometimes bad things, and you see these things, but you have learned to mind your business, so you walk past and keep your mouth shut.

Irony follows this practice in that we prisoners live a hundred or more deep in a space that would crowd twenty people in the outside world. Living cheek to jowl prevents ignorance of others' business, leading to various levels of hypocrisy for Rule Number One. Yet, we only catch pieces of things--an argument without context, two people conversing in whispers while walking the track, and so on. However, once an event transpires, the little pieces coalesce into a panorama.

Every person entertains what if scenarios from time to time. Such is linked to regret. Beyond the big questions orbiting the possibilities of different paths as a teenager, I often wonder if acting contrary to my



trained inaction could have ever made a difference. How often have I seen a rising confrontation between two men? Could a few soft words have deescalated such a situation?

A few weeks ago, I stepped into the dayroom not long after it had opened for the evening, around 6:00 P.M. Perhaps I went to heat something in the microwave, perhaps I had plans to talk to someone for a few minutes. I can't recall exactly why I left the cell, simply that I did.

If the first rule of prison is to mind your business, rule number two is remaining vigilant. Although fortune has favored me, limiting the trauma inflicted, there are places where the incarcerated always double-knot shoes when leaving the cell, and shower with homeboys on security.

Little of the action of the dayroom registered with me that day. Someone occupied each of the four phones by the stairs and a line of men sat in chairs waiting their twenty-minute turns. Dominoes clinked together at one table between hands, while two or three card games passed the time at other tables. The two TVs on opposite ends of the dayroom blared with only a couple people watching each. A few others simply mingled within the limits of their social boundaries. One less than typical action did draw my attention: Chance yelled through the crack of Tex's cell door some rather vile epithets, words most often reserved to challenge.

Although pushing fifty, Chance looked closer to forty.

People familiar with *The Simpsons* would see similar characteristics between Chance and the animated Snake. His outburst had little affect on me, however, because, not only have I grown inured to such things, Chance is an angry person known to express his ire. He once had words with me when I refused him bread from a state meal he wanted in order to feed birds.

Whatever Tex had done, it wasn't my business. I concluded my own in the dayroom and returned to my cell. I had plans to write a correspondent, and I worked on that until I took a break a bit before eight. At that point, again, I went out to the dayroom. Chance remained at (or had returned to) Tex's cell door, continuing a tirade of bitch-ass this and that (a common adjective in prison, at least in the Midwest). I went out to the courtyard to look at the distant trees on the other side of the razor-coiled fence.

Not every prison is Alcatraz, Terra Haute, or San Quentin. The DOC assigns security placement--maximum, medium, or minimum--based on sentence structure and behavior. And each classification reduction offers additional privileges. When they kept me at Portage (where Jeffery Dahmer was killed), the cell doors mostly remained locked. When they decided I had sat enough time without causing too many problems, they sent me to a medium. Other than for count and meals, dayrooms run most of the day, and we can come and go from our cells during that time. When dayrooms are open, so too are the courtyards. In addition to that, the institution also issues each person a key to his assigned cell.

The early evening fresh air refocused my thoughts. After about five minutes or so I returned inside. People began to mill around waiting for the gym sign-out. Chance had ended his tirade and spoke with Tex's cellmate. I suspected in that moment that Chance intended to fight Tex. But a suspicion means nothing, doesn't it? It became common knowledge later that the cellie had handed off his room key. I saw nothing because it wasn't my business. I made my way through the dayroom, and up the back stairs. Chance took a similar path perhaps fifteen feet behind me. I thought about saying something. The conversation in my

head talked me out of it. Cameras would have caught any interaction (without audio, thus context) which might have led to staff investigators questioning me, especially if Chance did, in fact, have the key to Tex's cell, and went to fight. Chance's intentions were none of my business. I returned to my cell, a few from Tex's on the tier.

People here often have the misconception that fighting in private will prevent staff involvement. Although it might decrease the odds of that involvement, we live near a hundred others, and, risks aside, some of them still choose to mind the business of others as much as their own.

They say a hard head leads to a soft ass. Asimov wrote that violence is the last refuge of the incompetent, yet many, especially in prison, utilize it quickly. People fail to understand how final violence is, ultimately. A punch that lands in the wrong place can kill a person. Or that same punch might stagger a person to fall against a hard corner, leading to the same result. Most people cannot comprehend the effects of taking a life, and don't even consider it when choosing violence.

Although about the same height, Tex gave up fifty pounds to Chance. Yet despite his small size, Tex had a penchant for letting his mouth write bad checks. Whatever the initial disagreement, Tex had more likely than not fueled the conflagration that led to violence. Many would have said, knowing the instigating factors, that Tex earned a few lumps in what should have amounted to a schoolyard fight. But that's not what happened.

Squabbles arise from time to time, from between strangers to the most intimate. When I think back to what I would soon witness, and consider it on a macro scale, it leaves me wondering how the human race continues. Has our existence always swung on the courage of a calm voice convincing the snail running down the razor blade to stop? Does that make my silence cowardice even though I had only a few suspicions of the violence to come?

I returned to my correspondence. The radio issued classic rock repeating various patterns of seven. My fan's motor whirled more to cover the dayroom din than circulate air. The clink of dominoes assumed a distance, almost unnoticeable. Then came the screams.

I only witnessed the aftermath. Tex's screams entered the dayroom as he must have fled the cell. Moments later the intercom blared "Dayrooms are closed!" over and over, and a swarm of correctional officers ordered Chance to stop the assault. Sitting in a chair next to my cell door, I froze, then abruptly closed my correspondence with "I'm sorry, something happened nearby, I need to close for now."

A seemingly breath-held silence replaced the din. Guards exchanged information about the incident, and job duties and responsibilities of that moment. I thought I could hear Tex moaning, but I refused to move for fear of what I would see through my cell door window.

Could I have prevented this? I wondered. The time for talking had probably long passed when Chance came up the stairs behind me. He had most likely solidified his intentions, and no argument could have dissuaded him by that point. I might have made a difference had I said something when I first saw him shouting into Tex's cell; instead, I adhered to the programmed reaction to mind my own business.

I steeled myself to look. In front of my cell, Tex lay partially hanging off the tier, almost unmoving. Blood.



What hyperbole adequately expresses the amount? As primary janitor on the unit, I was asked by staff to clean after they had photographed the crime scene. A fist of asphalt in a sock, we would learn later, splattered blood in a twenty-foot radius from a line of points between Tex's cell and mine, on both tiers. The spill kit contained a special cloth of a couple square feet with instructions to lay it over the bodily fluids, but it failed to cover even just the pool where it had dripped from his wounds onto the dayroom floor. They would take out a large red garbage bag full of mop heads for incineration once we had finished cleaning.

They would take out Tex on a gurney. EMS workers attended him while staff shackled him for transport out of the institution. I could hear them outside my door comforting Tex with platitudes, and I thought to myself about the difference between American and Japanese philosophies in reconstructing broken pottery where the Japanese highlight the fractures while Americans try to hide them. The warden issued no sad duty memo, and after a couple of months I learned Tex had been transferred somewhere for recovery—mental as well as physical.

Chance wrote me from the box a month after the incident. At sentencing for these new crimes, the judge could issue an additional century of prison time. He gave me a sorry series of ingrained rationales for his actions, which I half-understood having received a similar indoctrination over the past two-plus decades. I asked him if saying something would have prevented the assault. Since then, Chance hasn't said a word.





## *How I Came To Love Jazz*

The road to where I am now with jazz was, to quote a famous song, “a long and winding road”. To begin with, I am not a musician, but back when I was in my late teens and early twenties I became a “serious” music aficionado. I was especially drawn to rock. A friend of mine turned me on to Hendrix, Cream, finally to Santana. I grew to appreciate all types of rock music, but jazz was not then on my radar. Not even fusion. When it finally called out to me, I must admit I was not ready for it.

I was working in a hardware store, in what was a chain of stores that one could say was the forerunner of the big box hardware stores of today. While working as a part-timer stocking shelves and helping customers while attending college, I would turn on a radio that was part of a display of maybe a dozen or so different models that, back then, people would install in their cars as replacements and upgrades over what the automotive companies provided as standard equipment. More like sub-standard, but that is a different story.

My manager was a “rec” bass player who, perhaps, disdained rock music, calling it out for its simplicity, its reliance on “hooks” and three chords. I paid him no never mind, digging the sounds that emanated from the displayed car radios and when in my bedroom, the music filled my room. Perhaps, it made it hard for other family members to hear themselves think. What better way to hear Carlos and his early bands play tunes from Abraxas, Caravanserai, Borboleta. I have seen Santana live over 60 times, and counting. Add to the mix Jimi (gone before I even heard of him), Neil Young, the Grateful Dead. Loud. Walls of sound.

Rich was persistent, and determined to cultivate my musical tastes, or curate them. One day, he came into work with two albums, one by Pat Martino, the other by Joe Pass. He asked me to listen to them, to give jazz a try, to open my mind to other musical sonic experiences and possibilities. But with the sound of Carlos’ guitar in my mind, I would probably have appreciated Al DiMeola and John McLaughlin before Pass and Martino. I tried to listen to both; I could not get past the first compositions. Neither album struck my fancy. If memory serves, I returned the albums to Rich, despite having never listened to them again. Boy was I wrong. My journey, unbeknownst to me, was now taking an offramp from the rock and roll highway that I was on. DiMeola and McLaughlin were just the beginning.

The same thing that happened to me with Pass and Martino repeated itself with the Pat Metheny Group, back when Lyle Mays played keys, Steve Rodby was on bass, Danny Gootlieb manned the drum chair, and Nana Vasconcelos added textures and cool vibes via various percussion instruments (and the berimbau) plus wordless vocals. I tried listening to “Travels”, PMG’s first live double album. I was still not ready, but then something was happening. The road to jazz began to open up, or better said, my mind opened. PMG through “Travels” and all of their other creative output, began to make sense, and I have seen various iterations of PMG more than 50 times since my first encounter with their music. (My wife and I have even named one of our horses after the late, great Lyle Mays.)

Jazz then became an integral part of my musical self, albeit as a fan, since, as I hinted at before, I am no more able to play a musical instrument than I can figure out John Conway’s Game of Life, but that is a whole other story. It is actually beyond me to be able to describe jazz’s hold on me, but suffice to say I can hold my own in talking about the greats of the music: Holiday, Parker, Addelery, Monk, Coltrane, Shorter, Pass and

Martino (yes!), Metheny, Krall, Fitzgerald, Miles, Brubeck, Mays, Evans, Barbieri, Aldana, Hiromi. Shall I go on? I think you get the point. I have immersed myself in the language of jazz, just as I have done so with the Spanish language, running and cycling, horses, and so much more.

However, I realized the other day that I had been searching for the next Santana, the next Metheny, to add to the short list of my absolute favorites, whose music would accompany me to the proverbial “if I were stuck on a deserted island” question. Thanks to the algorithm of YouTube, I have “discovered” just that person. Her name is Harumo Imai and if you have not heard of her or listened to her music, you are missing out. She is a saxophone player, songwriter and composer extraordinaire (from Japan) who is just as comfortable playing jazz as she is playing funk, hip-hop and so much more. Her sound is unique, her energy electric, her tastes eclectic, and being young, she is poised to be the future of jazz. In fact, she was a member of the Future Jazz Quartet, whose debut CD “Flying Humanoids” was poised for...well, the pandemic interfered with what could have been...

Harumo is equally at home playing with musicians of her own age as well as players who are decades older. Imai becomes the musical GPS no matter who she performs with. She has shared the stage with Victor Wooten, Tokyo Groove Jyoshi and so many other traditional *and* contemporary jazz musicians. My deep love and appreciation of jazz, through her, has been re-invigorated. Jazz is big-tent music. It is not static; it has an element of surprise. Today’s practitioners are not bound by the past but they are informed by it; they are forging new paths and Harumo, to me, to my musical sensibilities, is, as the commercial says, find(ing) new roads. Jazz’s history has not been written in its entirety: there is so much more.

Carlos, Pat and now Harumo. Carlos was exploring the boundaries of rock as it meets jazz, but never quite crossed over. Pat is still exploring many of the sonic possibilities of jazz, and where it meets or intersects with rock. Harumo is taking jazz into the worlds of funk, hip-hop, R&B and rock and with her incredible improvisatory skills, is creating a new jazz dialect. One that is sure to be universal, accessible yet technically challenging. Full of emotion, spirit, sensibility, and grit. Unwavering in its originality, true to the past but even more so, true to the future. To paraphrase Jack Kerouac, Harumo is “ready to rock the jazz world”.

Why do I love jazz? I love it not just for what it was, and is, but for what it can become. Rich, if you are reading this (we have long since lost touch but I have never forgotten you), I send you a belated thank you for turning me on to jazz. I am forever in your debt. And, in case you are wondering if, when you loaned me those albums ohh so many years ago, if I did enjoy them...well, I do now.

PS: I had the honor of seeing both Joe Pass and Pat Martino live.

## ***The Gored Horse 1917***

The horse mostly fell out of the painting. It did not happen fast at all, more like an actual birth than anything else—the graphite and pencil on the canvas transforming to flesh-and-blood reality: front legs out first, right hoof and left foreleg striking the walnut desktop below the canvas; neck arching upwards, stretching in animalistic agony; the forebody and then the rest just falling out, the back right hoof and back left foreleg hitting hard; the whole of the horse’s body slipping downward across the desktop and toward the wooden floor where the gored horse ultimately landed all in a heap. Extending into the middle of the living room, the horse struggled to stand, whinnying and snorting and flailing its hooves, rising somewhat but not fully, arching as intestines oozed out from a long, bloody stomach gash.

That was how it started. Banjo Bender could hardly believe his misfortune, his gaze fluctuating between the now-empty canvas on his wall and the struggling horse on his living-room floor. “Who could have ever prepared for that?” he thought to himself. It was unbelievable. Banjo could hardly fathom what he was seeing, even though it was all happening right there in front of his very eyes. He blinked. He rubbed. His brown eyes blinked again. The horse did not vanish; it just writhed in agony right there in front of him. It snorted and gasped and stomped and stretched its neck and head toward the heavens and bled on the floor, and, worst of all, it didn’t go away.

One moment, Banjo Bender had been living a perfectly normal life. Just like every other day of his adult life, he had gotten up, showered and shaved, brushed his cavity-free teeth, grabbed underwear and socks from a drawer, and plodded into the kitchen, his long hair still wet, while poking at his cellphone until National Public Radio’s *Morning Edition* started filling the quiet. He boiled a pot of coffee on the stove, poured it and some cream into a cup, sipped, put on his socks, finished the coffee, cleaned the cat boxes with the grey scooper, tied a knot in the plastic bag and tossed it in the garbage, put on his brown hiking shoes, tied the black laces, opened the door, walked down the steep steps to his car, pressed the button that unlocked the white doors of his Toyota Camry, pleased in the car’s beeping, sat in the seat, started the car, drove to work, and at work did all those myriad things he did every day. Then he returned to the comfort of his home. That was his perfectly normal life. That life, his normal life, was exactly how he liked it. Now, there was a gored horse on his living-room floor. Nothing was normal now.

In the next moment, within the shock of altered experience, Banjo realized he had been holding his breath and gritting his teeth. He did not at all like having a gored horse in his living room. It ruined his life. It simply was not normal. It was inconceivable. It was wrong. In a moment of semi self-awareness, Banjo recognized that his mind was nothing but a dithery mess, a pendulum of uncertainty fluctuating between the extremes of dread and denial. Biting at his graying mustache and then dragging his lower teeth down, he sighed while slipping into a state of worry. What would his neighbors think? What would the police say? How would he explain that a gored horse had just flowed out of his Picasso? People would say he had some sort of mental illness. And then what would happen? His credibility would vanish.

It was not even a real Picasso, for God’s sake—just a costly Chinese reproduction. As if compelled by a force of nature, Banjo had decided to order the painting on December 1<sup>st</sup>—a quiet event, just the pressing of a button on his cellphone. Nobody even knew about it. By the 8<sup>th</sup>, the artist had started work in earnest. Of course, nobody officially notified Banjo until the 31<sup>st</sup>. So, for a whole month, he hadn’t really even known



that the reproduction was progressing.

The next thing Banjo heard, *The Gored Horse* had been shipped, but not to America, much to his surprise. Instead the factory had shipped it to Thailand of all places, to a sixty-one-year-old woman. After that, the painting made its way to Japan. The detour to Japan did not surprise Banjo, who remembered figuring something like that would happen since the painting had already been detoured once. Nor did it surprise him that the painting made its way to Taiwan and Hong Kong and also to Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and even Nepal. He was just glad that the factory and subsequent string of shippers kept him updated as to the painting's whereabouts as it made its way from one distributor to the next. He was, however, just a bit surprised to hear that the reproduction had arrived in France, but his surprise lasted only a short time because, instead of feeling slighted, he realized and even felt the welling of significant pride in the fact that the reproduction must actually be of the highest quality to have made its way to The city of haute couture.

By January 31<sup>st</sup> Banjo heard the painting had made it way to Orange County, California. Shortly after that, however, news arrived from various shippers and dealers that it was being redirected to places all over the globe: India, Germany, the Philippines, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Italy, the United Kingdom, and all points in between.

Banjo Bender found himself pacing back and forth between the kitchen and the living room, fretting uncontrollably about seeing the reproduction. All he could think about were the masses of people who would handle the painting as it made its way around the world. In fact, by February 7<sup>th</sup>, he was dismayed to learn the painting in its heavy wood-framed container had been to twenty-five countries. The thought of all those unwashed hands fondling his art sickened Banjo. Strangely, however, knowing the reproduction had been to so many places actually helped him feel certain the painting would eventually make its way to his home in Rock Island, Illinois. "As sure as the Mississippi River meanders its way past this city," he thought to himself, "I know my painting will eventually meander its way to me."

Now, as he watched the gored horse floundering in the middle of his very own living room, Banjo wondered how many times over the course of the painting's travels the horse had suddenly surprised strangers by materializing out of the painting in darkened rooms, railway stations, truck stops, warehouses, delivery trucks, and who knows wherever else the painting might have ended up. Banjo assumed the distributors had been having fun and looked at or maybe even displayed the painting whenever they could. He was sure everybody who passed by ogled and Googled. For Banjo, *The Gored Horse* was the visual equivalent of a Siren's song. The painting was irresistible. He knew others would feel the same. "But what about all those people who were alarmed by the materialization of the horse?" Bango queried mentally as the horse suffered physically. He could just see the faces of all those who witnessed the emergence of their gored horses. He could see their shocked expressions, just as he could imagine how pale and stymied his own reflection might reveal his face to be at that very moment. There must have been countless shocked people as the painting made its way from place to place to place.

On March 22, *The Gored Horse* finally found its way to Rock Island. Within a day, the painting was delivered to Banjo by postal carrier, but only after having spent a few hours leaning against a wall at the Polish Pub where it was shamelessly displayed while people sipped suds, played pool, listened to America's "A Horse with No Name," and, of course, coughed loudly. The carrier actually had to enlist the assistance

of Banjo's neighbor, an overweight boisterous drunk, to get the painting up Banjo's steep steps, past the flower garden, and to the back door where the mailbox hung. The two left the painting leaning against the white garage door. As the drunken neighbor made his way through the flower garden towards his home, the carrier scanned the barcode until the scanner beeped, then pulled some junk mail from his bag and placed it in the mailbox, dropping the lid with a clink. He then sighed contentedly before heading back to his vehicle.

Banjo heard the beep of the postal carrier's scanner and the dropping of the mailbox lid and was happy, although he had by that time given up on seeing *The Gored Horse* anytime soon. Thinking an Amazon package containing his new webcam had arrived, Banjo left the hot water running over the dishes in his sink and went to the backdoor to find out what gifts the carrier had left. Initially, he was surprised that there wasn't an Amazon package waiting, so he lifted the mailbox lid and removed the three pieces of junk mail, two coupons for local furniture stores and one advertisement for the local blond-haired female realtor who had sold him the house where he lived.

It was not until after Banjo had glanced at the junk mail that he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the container leaning against the garage door. He did not quite jump for joy because, at first, he did not know what it was. He soon figured it out, however, and, thereafter, quickly opened the screen door and tossed the mail in the garbage. Turning back toward the screen door, he opened it again, bent, and secured the standard-duty pneumatic black closer in the open position. Excitedly, he lifted the meter-wide painting in its particleboard delivery container, brought it into the kitchen, and turned off the hot water before releasing the closer and latching the screen door. The container was heavy, but he managed to get it inside. A sketched note on the front of the shipping container illustrated how the side panel could be removed with a large screwdriver placed between the thin particleboard cover and two-inch pine frame siding. So doing, Banjo Bender was able to pry open the container. Removing the top, he saw a piece of white butcher paper covering the front of the painting, and, feeling the slightly sticky resistance of the paper as he lifted the corner off the all but completely dried paint, he watched as *The Gored Horse* was revealed.

Banjo felt horrified and appalled by the content, although also humbled by the reproduction's craftsmanship. Whatever differences might exist in the work that made it a variant of the original, Banjo could not see with his naked eyes. "I'm sure," he thought, "Picasso himself would hardly notice any differences." It was truly horrifying—drawn on the ochre-colored canvas was a skin-and-bones horse fallen to its forelegs, intestines and blood flowing from its body. The death scene overwhelmed Banjo and caused him, for just a moment, to doubt whether he should put the painting on display. Then the moment passed, and he located a hammer and a 1.5" nail and placed the painting at the very center of the living-room wall and directly above his large walnut desk (upon which he stood to hang the painting). It was thrilling to think about how he would be able to study and read and occasionally glance up at his beautiful replication.

Right away, Banjo took pictures with his cellphone and posted them to a variety of social-media sites. In just a matter of minutes, he experienced a great shock. Virtually all his friends and family already knew of the painting, and there were even a few who already had their own copy, some copies larger, others smaller. Some had copies as close to the original as his own.

This nearly simultaneous product fetishization stymied Banjo Bender. He had been so isolated that it never occurred to him he might not be the only one who had ever thought about getting a reproduction of *The*

*Gored Horse*. As it turned out, there were people on social media from all over the world marveling at the painting.

Within three days of Banjo's hanging his reproduction on the wall, the horse fell out, onto his desk, and then onto his living room floor. There was nothing he could do about it. The first few hours of the horse's dying agony were overwhelming. Banjo could not even bring himself to get up from the couch where he sat. After four hours of watching the horse's suffering, Banjo thought that, perhaps, he could just push the horse out of the living room, into the kitchen, and out the back door. At least it could die in peace outside. But the horse simply could not be budged. Push as Banjo might, there was nothing he could do. The horse was in too much pain to move on its own and too heavy, really, too dangerous for Banjo to do anything about it on his own.

Eventually, Banjo worked his way around the suffering horse, through the kitchen, and out the back door, figuring, as he made his way to the neighbors, that one or more of them might be able to help him remove the horse. At the first neighbor's house, all Banjo could hear was the neighing and whinnying and stomping of equestrian-level suffering. Knock as hard and for as long as he might, the neighbor never came to the door. At the next neighbor's home, things were not much better. In fact, they were worse. Those neighbors, the Shoemakers, had what sounded like several horses in their home—at least four (one for each of their mansion's large sitting rooms). Bill Shoemaker opened the massive front door just wide enough that Banjo could see his head and face. Banjo tried speaking, but the noise was so loud that neither Shoemaker nor Banjo could really hear each other. Bill rolled his eyes and shut the door. Banjo left cured of any envy he had felt for the Shoemakers. How horrible it must have been to have four gored horses dying at one time.

That's basically how it went at every house. A few were able to come to their doors, but none of them wanted anything to do with helping Banjo, and they all shooed him away.

Undaunted, Banjo called his local friends—John, Gerardo, Cookie, Fred, Jenny, Joan, Samantha, Bill and Liz, John and John, and quite a few others, even his worst friend, whom he referred to as Horrid Torrid. They all had *The Gored Horse*, and each was stuck with a dying horse that simply could not be moved. Nobody could really help anybody else. In fact, there were gored horses in most every building in every town and city. The horse that had materialized from his painting had achieved just that level of viral fixation. The world soon came to a standstill.

Political leaders started working on the problem. Some political leaders quickly figured out that collective action yielded great results. The horses seemed to respond well to collective collaboration and could be coaxed back into their paintings as long as everybody truly cared for their own horses in their own houses. Once they got their horses back into the paintings, the people could dispose of the paintings, and then, though a few paintings might get snuck back into the country, the people could return to the lives they had been leading before *The Gored Horse* reproduction crisis.

In other countries, leaders first denied that the horses even existed while simultaneously buying millions of reproductions and distributing them to households and offices and bars. Some people in those countries tried to collaborate and take care of their horses. Most people slopped up their leaders' denial of the horses' existence. Had they covered their faces and not looked at the painting, they might have avoided the visual Siren songs. Instead, they had parties and packed their houses with friends, all the while telling each



other that the gored horses in their living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms were not actually there, but were, instead, a kind of collective fantasy. Like their political leaders, they bought and gave away as many reproductions as they could.

As for Banjo Bender, after going to his neighbors and having called all of his friends, he returned to his house where he cared for the gored horse on his living room floor. Banjo did his best to ease the suffering of the horse, stroking its forehead and muzzle until it quieted down a bit. After a few days of care, the horse flowed back into the reproduction from which it had emerged. Banjo Bender cleaned up his house (there was quite a bit of blood), then took down the painting, and set it near the curb where the city soon picked it up and disposed of it as per the official plan. When he returned to his home, he took off his shoes, sat down on the fluffy couch, and gazed up at the wall where the painting had once hung above the walnut desk (which still had the scuff marks from the horse's hooves). "Well," he thought to himself, "I suppose having only one original copy of *The Gored Horse* is enough for the whole world."

## *Falling Faintly Through the Universe*

Note the woman outlined in the cold pre-dawn living room, aching and tired, wrapped in last night's coat with its medicinal tang of the hospital clinging to the woolen crevices. Note her gaze watching the sky outside bruise and bleed and heal, one day spilling over into the next. Seeing her father's wan face covered in tubes, his face scratchy and overgrown, old. The room was noisy with beeps and whirs. A nurse nearby to explain the upticks and downturns of his body's impermanence. He may live, or not. I try to occupy my own body.

I think: we live on a dot, but the edges tend to smear. Proof is necessary.

Note the subcategories of twilight. That the dawn becomes. Breaks not as a plate but laces herself and paints herself and steps across the sky herself. She sprinkles her ankles and splashes her back, sending tiny ripples before she disassembles toes first into the swimming pool. That my mom does that.

Note that we try so to name the undulations of daybreak: astronomical dawn marks the beginning of astronomical twilight, which lasts until nautical dawn, and death comes in stages. Beeps and whirs. Star-gazers and sailors mark the dawn by degrees. But this can also be accomplished by accepting that the yolk of the day is now broken. You're it.

Note that time is conventional. AM is Latin, ante meridiem, before the middle of the day; PM is post meridiem, after, postman, parallel Martian, primary minivan, positive melody, prim maiden, pizza mood, plum Minerva, after the middle, but before the end. Ma and Pop. I'm losing it.

Note that people are more likely to die at 11am. That there's a study. That a switch in our genes keeps time. Is that so?

Note that the 24-hour cycle starts at midnight and runs through noon and on, am to pm, not with the military, of course, who can't be seen dicking around with dead languages. Note that timing is deflection. It's always easier to make a joke than to see the man halfway dead before you.

Note that the flower of the sunflower preserves the final orientation of the bud, thus keeping the mature flower facing east as a chorus, standing, braving the dawn.

Note that sunlight reaches us in waves that are in fact rings that slam against the earth's atmosphere, pitching us through time and space. Ride it out.

Note that twilight has three phases: civil, nautical, astronomical (re-packing the box, putting the props back where you found them, unbreaking the cookie).

Note that hens cackle or shriek where roosters crow. But angsty insects are the sunset's analog, a clicking herald for the close of day. He may live, he may not. Beeps and whirs.

Note that night occurs only once the sun no longer illuminates the sky.

## *Top of the Mountain*

*The shepherds move toward Paris  
their herding rods hit the ground  
boom  
protest of a generation  
thousands and thousands  
marching from Larzac  
through many towns  
hundreds of kilometers to arrive  
at the Champs Elysées  
boom  
to demand that the military  
not sequester their land  
this fight  
with the government going on  
for almost 10 years since 1971  
but really so much longer than that  
this walk  
boom  
this need to defend  
traditions, autonomy, rights  
this constant protection of  
what they oversee  
to keep what's theirs  
both sheep and farmer  
against power  
boom  
whoever the big  
bad wolf may be*

What I noticed first about Emile was his voice. It can sometimes be deep, rich and self-assured, though he also has a way of trailing off slowly into a higher register or suddenly becoming silent. In fact sometimes he disappears altogether. At dinner he'll be telling a story and then he's gone. He reminds me of a lark - more perky in the morning and of the kind to retreat at night taking his song away with him. But what always remains is the lingering scent of mountain air he's brought with him. There's also the way he can sometimes look like a teenager even though he's eighty years old and clearly he's covered a lot of ground over the years.

But nothing is normal in a life full of enchantment. When he was born in Paris under the occupation, it was so cold in the apartment that the midwife made a burning alcohol fire in the kitchen sink. Emile's earliest memory is of running into a bomb shelter in the metro around the age of three with his half-brother and mother. He met his father, who'd been taken prisoner of war by the German soldiers, for the first time when he was five. He had a wicked little sister and a jealous half-brother. But most importantly, he had a step-grandmother who decided she would tutor him until he would go to normal school with the others at



the age of eleven. He was the only one of his family to have had this special education and for mysterious reasons that he would never understand. Even his parents appeared to have fallen under some kind of a spell by entrusting him to her and nobody ever knew that she had secretly undertaken to endow him with special powers. Only Emile himself would understand over time that what she had given him was unique, but had also come with a price. Over the years he would frequently feel the loneliness of knowing certain things that are not easily understood by others.

### **Boots, Cloak and Dagger**

While Emile was growing up his step grandmother gave him three things. They were material objects that symbolized the particular ways in which she, as his tutor, was extending his mind. The first gift was a pair of boots that she said would carry him wherever he wanted to go. With time he understood the boots represented enthusiasm and curiosity. The second was a cloak that could make him invisible. It would show him discretion and humility. And finally he received a dagger that she said would make his language powerful and expressive. Even at an early age he was precocious and showed an aptitude for culture and learning.

I think of him often with his elegant but overworn clothes that come from friends or are findings from thrift shops. I picture the slight tremor that occasionally creeps into his movements and that reveal his age, the delicacy of his words and gestures that accompany his quiet musings and also the fact that he's known hard times. He once told me that even though he had a degree as a chemical engineer he was surviving on a retirement that was less than minimum wage. He told me he hadn't worked long as an engineer because back in the day when he was fresh out of graduate school he had abandoned his first job as a steel plant manager after less than a year. He realized quickly that the deplorable condition of workers was not something that as a manager he could tolerate.

And that was the decisive moment when he broke away from the comforts and frills of bourgeois life and took to climbing mountains, exploring uninhabited islands near the Antarctic in the South Pacific and then becoming isolated, keeping bees in the Alps. He raised three children without electricity or running water near a tiny village in the mountains to the east of France. When it came time to retire, all of this richness amounted to very little money. With nothing to lose, he decided at the age of sixty-five, to get his doctorate and write about the history and philosophy of astronomy. "Just because I'd always thought it would be an interesting thing to do", he told me one day. I suppose he'd been so involved with land and sustainability issues throughout his lifetime that in the later years it made sense for him to turn his gaze more toward the stars.

### **"It's as far south as you can go and survive"**

is what he and the men would say about the French military base in the South Pacific where they were in 1965. This place was so far away that they were shooting rabbits to complement the food supplies they were getting every six months from mainland France. They were part of a special technical regiment that was made up mostly of scientists who'd been sent there on various kinds of exploratory missions. Emile had

been sent to study radioactivity in the atmosphere. It was a perfect way for him to leave his job as manager at the steel factory and do his military service as a conscientious objector all at the same time. And he would often speak of those 18 months as being some of the best of his lifetime.

When the men weren't working they would wander around the base and observe the penguins and the sea lions, play cards and drink together and mostly tell stories or try to climb "the unclimbable mountain" - Mount Ross. Emile was the first to take on the big challenge by leading a serious climbing expedition in 1965. It was a treacherous journey with terrible ice and wind conditions. Just when they were getting to the top, a huge storm forced them to begin their trek back down. Even today when he isn't dreaming of going back there he finds other mountains to climb and is always looking to go higher and higher.

### **"He's nowhere to be found"**

is what many were saying about him during the years that he and his little family were in the Alps on the border with Italy. They mainly kept company with their dog, chickens, fruit and nut trees. They would go far away into town very rarely to get flour for baking bread. This is when he became a "bee whisperer" and would sell honey to some of the farmers he knew from that part of the mountain.

He also learned about some ancient farming techniques from his hippy commune friends further along on the same road. There was lots of talk about biodynamic farming with the phases of the moon. And then one day he was recruited by a regional infrastructure planning group to work on a project installing the first solar panels in France. This was all back in the 1970's and 1980's and the work was so revolutionary and experimental for its time that it was almost invisible to the rest of the world. And as it was in many ways premature, it didn't pick up momentum quickly and was abandoned until many years later.

In fact not long after this time, the commune would disband, Emile and his family would move toward a more urban setting and the solar panel initiatives would all disappear. Still today there's not much documentation about the alternative lifestyles that had developed during those years in rural parts of France. The actors in that movement were looked upon as ne'er-do-wells in their day and it's only now that many of their ideas are starting to get recognition - finally now after all those years of having "disappeared".

### **"Boom!" was the sound**

of the shephard's sticks moving up toward Paris, but luckily he didn't have to go and defend himself in front of the tribunal in 1981 where he had been summoned on charges of civil disobedience for having burned his identity papers in the struggle with Larzac. He would never have been able to come up with the ransom money and the jail time would have driven him mad. He got out of it by the skin of his teeth as did all of his group that got pardoned when Mitterand came to power and granted clemency to all citizens for misdemeanors and non-violent crimes.

Although it was a time of great agitation, many things came together for Emile with this peasant uprising at Larzac against the government under Pompidou and then Giscard d'Estaing. Emile was married by then

and two of his children were already born. He and his wife had been very active in the movement to adopt non-violent ways to challenge authority. They initiated petitions and wrote letters. Sometimes they would go and demonstrate. But mainly they were very knowledgeable about land usage as well as human rights.

It was a great victory for all of them when the peasants at Larzac finally won that momentous fight in 1981, using peaceful means of non-violent communication as they quietly but so articulately made their struggle understood all over Europe. It seemed to all of them then as if the horizons were finally opening up. But of course this was a long time ago and before talk of climate change. So there were many battles ahead still needing to be won.

But even still I can picture Emile quietly petitioning as he walks on the mountains where he lives further down the valley now. Boom, boom...His walking baton hits the rocky ground and there's the sound of his steady steps on the hills. He looks at the grapevines and observes how they change with the seasons. On one side of the valley they still use pesticides. On the other side they don't. And there are even some biodynamic producers not far from his town. The struggle continues and sometimes at town meetings they all argue and Emile knows it will probably take another generation for some of these people to come around. So he sometimes feels sorrow. But he knows this is the price that he pays for having covered so much ground, sometimes invisible and or with just the sound of the shepherd's baton : boom, boom... and the song of the lark and what he wrote in his petitions and memoirs, or his book about the stars. He sometimes calls to tell me about what's going on, about what he sees in his garden during the day or in the sky at night, and about how in spring many birds come and sing in that valley.



## *A Silent Beating Heart*

On a day not too long ago, I was opening a glass door to leave an art museum. I had a little humming in the back of my head, a sense that I should open the door slowly and look down. On the stoop in front of me lay a tiny green bird. The bird's dark brown wings were splayed on either side of its white body.

Dismayed that the bird might be dead, I bent down and carefully picked up the tiny body. It was a hummingbird. I slowly turned the body back and forth see if it was alive. The bird was so delicate and light, almost ethereal, and although it was still warm, I couldn't tell if it was breathing. It must have just struck a window and fallen to the ground right before I opened the door.

I felt honored to hold this bird. I can probably count on my hand the number of times I've ever even *seen* a hummingbird, and I'd never come close to touching one. I'm from Guatemala and hummingbirds are still worshipped by many of the indigenous Mayan tribes there. Some indigenous Guatemalans, especially the older men, to this day eat hummingbird bone powder as an aphrodisiac, or to add longevity and vitality, but those adjectives seemed at odds with the tiny bird in my hands. The impression I got when looking at the hummingbird was of impermanence and debility, and I worried that the slightest pressure from my hands would finish it off.

The fragile hummingbird in my hand had iridescent green feathers from its head to its tail. It made me think that the ancient Mayan myth of their creation must be true. The Mayan gods were said to have carved the first hummingbird from a precious stone of green jade, in the shape of an arrow. When they finished carving the arrowhead shaped bird, they blew the stone dust from the jade, but they blew the stone so hard that the bird flew into the air, as fast as an arrow. Seeing the speed of this creature they decided to make it their messenger. Holy Mayan day keepers, still practice augury and watch for the portents hummingbirds will deliver from the gods.

I looked around to see if anyone was watching and held the hummingbird up to my ear. Maybe it had a message for me? I heard nothing, not even the thrum of its furious heartbeat, but maybe its mere presence was a message in and of itself.

According to the day keepers, a dead hummingbird in your path means that you will soon experience death or a difficult loss. I immediately thought of my elderly father. He's so old, nearly 88. I shuddered.

Maybe my hands trembled a bit when I shuddered. Whatever the reason, the hummingbird stirred. I quickly cupped my right hand over my left making a cage for the hummingbird from my hands. I lifted it up close to my ear again, some part of me still hoping to hear it whisper me a message.

This time, while I didn't hear anything, a curious feeling settled over me, an inkling of trouble on the horizon. I had sensed that I should visit my father. Thinking that it wasn't likely that my parents had ever seen a hummingbird up close, I took it with me, gently wrapping it in my shirt for the brief car trip.

When I arrived at their house, *Papito* was wearing a white shirt and a green cardigan, hunched forward with his cellphone to his ear. He was flitting to and fro, walking around like he always does, talking to my sister Lily in Guatemala. He was talking about one of his new hobbies – varnishing dried flowers, and he

stopped in front of several delicate flowers and lifted them up to the phone, even though the camera wasn't on.

I walked up to him with the beautiful hummingbird in my hands and proudly showed it to him. He glanced down quickly, nodded his head a couple times, gave me a weak smile, then turned around and walked away, much more interested in the conversation he was having with my sister about flying back to his home in Guatemala. He picked up a cup of hot *té de jamaica*, made from hibiscus flowers, and stuck in the tip of his tongue tentatively to test if it was cool enough, before sipping from the cup.

I got more of a reaction from *Mamita*. As I held up the bird close to her, she said,

“*Ay, que no me toque!*” She didn't want me to let the bird touch her, afraid that it was sick. I took a picture of her and the hummingbird, but she wouldn't even glance at it, as if she could get avian flu from just looking at it. The picture was so disappointing, I deleted it from my phone.

By that time, the hummingbird was moving around and trying to flap its wings, so I took the bird outside to let it go in the backyard.

It buzzed off from my cupped hands and perched halfway up the stone wall in my father's backyard. It didn't move, and when I approached the bird, it looked like it was struggling for breath. I again picked it up, and it rested for a few minutes in my hand, maybe gaining strength from my warm skin.

After a few minutes, I lifted it to a tree branch, and it stepped from my finger to perch on the branch. It rested for another minute before flying over the wall. I heard some rustling, like the bird had landed in the mulch under a neighbor's pine tree, but by the time I had walked over to their house, the bird had disappeared.

I went back inside. *Papito* was off the phone. I asked him what he thought of the hummingbird. He gave me a kind of condescending smile and told me that there were hundreds of types of *colibrí* in Guatemala. He said he had seen tens of thousands of them in his life.

“¿*De veras?*” I asked, in disbelief. I had grown up in Guatemala City, and had rarely seen hummingbirds, even though I would often play in the forested hills behind our home.

“¡*Sí!*” he replied, in a slightly patronizing voice. “¡*Los colibrí son muy comunes en Guatemala!*” I wondered if they were so common in Guatemala why I had rarely seen one, but I didn't want to interrupt his stream of thought.

“When I was young, maybe 6 or 7 years old” he said, “I would hunt hummingbirds with a slingshot. My grandfather Amadeo's coffee plantation was surrounded by jungle and had many flowers that the hummingbirds would pollinate. I was so skilled at killing hummingbirds that my grandmother complained, and grandpa Amadeo said I could only kill animals that I could eat.”

“*Entonces,*” I asked hopefully, “did you stop killing them?”

“No,” he replied, with a chuckle, “I just started to eat the hummingbirds. I would pluck their feathers, and carefully clean them, then eat what little meat they had on their bones. *Los colibrí* eat so much sugar, that

they taste almost like sweet chicken.”

I was kind of in shock, and a little disgusted thinking of *Papito* killing the pretty birds and gnawing on tiny hummingbird bones.

“I ate so many hummingbirds,” he continued, “that I started getting faster.” I’m not sure if he was joking, but I decided not to interrupt his thought.

“By the time I was nine, I was so fast that one time, I chased a hummingbird for an hour, and I caught it with my bare hands while it rested on a branch. But I let that hummingbird go.”

I imagined my dad running in a blur after the hummingbird, like the Flash.

My dad kept on talking.

“You know that I was the boxing champion at military school, right?”

I nodded. He had told me that so many times that I’ve lost count.

“Well,” he said, “I always won my fights because I was as fast as a hummingbird – faster than my opponents. Mohammad Ali would always say, ‘float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, the hands can’t hit what the eyes can’t see,’ but hummingbirds are faster than butterflies and more dangerous than a bee. If you grab them, they can stab you with their sharp beaks, and their stabs hurt a lot worse than a bee sting.”

He held up his hands and pointed to his palms as if to prove his point, although I couldn’t see any scars. “I know, I’ve been stabbed by hummingbirds many times. That hummingbird you were holding was either sick or stunned. That’s probably why it didn’t try to stab you.”

I was starting to understand why *Papito* wasn’t as enamored with my hummingbird as me. *La convivencia genera desprecio*. Familiarity breeds contempt.

*Papito* must have felt that the conversation was over because he up and turned away and picked up a paintbrush. Hovering over another blossom, he delicately inserted the tip of the paintbrush deep inside the flower, and then removed the paintbrush still glistening with clear varnish.

I guess it was time for me to leave.

When I got home, I looked up some nature videos on the internet. Hummingbirds are amazing creatures. I never knew they could fly 500 miles without resting, but what was most unbelievable was that my dad was right. If they’re left alone, they usually don’t bother humans, but hummingbirds can be very violent. I was a little shocked to see so many videos and websites talking about hummingbirds and their vicious duels. They use their beaks like rapiers in a fencing match, stabbing at their opponents. Sometimes they have duels to the death over territory or potential mates.

I guess if the gods had originally formed hummingbirds from an arrowhead-shaped stone, it would make sense that they were so violent. I decided that maybe I didn’t care very much about any message this type of bird might be sending to me and pushed the hummingbird from my mind.



A few weeks passed.

I got COVID in the meantime, probably from when I took *Papito* to a Guatemalan Independence Day party he wanted to attend with his friends.

It was a really bad case of COVID, and between trips to the ER and the sleep-inducing medication I was taking, I hadn't given much thought to the hummingbird at all.

I was beginning to recover from COVID when my sister Debora called me. She lives with *Papito* and takes care of a lot of his medical needs.

"I'm worried about *Papito*," she said. "He won't eat, and he's been coughing since you took him to that Guatemalan party, and he's been having a hard time breathing, so I had a nurse come to his house and test him and *Mamita* for COVID."

She paused dramatically, and my palms started to sweat nervously. About six years ago, *Papito* had a heart attack, and he was on several heart medications. I knew that COVID is especially dangerous for people with weak hearts.

"And?" I asked, waiting for her to tell me the results. She's so dramatic.

"She says his blood pressure's really high."

"And?"

"He's positive," she said, "they both are."

I felt my heart sinking, and I thought of that green hummingbird, perched on the stone wall, struggling for breath, its heart beating over a thousand times a minute. I remembered picking the bird up from its perch on the wall and placing it on a tree branch, until it flew over the wall and disappeared.

"I'm really busy with school and the kids right now," she said.

"Don't worry," I answered, "I'll take him to the hospital."

It turned out that just giving *Papito* monoclonal antibodies wasn't enough. He was severely dehydrated, and his oxygen levels were so low it was dangerous. They released my mother but admitted *Papito* to the hospital.

He looked so frail and delicate in the hospital bed, poised over a plastic water cup, sipping with a bendy bellows straw.

I visited him the next morning and ordered him some pancakes. He was too weak to cut them himself, so I cut them, poured a lot of syrup on them and fed him. I stayed with him all that day and overnight. He would wake frequently and retell me old stories of all his adventures in years past in Guatemala.

They released him after three days, with oxygen to help him breathe better. As he walked back into his house, he was so weak, even with the oxygen, that he had to lean against the wall to catch his breath, but there wasn't a whole lot more they could do for him at the hospital. He's been home for a few days now and

he isn't getting much better.

Seeing my father settle down into his bed with the oxygen canister in tow, I thought about the hummingbird again. I wondered if it had been able to make it back to its nest. Or had it died on the way to its home?

A dead hummingbird in your path means that death or a difficult loss is coming.

I hope the hummingbird lived, but something tells me that it didn't. Most hummingbirds only live for two years, if they aren't killed earlier than that.

I think back on my father, killing and eating all those hummingbirds as a child. I think of him chasing that one hummingbird until it was too tired to fly away and catching it with his bare hands only to let it go. I think of him dancing around in the boxing ring, wearing his opponents down before taking them down with a few quick jabs to the jaw. I think of him testing the hibiscus tea with the tip of his tongue. I think of him leaning over flowers and carefully inserting the tip of his paintbrush into the petals and then removing the brush with clear varnish on its tip. I think of him sucking water through a straw. I think of him leaning against the wall trying to catch his breath. I think of him flying hundreds of miles to his home in Guatemala.

Maybe the hummingbird in my path was an omen. Maybe it had been carved from a jade stone. Maybe the gods had breathed life into it so it could relay to me a message. Maybe its message was an omen warning of some great loss, or future death.

If the omen was right and my father is about to die, he has lived a long life, much longer than a hummingbird, and it's hard to imagine he'll last another two years. I just called him, and he's struggling to just breathe and eat. The day's going to come when he'll need help to even sit up, just like when I helped that green hummingbird perch on a branch where he could see over the stone wall.

The day will come when *Papito* will be able to glimpse what's on the other side, when his body will finally give up and his soul will fly over the wall.

When that day comes, I'll remain on the ground beyond, wondering exactly where he has gone and hoping he has found it back to his true home.

## *Dyea, Alaska, Doesn't Even Exist*

*One gambler who came up before Steele was contemptuous when the policeman fined him fifty dollars. "Fifty dollars—is that all? I've got that in my vest pocket," he said. Whereupon the Superintendent added: "... and sixty days on the woodpile. Have you got that in your breast pocket?"*

*—Pierre Berton, The Klondike Fever*

Here's a photograph: I am standing at the edge of the Nelson Slough at high tide, the water curving out of the frame as it snakes through the Dyea Flats. In both hands, I grip a pink salmon caught moments ago, the distinctive hump identifying a male, the long thin jowl open as if striking the air. Rising in the distance behind us, the snow-capped mountains that ring the inlet. In my borrowed rubber boots and feigned expression of solemn respect for this ugly fish I've just bludgeoned with the handle of my net, I try to look the part. And sound the part, too. The fellow who took the photo asks me how to clean his own pink. "Underneath, cut it from the head down," I say.

I'm not a fisherman, but the pinks are starting to run, I'm in Alaska, I've read too many books for my own good, and it all gets under my skin. No need to charter a boat—for the first time in memory, kings are mandatory throw-back due to low numbers, so I'd only be going out after pinks, anyway. The slough is only four miles from the cabin, straight down the Dyea (pronounced *dye-EE*) Road on my bicycle, then, just before the Taiya River Bridge, a right turn toward the Dyea Townsite and the flats. So I hitch a ride into Skagway, buy a three-day fishing license I don't need, two hooks that I do, grab a copy of *Dot's Fishing Guide* Tide Tables, and I'm ready for some theatre.

The pinks are mostly male, crazed with rutting, and in no mood to eat. The fish in the photo I hooked in the side just by dragging a barb through the water. The next day, I hook another male, deep in the dorsal fin. This method is neither skilled nor remotely mythical, but both fish put up a good, muscular fight. They're in no mood to eat or to die, either. They're in the mood to rut. I clean the bodies on the bank of the West Creek, fifty yards from my cabin, tossing heads, fins, and guts out into the current and splashing blood stains with the silty water so as not to encourage bear.

I fillet the flesh out, fighting the pin bones, make a barbeque sauce of ketchup, garlic, Tabasco, and a jar of dark molasses I oddly inherited in the empty pantry, and light the grill. I've been told by actual fisherman that the offal is inedible, or that anyway it had occurred to no one to try to eat it. I brown a liver in butter in a skillet on the gas stove, and a heart, and something long and pure white I believe to be a swim bladder, and eat them. The possible bladder is especially delicious, a soft and creamy texture. Two days of blood and killing are sufficient to satisfy the fishing urge. I'm part pink salmon now.



During my six weeks in Dyea, I bicycle to the flats two-three times each week. Four miles, through the last of summer's wild irises, over the Nelson Slough Bridge, and there I am. Drop the bike in an inconspicuous spot in the undergrowth and start walking south. Not once do I fail to see bald eagles, both adults and juveniles in the spruce thick on the eastern mountain face. Perched, flying north or south, cartwheeling on at least one occasion. I am often the only human out near the shoreline, navigating the



mud and sand, the puddles and sea grasses. Curiously, out here is the only spot in the entire Dyea area where I am able to get a cell phone signal, albeit a spotty one when it's windy. And there's no public phone anywhere, of course. So I make my periodic calls home sitting on a favorite fallen tree, now driftwood long burnished by water and sun to a smooth shade of bone. Low tide exposes the wooden posts of the old town's wharf of more than a century ago, rows of black and rotted teeth jutting in lines from the sand. Further out at the water's edge, always the silhouette of three or four blue herons. Once, the tide forcing me to move north, I see a harbor seal's slick, bald head pop up in the rising slough. Brown bears, I'm told, come down in the summer in the evening to fish. (By the time of those late northern twilights, I am at the cabin well into my cups. Biking to the flats to surprise a 10' tall, 1000-pound carnivore at dinner seems ill-advised.)

Harbor seals are common in the Taiya River, which runs along the western border of the flats. One day I "borrow"—I didn't technically ask my host—a car, the windshield-cracked, mud-caked model preferred here, and drive the stunning nine-mile curving route from Dyea to Skagway on the newly widened and smoothed Dyea Road. It's the only road to and through Dyea, and the stretch west and above the flats is carved out of the mountain and follows the river. Starting out for Skagway in the morning, I stop to photograph two mature bald eagles on a log during low tide, just below me on the flats. Curving back that afternoon—to return the Toyota before it's discovered missing, I hope—I stop again, now high tide. The river is full of seals. One, two, three, a half dozen. Who knows how many? Heads rise, vanish.

The flats are always breathtaking, whether on chilly, atmospheric days with the mountains lost in cloud, or when the cover breaks, the sun returns, and sky and distances open up. The binoculars, the camera, they do nothing justice. After the first visits, I quit taking pictures and focus instead on the moment. Standing out there, I am at the edge of something special, a small part of a thing vast, and, hell yes, holy. Only a visitor, I nevertheless feel I deserve to be there and am welcome.



Mostly, my company at the homestead is non-human, and there's plenty of it. Officially: two horses (Glory and Twilight), a pair of miniature pigs (her name I forget; the smaller male is Boarus—get it?), two ducks, one beehive, one noisy and clock-challenged rooster and his harem of 20 black-and-white striped Plymouth Rock chickens from whom I regularly steal a streaked egg or two, cradled clandestinely, carefully in the pockets of my denim jacket for the trek back to the cabin. I throw the chickens a handful of cracked corn now and then. We call it even.

Oh, and the dogs. The dogs. They are easily an exposé unto themselves. Mya, the golden retriever always ready to romp, ideally in the form of chasing sticks—with which she never returns—in the West Creek, then loping back up to the drive dripping wet for a good roll in the dirt. If I am sitting on the front porch reading, it's not uncommon for Mya to bring a stone to be thrown and drop it at my feet. If I manage to angle it into the weeds, I buy enough time to read a paragraph. A short one. Taiya, the gorgeous German shepherd who is sometimes social, sometimes thoughtful and withdrawn, quietly runs the pack. She's good company on a walk for anyone nervous of bear. And then there's Hudson. I don't know what the hell Hudson is—some kind of hound, I suppose. What he really is, is goofy and rough. If something's on your lap or the rickety side table, good luck—it's likely about to go flying. Here's Hudson, ready to go! Hold on.

My favorite visitations, though, are the wild and unexpected ones. The deer mouse, lightning fast and cute as a button with its bug eyes, that I feed peanuts and sunflower seeds on the porch in the days' last light. The small inquisitive red squirrels and aggressive Steller's jays. The even more raucous raven pair gliding through the shadows of the big cottonwoods. My favorite of all, when I open the window above the kitchen sink, and, turning away, hear a thud—a brown bat rudely awakened and dislodged, sprawled on the sill, and as surprised as I, one leathery wing draped on either side. Its tufted ears, attentive yellow gaze, low sustained hiss from between tiny rows of teeth. I let the bat make up its own mind about our next move, and after a few minutes of recovery it chooses to fly out, not in. Just as well. I imagine it an angelic visit and torture that conceit in a poem. The dead vole—long story—I bury in the sandy soil beneath a purple hyssop blossom, the grave within view of my writing table.



A month in, I do finally see my bear. I've taken the narrow-rail train up over the dizzying White Pass (from sea level at Skagway to 2865 feet at the summit) and into the Yukon, to the town of Carcross, as far as the line now goes. On the ride back down the Klondike Highway, we see a small black bear, cinnamon-colored and handsome by the side of the road, an odd place for it this time of year now that the dandelions, a favorite snack, have bloomed out. The bear seems unimpressed, giving us plenty of time to hang out of windows for blurry photographs and movies. It squats, defecates. The van is abuzz, laughing. We're all thrilled. Then it ambles back into the woods, its mother around somewhere.



*"There ain't no choice," said an old-timer of choosing between the Chilkoot and the White Pass. "One's hell. The other's damnation."*

*—Martha Ferguson McKeown*

I hear the Dyea Townsite described as a ghost town, but walking the grid of pathways under a canopy of spruce, hemlock, cottonwood, and lodgehill pine, I don't see any apparitions. I don't see much of anything. A single propped-up façade of a building. A depression in the ground that could have been an outhouse or a cellar. Out to the east, a sweep of meadow dotted with summer wildflowers. The fact is, Dyea no longer exists, ghostly or otherwise.

This was Gold Rush country, though there was never gold here. In the Inner Passage, Skagway and Dyea were overwhelmed with stampederes, each posed beside his one ton of goods—a year's worth of supplies—mandated for each man by the Canadian government (it's a fascinating list—10 lbs. coffee, 15 lbs. salt, 150 lbs. bacon!, one can mustard . . . ). The blurry photos of the crowded Dyea wharf, compared to the solitude of the flats today, astound, are hard to fathom. From Skagway, stampederes took the White Pass into Canada and the Yukon. From Dyea, the Chilkoot Trail. The White Pass was nicknamed the Dead Horse Trail after the 3,000 abused and overloaded pack animals were left dead there in 1898. The shorter Chilkoot Trail features a 1,000-foot climb named (cynically?) the Golden Stairs, climbed single-file. At one point, the trail rises nearly 2500 feet in 3.5 miles. (Jack London took the Chilkoot in late 1897. I hiked the trail's "easy" beginning one sunny afternoon—to Finnegan's Point and the ethereal Irene's Glacier—carrying no pack, and ten miles in and out, four hard hours, was every bit of fun I needed.) By 1897, after only a few months,

Dyea was a boomtown of an estimated 8,000, with 150 businesses (hotels, restaurants, saloons, outfitters). By 1903—the dream of gold already long dead and the completion of a White Pass railroad from Skagway having put the final nail into Dyea’s coffin—the population is reported to have been . . . three. As weeks pass, I hear stories and legends endlessly. Happy endings are hard to come by.

There’s nothing here now but the trees and some recently re-paved paths (everyone I talk with liked it better before the repavement). Houses were moved or sold as lumber or burned or flooded by a shifting Taiya River. There was a lot more water here 120 years ago. The whole area of the flats is undergoing a geological process called “glacial rebound,” the land rising at an astounding rate of .75 inches per year, which translates into a valley floor more than eight feet higher than it was a century ago, when flooding in the town would have been common. So, the con men and prostitutes and broken and exploited miners, the whole rapacious dream, all long departed. A couple of miles north the Dyea Road passes here. A handful of eccentric homesteaders, mostly hidden, live off the road. The year-rounders. The serious freaks. But here in town this afternoon it’s just me and the young forest. A single grouse, the darting shape of a field mouse or vole, a score of glaucous-wing gulls circling the river. The golden sky.



*For some goldseekers, Slide Cemetery was only one of several burials.*

*—on-site placard*

But if it’s ghosts we crave, it’s ghosts we’ll have. They’re not hard to rouse. Leaving the flats and townsite, turn left at the Slide Cemetery Road for a community of a different sort, one with a personally disconcerting twist. Another photograph, then many more, of thin wooden markers, leaning and decayed, facsimiles of markers rotted away before them. James Edward Doran, Age 21, Native Minnesota, Died April 3, 1898, R.I.P. S. Grimes, Tacoma, Wash., Died April 3, 1898. John A Morgan, Emporia, Kansas, Died April 3, 1898. S. Atkins, Barker City, Oregon, Died, April 3, 1898. The names, the cities from which the men arrived, and that single date again and again as I browse among the mossy boundaries of the dead, inhale the musk of surrounding woods. Many markers unreadable, a few discernible letters or bleached completely bare, just a grainy discoloration where an identity had been.

After weeks of heavy snowfall near the Chilkoot Pass, on April 2, 1898, the weather took a radically warm shift. Several small snowslides that night culminated in the avalanche of Palm Sunday, April 3, when, according to the placard here “the whole mountain roared loose. Victims were found frozen forever in a running position.” There are 49 markers within the slat-fenced confines of the cemetery, but no one knows the true number of remains here. Some of the largest hemlock in the area grow over this quiet spot—I alone represent the living as I meander along the pathways—and a speckled light surrounds us. The trees at the entrance are astounding—thick-trunked, close, with bare, horizontal arms entangled. Skeletons in twisted embrace. Ladders of bone. I’ve never seen hemlock do this anywhere else. When the photos are developed, a soft, ethereal glow amidst the trees is unmistakable, a canopy of suffused light above the reposing dead.

My birthday is April 3. I walk among the ghosts, quiet and commemorative, pondering. A presentiment, perhaps, of . . . warning? Expectation? Responsibility? Slide Cemetery is shaggy, peaceful,



beautiful in its fashion. Alms of fern uncurl along its boundary. 120 years have quieted these lost lives. I feel drawn to this place that marks my birth coincident with tragedy. And now, having offered my attention and respect, I'll recover my sprawled bicycle, take a shortcut, dismount to navigate the rutted mud and dung of the private horse path, and be at the homestead in no time. It's turned chilly in the last half hour. Shadows have spread beneath those entwined branches. Back at the cabin, I'll bathe, stoke the wood-burning stove for the evening, and return to a new novel I saved for the trip. A story of how the dead are ever among us, watchful and abiding.



The cold, gray, drizzly weeks of July finally give way to sunshine, and do so dramatically. Consecutive days hit 80° F, and one can feel the collective excitement, an impulse to undress. The Yukoners in their tents and campers will descend on the campground and riverbank by the weekend, but for now it's a solitary paradise. This morning I am wearing shorts and a t-shirt, and—for the only time I will during the entire trip—the sandals that I packed in a moment of idiocy. I have recovered from a cold that laid me out for days. From the West Creek Bridge, on a pebbled island where creek and river merge, three red-breasted mergansers, female, lovely ducks. Then I am leaving footprints along the sandy bank where the Taiya flows closest to the homestead, ten minutes or less by foot.

Recent mornings I've made a ritual of, first thing, walking along the river to spy on a bald eagle nest that overhangs the water. It's been there for years and could be abandoned. Finally, I've seen a sign of life—an adult bird preening on a higher branch. I want to see it again. Approaching me, a woman, bare-footed, walking her Yorkshire terrier. We smile. "Best day of the year," she says as we pass, and I can't disagree. No eagle, but it hardly matters. Later, after the day's poem is complete, with the whole fine afternoon selfishly ahead, I will bike to the flats. Of course I will. And there will be eagles.



## Review of *Batalion, Judy. Light of Days: The Untold Story of Women Resistance Fighters in Hitler's Ghettos.*

WILLIAM MORROW & CO, 2022. 558 pp. Price: \$28.99

In this thoroughly researched work of passion, Judy Batalion captures fear, resilience, love, survival, terror, loss, and the good fight in the midst of the Nazi reign of terror in occupied Poland. Underground and entrenched in poverty, freedom fighters established a smuggling network for information, weapons, papers, and more across the ghettos. As such, discretion was key; what better way to fly under the Third Reich's radar than to be a young, meek, seemingly Aryan woman with nothing to hide, save for the "bulletins sewn into her skirt or [the] pistol inside her teddy bear"?

Batalion's wonder is palpable as she introduces each woman and what she went through. Her journey started with *Freuen in di Ghettos (Women in the Ghettos)*, a short compilation of stories about dozens of previously unknown young Jewish women who resisted the Third Reich. Published in 1946 and written in Yiddish, this unassuming book found its way into Batalion's hands by happenstance; hiding at the bottom of a stack of texts on women's history she had ordered from the British Library, she found not only a story, but herself, deeply touched by its contents and shocked at its obscurity. As she began the translation process, she knew at once that bringing these stories into the light would fill massive gaps in the complete story of the Holocaust. "Despite years of Jewish education, I'd never read accounts like these, astonishing in their details of the quotidian and extraordinary work of woman's [sic] combat. I had no idea how many Jewish women were involved in the resistance effort, nor to what degree."

Involved indeed. Women risked their lives by going undercover, charming, bribing, and killing Gestapo officers, educating children and aiding the sick, smuggling guns and bombs and intel and people in and out of the ghettos, and so much more. We meet several remarkable Jewish women along the way, the bulk of Batalion's narrative resting on the shoulders of then-teenager Renia Kukielka. Orphaned and outraged, Renia joined Freedom, a Jewish youth group, in the early 1940s in hopes of finding a strong, involved community and making a difference. By 1943, she was sent on her very first courier mission to Warsaw to meet with Irena Adamowicz, alias Zosia, who lived undercover in a Catholic home. Renia's fluent Polish, light hair, and whip-smart tenacity made her perfect for such a role. "When a *kasharit* [courier] arrived with news about families and politics, it was a sign that they hadn't been forgotten, that life went on outside their confined torture, that not everyone was depressed. These women were lifelines, 'human radios,' trusted contacts, supply dispatchers, and sources of inspiration. Thanks to them, news 'blitzed like meteors' across the country."

Renia's first journey out of her hometown of Będzin is marked by immense anxiety and incredible strength of spirit. Pictured on the cover of the book dressed in a prim disguise, a cast shadow depicts Renia wielding a rifle on her back, hidden from the inattentive eye; this proves rather more severe than the roll of cash she stows in her garter for her first trek beyond the ghetto, but indicative of the death-defying journey that follows. It goes without saying that Renia is very, very lucky to be alive.

Batalion handles suffering fearlessly. Her narrative style is poignant and rife with awe as she waxes sprawling images of war-ravaged Poland and its various ghettos and wanes to zoom in on their internal conflicts and female leaders. Though Batalion's prose has room for improvement at some points, she consistently shows true understanding of the weight of these stories and recognizes her privilege in being able to tell them at all. A daunting task indeed, but one that Batalion rises to with confidence and stunning devotion.



## ***A Face of Paper***

There is a shadow on the page.  
But your face is of paper.  
The lines of your face are drawn with ink.  
I open the window, the sky is full of clouds  
But my gaze is silent.

## ***A Dead Body***

Here the night is made of ashes.  
You are waiting for the dawn.  
Your father's body is lying on the bed, cold.  
You wait for the sun to come  
and warm it one last time.

## ***Away from them***

Tomorrow I will leave this old house, this old body, this old country.  
I will go through the forests, I will go through the mountains.  
Animals will be my only friends.  
I could talk with them.  
I will no longer see the human world  
And the sun in the night.

## *Лицо из бумаги*

На листе есть тень.  
Но твое лицо – бумага.  
Линии твоего лица нарисованы чернилами.  
Я открываю окно, небо полно облаков,  
Но мой взгляд молчит.

## *Мертвое тело*

Здесь ночь сделана из пепла.  
Ты ждешь рассвета.  
Тело твоего отца лежит на кровати, холодно.  
Ты ждешь, когда солнце придет  
и согреешь его в последний раз.

## *Подальше от них*

Завтра я покину этот старый дом, это старое тело, эту старую страну.  
Я пойду через леса, я пойду через горы.  
Животные будут моими единственными друзьями.  
Я могу поговорить с ними.  
Я больше не буду видеть мир людей,  
И солнце ночью.

## *Gratuitous Nudity*

A poem is a naked person,  
and that naked person  
is me, everything hanging  
out for you and the world  
to see.

And let's face it, Time  
has not been on my side,  
this life also having never  
been anything close to  
resembling kind.

My verse is just the literary  
version of a "dad bod", and  
with each stroke of the  
pen I'm simply letting  
myself go.

Words that in my youth were  
chiseled and looked damn  
sexy in a pair of skin-tight  
stanzas have become soft  
and doughy,

No more dressing to impress,  
just me and life, the way it  
is, drunk in front of this  
typewriter, swaddled in  
sweatpants.







## ***I Sat in an Empty Auditorium on My Lunch Break and Contemplated Colonialism***

The screen in the auditorium is pregnant and growing,  
Drinking up the black wall beneath it like a parasite.  
Wall eaten by  
screen eaten by  
space;  
Darwinism infected at last  
by reality.  
The whites in my eyes are barely palpable, now;  
they've been sucked up by the ever-stretching canvas.  
My thoughts are jettisoned.  
The bolts that once held this screen ricochet.  
The lights are dimmed but  
No movie seems to be playing.  
All that remains is a damp darkness and that  
Blank white ocean.  
There is no ark for this flood.  
This rapture holds me firmly.  
Is *this* the movie?  
The static of birth is absent.  
The credits fold in protest of rolling.  
As the screen grows wider,  
It loses room for the actors.  
The color spectrum in my mind refuses to project itself.  
No air, white screen.  
No air, white screen,  
No air, white screen.

*-i sat in an empty auditorium on my lunch break and contemplated colonialism*





Phyllis 2018

Phyllis Green, Missing You



## *Close to Retirement*

Of course I can endure  
two more years working a demeaning  
meaningless job  
standing on my head if I had to  
I brag reminding myself  
that St. Simeon Stylites lived  
atop a 50-foot pillar  
in the Syro-Arabian desert  
for 39 years.

“Piece of cake,” he was heard to have whispered  
that final day when while attempting  
to rise from his praying position  
he leaned too far forward  
and plummeted to his death  
in the boiling hot sand below,  
smiling all the way down.  
“Finally, thank God,” he murmured  
his last words  
to no one in particular.



## *Etchings in Nitrogen, with Swivel Knife*

In this synthesis, a year zero formed from heart, head, and hearth,  
New life breaks into being: a shared paradigm of death and (re)birth,  
And through a millennia-spanning meshwork of organs, bones,  
And flesh: a co-relational mélange that brooks the issuance of mind,  
Our continuity ends in ash, in one last agricultural labour:  
The tilling of the soil, an epilogue left for our children:  
A saintly formulation of dirt: Six pounds of nitrogen  
All fuel to feed nine foot square.

My mother learned this orphaned young, and, since I was a child,  
I have known, too, where she will follow hoarse rattling gasps  
With a tender ministry of muck, an issuance,  
Soon to be heavy with tendrils, thorns, and blossoms,  
And budding cultivars of whites and dappled pinks,  
Soon to become the first exhortations of a young cherry tree,  
There, on the mountain way, the Dodder bank and hostelry road,  
Bóthar na Bruine, where kin centuries-long lie, each plot full  
In a continuum wrought of bark, seed, and skin; each plot full  
Of memories, most of which will soon vanish in lost elegy,  
For the congregation of the dead she will join has lost, in the living,  
Its line of guttural song, of table slaps, and whiskey sups,  
Of young children, shifting in the light, eschewing the present tense,  
To swallow whole the mysteries of the past.

Yet my son will learn our endangered history, my daughter, too,  
Even if they do not cherish it, in first blush. Even if they do not cherish it,  
They will know it, and when the susurating breath of knowledge-thirst  
Roils the beds that rise from a lineage of split bones with autumn leaves,  
Föhn winds in the lee of life, when their unsteady hands press leather, too,  
With a swivel knife, etching out pencil-trace shapes – orchids, Muscovy ducks,  
Cormorants wings raised for flight, and hazelnuts hanging from hazel trees –  
Then, at least, they will be glad of the company of ghosts, and I hope that once  
In decades spent shivering for want of touch, in the elision of self that rises  
When hips lock and tongues trip, over each other, to taste,  
That they will share that infant scansion, which perforates the line of life  
With new life; and that they will offer their children, too, this soft homily to time.

## *A Pinprick Chance*

I starved in Drear,  
Was escape, I knew,  
And ride, it, until –

Yet I am ashamed,  
That stood mothballed  
Themselves pinpricks

And I thought change  
Crashing  
But I heard it curse me,

Yet still I am ashamed,  
Poised  
In hock to promises made

And I have starved alive,  
Here, where I rest  
*To understand*

but ahead of me, always  
so I could accept  
ahead – a pinprick

for I could not stop,  
in the warehouses, flightless  
and also the ceaselessness

was a great wave  
salmon knowledge  
let it eat me,

as a hypocrite,  
between volcano  
to take me sobbing

staring out the fogged windows  
under silent zeppelin flowers,  
*my lamentable reach.*

waiting on platform 12,  
this locomotive's SPEED,  
chance – of change.

and I worried near the zeppelins  
birds of antiquated dreams,  
of waves.

splashing salt wisdom,  
and fire,  
and I understood.

and true believer,  
and earth,  
from drear.

of drear,  
and I have come

## *Lost and Found*

You discover birds or small animals  
have eaten all the breadcrumbs. Now  
you're lost, night approaches but don't

panic, maybe it's for the best. At home  
your stepmother waits with a broom  
and a passive father won't lift a hand.

An owl hoots, close your eyes, there's  
a meadow, a great standing deer with  
vines and purple blooms of morning

glory in its antlers. Nearby you hear  
a stream's blue current, a gold leaf  
like a heron's footprint sailing past.



## *Wet Floor*

I often bump  
into a wet floor sign  
where the floor is not wet.

I figure it's mandatory  
to remind people  
of slip and fall.

But not a breach  
of rule if it remains  
when dry.

So it stands stately  
in the middle  
of the ground,

in plain sight,  
telling a lie.



*William Crawford, Empty  
Table, Domino's Pizza, Winston,  
Salem, NC*

## *The Nature Inside Me*

Veins, organs in me  
are rivers, mountains on earth.  
Scientists decipher mysteries  
that I never see through.

Bacteria battle,  
cells die off and renew,  
every nerve has a will,  
every cycle is law and order.

As sun I rise,  
as moon I fall,  
the epitome of nature resides,  
limited resources, limited time.

In nature, I seek remedy,  
never resort to the version  
in my body, never loved it  
enough, never saw it with awe.

## *To My Surgeon*

Orderlies pushed my gurney  
in, parallel with the table. I scooped  
myself over, limbs buckled,

heavy pad strapped on my abdomen.  
I saw faces masked, eyes  
not yours, my heart pounded.

Soon I blacked out.  
The rest I can only imagine –  
under halogen lamps, they shave

my armpit, you mark the places  
to be cut. Wherever the edge of scalpel  
trails, blood, like red rivulets

flow. Gloved hands excise meat  
contaminated, fingers interweave  
with forceps & needle holder,

stripes over sutures to let them grow.  
I often go over this, wondering  
how I'd abused my body

to make you carve on me.  
I wonder if you care about your work,  
the lines you draw, the wounds

you sew – they're performing  
and healing well,  
I touch them every day.



## ***Battalions***

*Translated by Toshiya Kamei*

Today I want you to feel  
on top of the bones  
of those who came before.  
Even the bones  
of those who will come later  
and even the bones  
of those who will never be.

Then tell me if you saw the world  
in bone splinters  
in old clothes,  
in a woodworm,  
in a shroud that weighs  
like a transparent, obscene flower.

She's also on top  
of those who weren't  
under the dome of the world:  
there everything begins.

## ***Batallones***

Hoy quiero que te sientes  
encima de la osamenta  
de los que vinieron antes.  
Incluso sobre la osamenta  
de aquellos que vendrán después.  
Y hasta en la osamenta  
de los que nunca estarán.

Luego dime si viste el mundo  
en las esquirlas de hueso,  
en las prendas viejas,  
en la carcoma,  
en el sudario que pesa  
como una flor transparente, obscena.

Ella también está encima  
de esos que no estuvieron  
bajo la cúpula del mundo:  
allí donde empieza todo.

## *Flood*

They sat up high on the roof, the two of them  
the water below swallowing their words

A woman, just a level down, stood at a window  
a white hibiscus in her hair

hesitated, then jumped  
into a tree

A breeze hummed in the blinds that she had left behind  
Another woman, one remembered, never believed

getting off in the front seat impossible  
rain battering the car's roof

Did the woman in the tree laugh  
Or was it just the ache of drifting debris

The sky shifted a bit to the left  
scrambled its reflection, unhinged the invisible streets below

They breathed in the flooding waste's aroma  
the treetop now arousing the wind

The word *weather* eludes me, the other one thought  
It sounds like *whether*, now an inescapable choice

whether to weather the rising flood  
or jump into what's left of the tree

It began to rain, a hard rain graying the world's features  
Is that the woman still hidden among the leaves

Or a bobcat, they thought  
Is that the tree even, or a trick of the rain

the implausible world, woman roof and tree  
dissolving in the summer air

## ***Thomas Tallis***

A voice in a box   each boxed in   in the wind's interiors   surrounding us

an osprey lost in Farsi   nesting numbers   fish fed

that shade that runs through our veins   seeps into cavities   helter-skelter   immaterial though it is  
scratches

the water steel green   cloud troubled   cut with light   the coroner our crooner

that hydroplane   its scar drawn across the Sound

your motet's many voices   gathered us in their transcendent embrace   suspended a garden's dissonance  
its hanging spiders colluding there



## *A Day in The Life of a Poet*

There's really no reason.  
No decision is made  
nor pleading involved.

No one lets go  
with anticipation or fear,

no attachment  
    nor freedom —  
        no place of final rest.

I watch all day as the golden stem  
seems called from the wobbly branch  
and sifted surely to the ground,

and see that a leaf  
    is a leaf

and not my own regard.

Then rise to tend the kettle.

## *Life*

“Today,” I say to Ringo,  
who is eager for the leash,

“we are Mary Oliver and Percy  
and we’re to keep the course of crows.”

We are new to this way,  
and the plain invitation of a goodness,

so he straightens his back  
and wrinkles an ear

as I step off the path  
in regard of the bright October field.

It takes a gentle tug.

## *Watching TV With Robert Bly*

He prefers documentaries.  
Or the occasional biography.  
Lincoln in his black coat. Sappho the Tenth Muse.  
Once, we watched a special on Kennedy  
and he began to shuffle  
his feet so fiercely I thought  
he would spark the holy flame  
that finally burns us to the ground.  
But he didn't.  
Sometimes, when he closes his eyes  
and I wonder if he might be gone  
I change the channel  
to see if I can rouse him again  
to hear his high-pitched exhortations.  
Let us grieve. Let us weep. Let us mourn.

But his awakened eyes have turned  
to the window  
to the light  
in the castle by the forest  
from which no hunter has ever returned.  
The same light  
I now see  
all around his body  
facing out  
into the snowy field  
just off a Minnesota backroad.  
Half-a-mile from home.

This must be the place, he says.  
Then enters it alone.

## *Relic*

I never wanted to be a token

or a broken wound.

I wanted to open the gates with my handsaw.

Sometimes, in the darkness,

no one sees my shadow.

≡

Ontology with a camera at the end of a flex hose.

≡

I didn't want another day to come.

I wanted all nights.



## *A Little Tepid Pool*

in which to rest my toes.

Prolonged exposure to frigid cold  
has done this to them—  
turned them black.

Well my choice to stay  
submerged

for hours while the wind blows across  
sifting crystals.

There is pain of course there will always  
be pain—the price to pay.

The price we pay every time.

But, O the glory of trying, dear heart,  
the glory.

*--to Edna St. Vincent Millay*

## ***What Would Happen***

What would happen if  
they came for them and  
We went too?

What would happen if  
the police came  
for the brother  
in the street who was doing  
nothing but being  
too much himself  
and we stood and  
told them to take us  
with him

What would happen if  
they stopped the  
muslim man  
at customs and dragged  
him away from his wife  
and son for being  
foreign and brown and  
we stepped out of line  
and told them to  
take us with him

What would happen if  
they grabbed the trans woman,  
tore off her skirt  
beat their hatred  
into her for being beautiful  
and bold and as they dragged  
her away we stepped up  
and said take us with her

What would happen if  
if we all stood up  
for each other and said  
take us too and  
when they did  
we embraced them with love

## *The Ocean, for Example*

What does the ocean do  
when it creates a failure  
of a wave, a mangy little billow  
that fizzles onto the shore,  
a dud that never goes beyond  
muddled ruffles?  
What does the ocean do then?

It makes another wave.

What does the ocean do  
when it spins a perfect  
turquoise Murano wave,  
a liquid aqua cylinder  
flawlessly unfurling?  
What does the ocean do then?

Well, you already know.

## *Roads Taken*

He had come in from the garage,  
dropped his oil-black lunch pail  
heavily onto the sink where my mother  
would retrieve it, clean it, and fill it  
for another long tomorrow. He had  
tried to wash up in the bathroom,  
change into “home clothes,” but  
the machinery embedded its black  
blood too deeply in his flesh so  
his skin wore tattoos of darkness.  
I knew he would slip off to sleep  
while Hogan’s Heroes rattled  
its bad schtick and canned laughter  
for another Friday night ending another  
long and deadening week of work.  
So, I sat beside him and asked to talk.  
He looked at me from under heavy  
lids with a weary but curious smile.  
And I told him that I did not know  
what would come of me from life,  
but that I had decided my direction  
would begin with an English major.  
And I waited. He was such a hard  
man, a practical man, a man whose  
library was *Popular Science* not  
Alexander Pope, *Mechanics Illustrated*,  
not *The Illustrated Man*. It was his  
grease-smeared paycheck that paid  
my tuition to go to a university he  
had only visited once to drop me off.  
I knew he would scoff at the idea,  
the impractical idea, of a major  
in the careful but useless ordering  
of words. I bowed my head, heard  
him say, “David, I don’t know what  
to tell you. Just stay out of the factory.”  
My face flushed with gratitude—  
and shame.



## *There Was No Tree Nearby Though Leaves*

There was no tree nearby though leaves  
are still falling where you stood  
slowly waving goodbye as if its silence

was not yet the tool for turning your lips  
into the breezes that don't move  
—you built with that hand a grave

filled it with wood and corners  
and someone who loved you  
who can no longer breathe out

return your words kept warm  
as if there were now two Earths  
one for you, the other the cold.

## *Interlude*

At seven bells,  
Sunday morning carillon,  
we sit in the rose garden  
with the zodiac sundial  
behind the arboretum,  
the sunlight making  
the gossamers shine  
and flash up and down  
their lengths in the trees.

American yellowwood petals  
thick beneath its trunk,  
white and fragrant.  
Beside the pond, we pick up  
tulip tree buds, loosened  
from its eminent height,  
looking like painted oriental  
parasols, dropped on the path.

On the bridge over the falls,  
we rescue a dragonfly,  
thorax adhered to pavement,  
from its being too sticky with  
pollen, by moving it onto a leaf  
with my pocket comb,  
that we carry over to the grass  
still glossed with dew,  
before it surprises us  
when it flies out of our hands  
to dart beneath tree shadows  
along the river.

There are so many windblown  
petals fallen onto the pond  
the eddies swirl with  
a white and pink froth.

This is our interlude.  
This is how we pray.



*Alan Bern,  
Moon by a  
Thread*

## *In the Burning Chamber*

We were burning fall, and obtaining people made out of heavens.

## *The World*

A pure archduke of the sky,  
the wind is –  
transforming the sea into flying cold,  
the sun into waves weighed down by gold,  
and the islands into world.

## *The Two of Us*

In the water of superior summer, we were standing.  
The water was becoming, from light, itself.  
Shoreless we were, sighted blood.

## *The Homecoming*

The air is singing, echoing.  
Hotly, it is flying.  
I am going up into myself.



## ***Revision***

This poem is made of 100% recycled material.  
All the words have been used before--there isn't  
a word in this poem that you yourself haven't used.  
And the spaces between the words, and the spaces  
between the lines and between the letters--and even  
inside of the letters--are the same perfectly breathable  
open spaces that you and I have been passing through  
all our lives. It's quite possible we passed each other--  
grazed each other almost imperceptibly--in such a space  
as this, occupying it at the same time for the briefest  
time, because time in this poem is also from another  
time, and the ideas in this poem are recycled ideas--they  
flew into my head, a recycled head with curly hair and  
a Jewish nose, a nose that's been recycled on Jewish  
faces since before the Jewish calendar came out, which  
by the way, is made of 100% recycled material: recurring  
Holy Days, daily Psalms, scrolling Torah portions to be  
read aloud often. Read this poem aloud often. Reuse it  
or recycle it--share it, post it, compost it, give it away,  
copy it, paste it, plagiarize it for all I care: the name  
and bio will biodegrade but the poem goes on being  
itself, reshaping itself, revising itself, making itself stronger.

## *Torn*

Right leg body bagged across  
the coffee table, heavy as a marble  
slab The Renaissance forgot. Sit  
up and painful glug of knee;  
the meniscus a dry 'O' like your  
kiss before Chapstick. The femur  
hi-fives the tibia under a thick  
pudge of fluid; a snow globe  
I try not to shake. Prescription  
for Vicodin goes unheeded  
at the pharmacy, its absence  
now saving me. What's left  
but a glass of cold water and the  
stupor of Netflix, dusk pressing  
the windows until they bruise.

## ***Grandmother's Plums***

Sitting on the counter  
in a big blue bowl  
or sliced in half moons  
across a plate,  
those purple globes were  
worthy of painting  
by Cezanne.

I loved the way  
she boiled them down  
into plum butter,  
          dried them for breakfast fruit,  
chopped them into hunter's stew  
as in the old country

or layered them  
through sweet dough  
in dark swirls.  
Their savory flesh  
could be tucked inside  
a crisp sugar tart  
or a baby's innocent pabulum,

faraway from the past,  
from the flooded  
crops and bombed cities.

Humming at the stove,  
grandmother stirred  
with a large spoon,  
mixed their pulp  
with cinnamon and sugar

forgetting her long journey,  
train windows framing  
sooty cities and then  
the vast green orchards

of America, its flickering  
possibilities, a handful  
of plums tucked in her pocket.







## *My First Massacre*

My mom told me about the girl  
who survived a mass shooting at a nearby McDonald's.  
She covered herself in ketchup – pretended to be dead.

I pictured her lying still on the Naugahyde  
bench, her bare legs curled under her so as not to shake –  
her face, neck and shirt smeared in bright red tomato.

Only a six-year-old like me  
with an imagination so bold could decide  
in an instant to sauce herself with condiment.

We learned to hide under masks of sweetness,  
our hearts thickened with a pain  
so great we could burst at any minute.

## *Autumn Beds*

All around me the plants wither,  
covering the garden with their leftovers.

The tomatoes crack, split their skins—  
a too-ripe secret, if only I understood.

Even the squash, offering bright yellow flowers  
every morning, hang heavy with powdery mold.

I've already unearthed the potatoes. Holes gape  
like hungry mouths where they once hid, buried

inside a warm bed. Last night I dreamt of infants,  
their bodies growing like sweet peas

against the trellis. I visited their rooms this morning.  
Their beds empty, and cold to the touch.

## *Moth on the Sunshine Coast, BC*

The bronze spots on your wings  
camouflage in knots of pine,  
the dark walls of the cabin.  
You are hidden from light and passion.  
Knowing your hunger,  
I wait for you to leave  
but watch only your stillness.

Finally I guide you with bare hands  
toward the open window,  
I grasp your delicate wings,  
so gently, yet clouds of moth dust  
scatter on the wooden sill.  
You flutter into the black night,  
drawn to the silver moon  
who steals behind a veil of clouds.

In the morning I wake early.  
You are no longer here,  
off somewhere in the frigid forest,  
*Arbutus* and Western redcedar,  
winds of emerald and moss,  
grey clouds enfold beyond.  
I open the screen to look for you,  
but only the gold dust  
of your wings remains,  
spilled like incense in a shrine.

## *If People Were All Trees*

*"I wish people were all trees  
and I think I could enjoy them then."  
—Georgia O'Keefe 1921*

You laugh gently in the breeze,  
your white puffs float by, I wander  
amid your clan of black cottonwoods  
along the meandering river. I stop  
and listen to your kin.

Mountain aspens in autumn sing  
bright yellow ballads of generations gone.  
Moss-covered bigleaf maples spread  
winged seeds on windy afternoons.  
Piñon pines bestow nuts to jays,  
shrubs of the high desert,  
gods of the mesa sun.  
Ancient redwoods, dressed in gnarled  
bark, reach for blue above the pacific mist.

I could perform this dance  
with a thousand living trees  
in a thousand wild worlds.

What tree would I be if I joined this family?  
Would I stay where I was planted?  
Would I endure the thirst of drought  
and the singe of fire?  
What love would my roots touch?  
What songs would the wind play  
in the hollows of my old age?

Maybe this river will gather  
all our broken branches,  
carry us to the great ocean,  
where scrubbed by salt tides and sea kelp,  
I could taste all these worlds.



## *Looking Glass World*

Just once can Violetta fly to Paris with Alfredo  
and Tosca not jump from the parapet  
Just once can Leonora refuse the bitter poison  
and Brunnhilde ride her horse to Pennsylvania  
instead of into Siegfried's funeral pyre, living  
on to tell the stories of gabbling gods.

What would it take to find just the right  
incantation, just the right resolving chord  
or set of syllables to change the outcome,  
so Madama Butterfly sets the knife aside  
and hugs her small son to her breast?  
Where is the mirror to that looking glass world?

What's with the compelling lure of tragedy?  
Stuck spinning and spinning on the loop  
of a Mobius strip, we watch Mimi die  
in a frigid attic for the fiftieth time. We hear  
Rudolfo's harrowing cry as the curtain lowers.  
Our frozen tears fall like silver seeds.

## *Moon Raven Shadow*

I rent a room in a sea village in Iceland.  
Across the street is a pub. It's the kind of place  
where the patrons consist of old mariners or poets.  
They nurse their drinks while they sit beside  
the windows overlooking the port. Therefore,  
it's not a surprise when the bartender waves  
as I enter carrying, *Leaves of Grass*, a reprint  
of the 1855 edition. It's a few hours before happy hour,  
and speaking in a husky voice, the bartender asks  
what I'm drinking--"Coffee." *You'll need a double shot  
of whiskey to get happy for happy hour*, she says,  
"I'd fall asleep after drinking one," I reply.

Later, she joins me because there are only us  
and the cook. He's busy chopping in the kitchen,  
and I tell her my wife died from cancer.  
She recounts a story about her first husband,  
a fisherman. His boat hit an old Nazi mine.  
It was free-floating. Her second husband,  
a merchant marine, fell overboard and was lost.  
She tells me during the 60s, she sang in a band,  
The Moon Raven Shadow. Now, she manages the pub  
and likes being near the sea. Standing, she says  
in a voice full of waves and sand, *I'm a war widow  
and a sea widow. The Atlantic is my sister.*

Back in my room, I'm reading. Outside, the moonlight  
casts narrow shadows of electric lines. After midnight,  
the wind rattles the glass panes of my room.  
I look out and see the bartender locking up.  
She touches the door's moon-shaped window.  
As the wind whips her long coat, she begins her walk  
along the shore towards darkness. The surf sprays  
her silhouette as it slides over the lava rock break wall.

Her scarf waves in the sea wind, and I imagine  
her heels clicking the walk. Tugging her collar,  
she walks away slowly as if considering the host  
of the dead sailors. Beside her is the ocean, her sister.  
For seventy years, that woman darkened her nights  
and bruised her mornings. Alternately, she nods  
her head, looks towards the sea, then looks away.  
Perhaps, she speaks to the one who stole both  
her husbands and whom she has finally forgiven.

## *States of America: State of “On Pills”*

the population of  
the great state  
of “On Pills”  
is “thirty billion served”  
and this is the greatest state  
in the greatest country  
in the history of a world filled with pharmacies  
after another haunted night of the damned...  
O, I CAN’T PAY THE RENT! ...  
(but ...  
i must pay the rent...)

## *Tower of Poetry*

should I barricade myself in the tower of poetry and start shooting?  
that--- is the question...  
n all the while I'd be whispering to myself...  
I'm gonna Neruda you, YOU MOTHER-FUCKER!...  
I'm gonna Parra you, right between your eyes, B-itch...  
n here's a Bolano for your bollocks, you ---you Dick For Brains!  
n then I'd shoot more...but I'd be empty.  
O, my kingdom ---MY KINGDOM--- for an A-K Ferlinghetti!











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