

The DOUBLE DEALER



"Improvisation's special precinct, that place where we ever long for an immediacy we cannot completely inhabit, the Greeks called Hermes."

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2014 Joint Ventures



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS



The Faulkner Society regularly enters into cooperative ventures with other non-profit organizations and public agencies to present expanded cultural opportunities for the Greater New Orleans community.

This year, the Society is again privileged to partner with The National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Midwest, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to present BIG READ programming, this year based on the fabulous novel by Ethiopian-born American author, Dinaw Mengestu: **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears.**

New to the Faulkner Society's Words & Music and **BIG READ** sponsor team is the law firm of Jones, Swanson, Huddell, & Garrison. Local support comes also from the City of New Orleans and the Louisiana Division of the Arts in grants administered by the Arts Council of New Orleans.

A major underwriter of BIG READ and our *Pan American Connections* programming for 2014, is Loyola University's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, directed by Uriel Quesads, Ph.D.



Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies



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The Double Dealer, the Society's literary journal, was created in the image of the 1920s and 30s *Double Dealer*, a New Orleans journal, which was the first publisher of the work of Nobel laureate William Faulkner and the early work of such important authors as Ernest Hemingway. The original *Double Dealer* was founded by Albert Goldstein, Julius Weiss Friend, John McClure, and Basil Thompson, along with dedicated Louisiana guarantors, who were tired of hearing the South described as a literary backwater by Eastern Establishment critics, including notably H. L. Menken, who later became a cheerleader for the journal. The Society's goals in re-establishing the journal were to provide a forum showcasing developing writers alongside established authors and to provide educational resources for writers and teachers. **William Faulkner** was just a young man when he came to New Orleans and found his muse as a novelist. He was 27 when he wrote his first novel, **Soldiers' Pay**, in the room that now houses Faulkner House Books on the ground floor of 624 Pirate's Alley. He worried about the same things developing writers worry about today. Will I get it right? Will a publisher think I got it right? Will anyone remember what I have written after I am gone? Is it all for naught? He found strength in the freedom of our city's laid back, easygoing society and the concurrent heartfelt nurturing he found in New Orleans, support he needed to

become America's most celebrated fiction writer. To all the readers visiting the pages of the 2014 *Double Dealer* we hope you will enjoy the talent exhibited by contributors. As for writers, we hope you find your way to New Orleans and here find a dose of the same kind of nurturing and inspiration Mr. Faulkner found.



Cover Art: Hermes by Alan Gerson

Hermes by Alan Gerson is the cover image for **Randy Fertel's**, the new, definitive book on improvisation in the arts, ***A Taste for Chaos***. Randy's new book inspired the 2014 theme for **Words & Music, 2014** at which he was Keynote speaker. Artist **Alan Gerson**, a "recovering attorney," received his MFA from UNO in 1980 and was the visual arts director for the Contemporary Arts Center before receiving his law degree from Tulane. After three years in practice, he "wisened up" and returned to art. He's had one-man shows in New Orleans, New York, Santa Fe, Miami, and Pasadena and has participated in group shows nationally and abroad. He was a prize-winner at the 2000 Florence Biennale. His work is in the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Ogden Museum for Southern Art, and many distinguished private collections. Described as dreamlike, highly personal, and imagined, his work is sophisticated, frequently with a "faux naive" approach with aspects of both the real world and an imaginary universe. His "goofy guy" character present in many of his paintings, at times only in spirit, is a teeth-grinding everyman/woman dropped into a world he or she is barely capable of understanding. In 2011, Alan's portrait of Mr. Faulkner conjured the Nobel Laureate as he liked to imagine

himself from time to time, a country gentleman riding to the hounds, refreshing his spirit with a Jack Daniels Julep. The painting was auctioned to benefit the Faulkner Society's literacy projects for at-risk teenagers and continuing literary education for adults. Alan and his work sum up the originality in art that results from individual improvisation, building on but departing what has gone before.

WELCOME!

Welcome back to *The Double Dealer*! Randy Fertel's mammoth accomplishment, **A Taste for Chaos: The Art of Literary Improvisation**, has been an inspiration for us this edition, reminding us of the integral role improvisation plays in both life and art.



Now an online journal, *The Double Dealer* is published with the *William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition* and *Words & Music:,, inc.*

Working with our Associate Editors—**Caroline Rash, Shari Stauch, Jade Hurter, and Isaac Dwyer**—is a great pleasure for me because of their diverse talents. All are

writers but they have editing and publishing skills as well.

Caroline Rash comes to New Orleans by way of Clemson, SC; Dalian, China; and Conway, AR. Currently a copy editor at Peter Mayer Advertising, she has contributed as a freelance writer to regional newspapers and interned at *Oxford American* magazine.

Shari Stauch has been in publishing, marketing and PR for 33 years. She is a frequent presenter at *Words & Music* and five-time finalist in the Faulkner-Wisdom Competition, with first-runner-up finishes in both Novel-in-Progress and Essay. Her firm, **Where Writers Win**, works with emerging authors to provide marketing, websites, training and tools to set authors apart in a crowded marketplace.

Jade Hurter is an MFA candidate at the University of New Orleans, where she teaches freshman composition and works with the Scholastic Writing Awards of Southeast Louisiana. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Quaint*, *New South*, and *Thank You for Swallowing*.

Isaac Dwyer is a student at Bennington College in Vermont, where he studies anthropology, Spanish, and history. Alongside working as internet magician at the Pirates' Alley Faulkner Society, he's also done web design and editing work for *The Silo*, the literary journal published at Bennington. Last year, he was a winner in the California Young Playwrights Contest. When in high school, he placed (three times!) in the Society's short story contest for high school students. most of work is now in translation.

We would also like to thank **Christine Murphy**, a published poet and non-fiction writer currently working on novels and a memoir, who volunteered valuable copy editing .

We are actively soliciting sponsors for our next issue and future issues to ensure that *The Double Dealer* will continue into the future. If you are interested in becoming a guarantor or advertiser, we'd love to hear from you: Faulkhouse@aol.com



We hope you enjoy the edition!

—*Rosemary James*

Co-Founder, Faulkner Society; Supervising Editor.





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COMMENTARY



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

*I write and that way rid myself of me and then at last I can rest....
I write as if to save somebody's life. Probably my own....
-Clarice Lispector*



THE GILDED CIRCLE OF INSPIRATION AND IMPROVISATION

By Rosemary James

I'm after what is beyond thought.
—Clarice Lispector, 1920 - 1977

The photographs in this edition by **Joséphine Sacabo** are from her recently created collection, **Beyond Thought**, a title taken from the words of the famous Brazilian writer **Clarice Lispector**. Ms. Sacabo's collection is dedicated to Ms. Lispector, whose body of work, much of which is available in English translation, revolves around her ongoing search for the meaning of life.

The late Clarice Lispector was the embodiment of improvisation in literature and life. This Brazilian novelist, short story writer, and journalist, whose literary innovation brought her international renown, died at a young age of ovarian cancer, but in her short life, she excelled in her education and accomplished extraordinary things as a writer. She was an ongoing advocate against injustice and political persecution, and a champion of women's rights. Married young to a Brazilian diplomat, she lived abroad on occasion, but her work was firmly grounded in Brazil, where she grew up and was educated. References to her literary work are pervasive in the music and literature of Brazil and Latin America. Born in the Ukraine to a Jewish family who migrated to escape pogroms, she brought Brazil to center stage in the theatre of world literature. (For complete biographical details, visit: <http://www.egs.edu/library/clarice-lispector/biography/>)

Her contributions to literary form, her searches for the right word and the right meaning of it, her creative character development, and the guidebooks she created of self-exploration and self-understanding are gifts for us and for generations of writers and readers to come. Her contributions to the recognition of women as unique and worthy individuals, owing nothing to men's ideas of what they are, are enormous.

She is a perfect role model to spotlight in this edition of **The Double Dealer**, which is given over in large part to improvisation in literature and in life.

I must admit I was not familiar with Lispector's work until I first laid eyes on Joséphine's incredible photographs. When I saw the photographs, I immediately wanted to know more about the source of the inspiration, so I began researching her life and reading her works that were available in English translations.

Joséphine, who has been a close friend of mine for about 40 years and is a founding member of the Faulkner Society, has talked about a "Gilded Circle" in art. What she means by that is, "First there was the word..." and the word inspired the other arts, which in turn inspire more words, which in turn inspire new creations in the other arts...and the circle keeps on turning.

It is this Gilded Circle that enriches our lives as readers, as human beings.

I find that when I start with one book of fiction, the book invariably leads me to the discovery of other authors who have explored similar ideas or themes, similar settings, similar eras of history, and these new authors in turn lead me up other avenues. I find myself asking, "How could I not have known about her work before?" The answer, of course, is that I have been following trails opened to me by various books and authors instead of reading the bestseller lists or re-reading only the literature put before me in long ago classes. Invariably, the books I have loved most, the books which have taught me most, are those I have found through my improvised reading journeys, and connecting with that Gilded Circle.

This is not the curriculum-dependent approach to



learning of school but rather an improvisation in self-education, self-renewal, a joyous freewheeling journey through the literature of the world, in a manner which has its own fine logic in the very lack of planning or restraints.

For example, reading the great Irish author, Booker Prize winner **John Banville**—who is inspired by the visual arts and incorporates a focus on works of art in many passages of his superbly crafted fiction—is bound to inspire a desire to learn more about the world of fine art and in turn more about the creators of extraordinary paintings and, then, to see and learn more about the paintings themselves. Looking at paintings once, I discovered a beautifully painted family portrait of mother and children by **John Singer Sargent**. It was the painting that reputedly got him admitted to the London Royal Academy. Only later did I learn that it was rejected by the family who commissioned the portrait. The mother, so the story goes, was appalled by how sloppily her young son appeared to be sitting in the painting. That story, told to me by a descendent of the family, was as important to me as the painting itself and made me delve even more deeply into the life of Sargent and other painters to learn how their works reflected the social mores and obsessions of their times. A writer friend of mine, **Karen Essex**, similarly became obsessed with Leonardo da Vinci and the result is her highly acclaimed novel, **Leonardo's Swans**.

Randy Fertel, in his new non-fiction book is **A Taste for Chaos: The Art of Literary Improvisation**, has hit a home run in his summation of his own 40 years of exploring improvisation in the arts. His research methods bear resemblance to my own undisciplined but incredibly rewarding reading pattern. Randy



most assuredly has been in tune with the Gilded Circle over the last four decades. His erudite book is dense with connections, and you'd better be prepared with a dictionary and encyclopedia to learn some new literary terminology, and to understand some of his references to the classics, to archetypes, to scientific terminology, etc. This is one the best guidebooks you could possibly find for creating your own voyage of discovery, self-education, and self-renewal. I highly recommend it to you.

(See the Section in this edition by and about Randy and his new book which follows.)

I spent formative years in Panama and my childhood memories have given me an adult appreciation of and attachment to the way Latin American writers approach creating fiction. Like Faulkner, they often revel in literary experimentation. And also like Faulkner, they never stray too far from the “old verities and truths of the heart” in their philosophical musings and storytelling. They understand the importance of the element of magic, how to create it, and how to weave different realms together seamlessly.

Clarice Lispector has absorbed that Latin American magic by growing up in Brazil, but she also draws on the tragedies and angst of the Jewish history, and has been described by many as the greatest Jewish writer since Kafka. So, likely, if you read her work, you are going to be inclined to visit the work of Kafka, and God only knows what can of literary worms such a visit will open for you.

If you are willing to let a book lead you where it will, I invite all of you to discover the work of **Clarice Lispector** this year... and that includes you, Randy!



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

So long as I have questions to which there are no answers, I shall go on writing.

-Clarice Lispector



PAN-AMERICAN CONNECTIONS



The mystery of human destiny is that we are fated, but that we have the freedom to fulfill or not fulfill our fate: realization of our fated destiny depends on us, while inhuman beings like the cockroach realize the entire cycle without going astray, because they make no choices.

-Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*



BRAZIL'S LITERARY HEROINE: CLARICE LISPECTOR

By Rosemary James

This passage might just be the one passage that sums up Clarice Lispector's conclusions about the divine mystery. It comes from a book that only became available in English after the author died, translated by Ronald W. Sousa. This book is not for the reader who is strictly seeking a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Its appeal is for those who are interested in language and the way it can be manipulated to make a point or to confuse, to convey philosophical judgments with clarity and ease.

A Paixão Segundo G.H, or The Passion According to G.H.,

has become one of the most famous books of Lispector's oeuvre. Viewed by many as representing her finest and most groundbreaking work, this is the story of a wealthy woman who has a transcendental experience after confronting a cockroach. Aficionados of South American fiction will revel in this nearly plotless novel. Using a single character, Lispector transforms a banal situation—a woman at home, alone—into an amphitheater for philosophical investigations. The first-person narration jousts with language, playfully but forcefully examining the ambiguous nature of words, with

results ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous: "Prehuman divine life is a life of singeing newness," or, "The world interdepended with me, and I am not understanding what I say, never! never again shall I understand what I say. For how will I be able to speak without the word lying for me?" These linguistic games frame existential and experiential crises that Lispector savors and overcomes to point us in all the right directions.



Clarice Lispector's journey of self-exploration and experimentation began with her first novel, written between March and November of 1942, and published close to her 23rd birthday. **Near to the Wild Heart** is written in a stream-of-consciousness style reminiscent of the English-language Modernists. It's a bit like Faulkner's **The Sound and The Fury**. It centers on the childhood and early adulthood of "Joana," who bears strong resemblance to her author. "Madame Bovary, c'est moi," Lispector once said, quoting Flaubert, when asked about the similarities. The book, with its revolutionary language, brought its young, unknown creator to great prominence in Brazilian letters and earned her the prestigious Graça Aranha

Prize. The work, much in the mode of existential contemporaries like Camus and Sartre, ponders the meaning of life, the freedom to be one's self, and the purpose of existence. It has no conventional narrative plot. Instead, it is built on flashes from Joana's present life as a young woman and her early childhood. The novel, like most of Lispector's work, focuses on



interior, emotional states. From this beginning, she gave Brazilian literature a unique voice in the larger context of Portuguese literature.

Her examination of the internal lives of her characters is reminiscent of the styles of not only Faulkner—whose work inspired many Latin American writers, including Colombian master Gabriel Garcia Marquez—but also of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Água Viva (The Stream of Life)

In 1973, Lispector published the novel *Água Viva*. It was first translated into English in 1978 and was reissued in English in 2012 by New Directions Publishing, with a new translation from the Portuguese by Stefan Tobler. The book is an interior monologue, in which an unnamed first person narrator addressing an unnamed “you.” Like Faulkner’s highly experimental early works, *Água Viva* has a musical, riffing quality, with the frequent repeat of certain passages.

She wasn't crying because of the life she led: because, never having led any other, she'd accepted that with her that was just the way things were. But I also think she was crying because, through the music, she might have guessed there were other ways of feeling.

—Clarice Lispector

The Hour of the Star

In her final novel, Lispector works her prose like a cellist, delicately, then forcefully plucking at the reader’s emotions; softly, then insistently directing the reader to come to grips with the human condition.

Translated by Giovanni Pontiero, **The Hour of the Star** may well be Lispector’s masterpiece. Narrated by the mysterious, urbane Rodrigo S.M., this brief, strange, and haunting tale is the story of Macabéa, one of life’s unfortunates. Living in the slums of Rio and eking out a poor living as a typist, Macabéa loves movies, Coca-Cola, and her rat of a boyfriend; she would like to be Marilyn Monroe, but she is ugly, underfed, sickly, and unloved. Rodrigo recoils from her wretchedness, and yet he cannot avoid the realization that for all her outward misery, Macabéa is inwardly free. She doesn’t seem to know how unhappy she should be. Lispector employs a seemingly pathetic heroine against her cosmopolitan narrator—edge of despair to edge of despair—and works the two like scissors, cutting away the reader’s preconceived notions of poverty, identity, love, and the art of fiction. The novel might be considered something of a feminist manifesto, but it doesn’t shout its message. Instead, Lispector uses her characters to bring her beliefs into sharp focus. The boyfriend, Olimpico, is

totally self-obsessed, and sees the women in his life as extensions of himself. Then there is Rodrigo, the man who narrates Macabéa’s story, who delivers all the information about her. How do we know she is not beautiful? Rodrigo tells us. All of the reader’s ideas about her originate with Rodrigo, Lispector’s means of conveying to the reader the ways men judge and value women. It is men who decide what beauty and ugliness are. Macabéa’s values and real character are woven into the thread of the narrative, despite the narrator, and her inner value is revealed, guiding the reader to reflect on the injustice of Macabéa’s life, a



story which is told with an intensity that gives the simple plot a haunting magic, a fairy tale quality.

Family Ties

Clarice Lispector was not only a great novelist; her short stories are also phenomenal and often filled with magic. The First World Congress of Sorcery in Bogota even invited her to attend in 1975. A translation of her story *The Egg and the Hen* was read at the convention, a story chosen for its mixture of occult and spiritual elements. **Family Ties** incorporates much of the short fiction that Lispector wrote before 1960. It is a book of quintessential Brazilian short fiction and possibly the best point for embarking on your journey into the world of Clarice Lispector.



MEMORIALS

ANGELS WITH THE ANGELS

The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society has been privileged to have the generous support over the years of men and women for whom the only appropriate title is our Angels. Among our earliest supporters, three people stand very tall:

*Hartwig Moss, III,
E. Ralph Lupin,
and Theodosia Murphy Nolan.*

All three have left us during the past year. And, while we join their families in mourning the loss they have suffered, we know that these superior human beings have now taken their rightful position in the greater company of that band of Angels on high.

Hartwig Moss, IV, with his wife Nancy—an early member of our Executive Board—was among the first to realize the importance of the projects the Society creates for young people, especially young developing artists and also teenagers who may be at risk for illiteracy. When we announced in 1992 that we were creating a literary competition open to anyone anywhere in the world writing in English and that we would include a category for Best Story by a High School Student, he told us that night that he and Nancy would underwrite on an ongoing basis the prize for this category. And for 23 years, he did, indeed, follow through on this pledge, underwriting not only the cash prize for the winner but the costs for the gold medal in Mr. Faulkner's image presented to each winner and the various administrative costs including travel and hotel accommodations for winner and judge each year. He said on numerous occasions:

Encouraging young people to write is encouraging them to be successful in life. There is no career, no way of life in which young people can hope to achieve career and personal satisfaction without first class reading and writing skills

This year, Nancy and their children are continuing the tradition he started. They are underwriting the prize in memory of Hartwig and his contributions not only to the Faulkner Society but to the community at large.



Hartwig and Nancy Moss.

A New Orleans native, he was graduated from the Isidore Newman School and Yale University. After serving as an officer in the Navy, he was educated as an insurance broker and, eventually, took the helm of the family business, Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency. Over the years, while he dedicated himself to expanding and securing the insurance business inherited from his ancestors, he also gave of himself in numerous roles of community service. He was, for instance, as a member of the Board of Directors of Touro Infirmary, instrumental in raising funds for the modernization of the hospital. He also served on the boards of the Jewish Welfare Federation and United Way and as President of the Jewish Community Center.

He was a family-first kind of guy, however, and we know that Nancy and their three children—Robby, Stefanie, and Marcie—are missing



him terribly now. Who wouldn't miss this handsome, playful man with a great sense of humor, who also had a no-nonsense get-things-done attitude when tackling business and community obligations. His passing has left a hole in our hearts.

E. Ralph Lupin, a physician and an attorney, was instrumental in the success of Faulkner Society's first *Words & Music* festival, staged in 1997 on the 100th anniversary of the William Faulkner's birthday. He underwrote the costs of a grand concert of classical music and literary performances at St. Louis Cathedral. Thereafter, he awarded us annual grants from the Lupin Foundation to provide scholarship participation in continuing education projects for developing writers, establishing The Lupin Scholarships.

A force to be reckoned with in medical, cultural, civic, and military activities, Ralph Lupin gave his life, his time, and his treasure to improve the quality of life in New Orleans. The Lupins built St. Charles General Hospital, later sold it, and used the proceeds to create the Lupin Foundation, a trust which took on the funding of many of the city's major cultural needs— such as a state of the art performance hall for New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. Ralph was generous with the arts and a fierce combatant on behalf of the historic and architectural integrity of the Vieux Carre. He could always be counted on for unbridled opposition — without couching his remarks in meaningless niceties—to such aesthetic blunders as the introduction of large, wheeled garbage bins or the installation of solar panels on the roofs of Quarter buildings, bad art hanging in the alley next to the Cabildo, the proliferation of tarot card con artists, or developers intent on destroying Quarter buildings to make condo warrens. A 35-year member of the Louisiana State Museum's Board of Directors, serving three terms as chairman, he was often referred to as the heart and soul of the Museum. He was the board's representative on the Vieux Carré Commission, and he chaired that organization, too. After a fire struck the Cabildo in 1988, for instance, the Lupin Foundation helped restore the building, site of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase.

He loved the military, serving in the Air Force and then in the Louisiana Army National Guard, becoming a Brigadier General. That love influenced him to join the group responsible for creating the National World War II Museum. A long time board member, he instigated the new Holocaust Center. The Lupin Foundation supported not only NOCCA but other educational institutions, Audubon Park, the New Orleans Museum of Art, and numerous other cultural and civic endeavors. The Lupin grants were generous and helped many organizations hang on in the current climate of reduced public funding for the



Ralph and Pam Lupin.

arts and education.

His motivating force in life was to nurture individuals and organizations in need. Asked the source of this drive, his widow Pam Halter Lupin said, "I don't know. It was just there. It was just the most important part of him. It was always there. Even as a kid he wanted to help people. He learned to knit, for instance, so that he could send handmade, warm socks to combat troops abroad."

In fact, it seems, he was on a mission for God from the get-go.

Theodosia Nolan Murphy, was a great Faulkner fan and loved good books generally. Chats with her usually began and ended with conversations about good literature and its important role in career success and lifelong personal satisfaction. She was concerned that reading was being given short shrift among young people. And her donations to the Society were earmarked for writing projects. She was introduced to the Faulkner Society by her sister, the late Caroline Murphy Keller Winter, known to everyone as "Polly,"



Theodosia, a legendary beauty, was also a formidable businesswoman, noted internationally as the founder of the Murphy Oil Company. A native of El Dorado, AR, one of the great passions of her life was historic preservation. Captivated by the history, charm, and beauty of Natchitoches, she became a major patron of the arts there. Her enduring contribution to the area was the preservation of the French Creole residence at Cherokee Plantation, a property that had been in her family for generations. She assumed ownership 40 years ago from a descendent of her grandfather and later spent three years restoring and refurbishing the house. Today, Cherokee is part of the Cane River National Heritage Area and the majestic residence is opened to members of the public twice a year, to share the history and the spirit of the property.

Theodosia also hosted social activities there in support of the Cane River Creole National Historical Park, the Cane River National Heritage Area, and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. Cherokee is a worthy monument to Theodosia Nolan's grace, elegance, and devotion to preservation with integrity.

Her funding of Faulkner Society projects also is a worthy monument to her intellect and love of reading. Last year she was the underwriter for the Faulkner Society's Narrative Non-Fiction prize in the *William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition*. Her grant made possible, in fact, creation of the category. The judge, literary agent Jeff Kleinman, was so taken with the manuscript he selected to win that he signed the winner, Alex Sheshunoff, immediately. And very quickly he sold the book to a top publishing house. The book, a humorous memoir of adventure in the South Pacific, will be released in 2015. Sheshunoff, a living monument to Theodosia's generosity, returned to *Words & Music* in 2014 as a member of the festival faculty.

And don't tell me that's not the work of Angels.

—Rosemary James, Faulkner Society

Theodosia Nolan.

who had become a patron of the Society while her friend Abbey Catledge was Chairman of the Advisory Committee. Polly also introduced their sister Bertie Murphy Deming Smith to the Faulkner Society, bringing her to the first *Words & Music* festival in 1997. In the years since, Theodosia and Bertie have been among the stalwart underwriters who have guaranteed the continued operation of the Society, as have Theodosia's daughter, Tia Roddy, and grandson, Peter Tattersall.

“Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind.”

-Henry James



👉 IMPROVISATION & THE ARTS 👈



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

I'm afraid to write. It's so dangerous. Anyone who's tried, knows. The danger of stirring up hidden things - and the world is not on the surface, it's hidden in its roots submerged in the depths of the sea. In order to write I must place myself in the void. In this void is where I exist intuitively. But it's a terribly dangerous void: it's where I wring out blood. I'm a writer who fears the snare of words: the words I say hide others - Which? maybe I'll say them. Writing is a stone cast down a deep well.

- Clarice Lispector



AVOIDING THE GOLDBLOCKS QUESTION

By Randy Fertel

Editor's Note: the essay here by Randy Fertel, Ph.D. is a prologue to his new book, **A Taste for Chaos: The Art of Literary Improvisation**. The book is the result of the author's 40-year love affair with the realm of improvisation in all of its manifestations. He has explored improvisation in literature, which led naturally into research and reading adventures in the other arts and humanities and he has concluded that life would be a sorry lot for humankind without the gifts of spontaneity and freedom of expression. What he has achieved here is monumental. He has created a beginner's guide to mastering the knowledge of the Western World. You start with the exploration of a master of a subject and then follow the avenues he or she opens for you. He has provided a roadmap for educating and re-educating ourselves in the pleasures of leisure reading and contemplation. You'll want to read the whole thing, of course; this will merely whet your appetite. Our opinion is re-enforced by the comments of influential literary figures.

A Taste for Chaos is a stunner of a book – smart, jarring, innovative, witty, provocative, wise, and beautifully written. As a sustained and unified work of literary analysis, this book is nothing short of dazzling, both in its meticulously structured central argument and in its intricate exploration of the artistic tensions between order and disorder, reason and intuition, design and improvisation. Not only is this a book about the artistic endeavor, it is also a work of art in its own right.

—Tim O'Brien, National Book Award; author of **The Things They Carried** and **Going After Cacciato**

A Taste for Chaos provides a sweeping view of the complex history of the notion of artistic spontaneity. Packed with erudition and references ranging from Lucretius to James Brown, and written with reader-friendly clarity, Fertel's book is a lively examination of the centuries-old debate between the improvisers and the deliberators. This detailed labor of love deserves its place on any serious bookshelf devoted to literary study or the history of ideas.

—Billy Collins, United States Poet Laureate 2001-03

IN HIS **ESSENTIALS OF SPONTANEOUS PROSE**— a document Allen Ginsberg kept tacked to his wall — Jack Kerouac recommends “swimming in [a] sea of English with no discipline.” Elsewhere he endorses kickwriting: an art that “kicks you and keeps you overtime awake from sheer mad joy.” Beat novelist John Clellon Holmes enthused over his friend's achievement: “Somehow an open circuit of feeling had been established between his awareness and its object of the moment, and the result was as startling as being trapped in another man's eyes.”

Spontaneity would seem sacrosanct, of unquestioned value in today's society, and yet it has caused not only hair-splitting — was **On the Road** really spontaneously composed if he edited it for six years? — but also much sword-crossing. Assuming the arch, confident voice of the urbane craftsmen, Truman Capote famously judges: “That's not writing, that's typing.” Poet John Ciardi memorably sums up the hostile camp: “a high school athlete who went from Lowell, Massachusetts to Skid Row, losing his eraser en route.”

And yet many texts absolutely central to the Western tradition employ this gesture, insisting that they are improvised. Must we condemn, or worse, ignore a text

because we suspect the claim of improvisation is a bit of a stretcher?

“Absolutely central” is my way of saying that these texts are excellent and worth our attention for the pleasure they give, but also that they have been crucial in how we have articulated and shaped our experience and are vital to us now as we look back, trying to comprehend the past to understand how we got here. We cross swords over spontaneity's value or we debate the Goldilocks question: has the improviser's spontaneity been too much, too little, or just right? Yet we sometimes misunderstand such texts, mistaking the gesture of spontaneity as a gauge of its unqualified commitment to spontaneity's value. Either lionizing or condemning such texts for their achieved (or unachieved) spontaneity, readers often miss the expressive tensions that the theme introduces.

Improvisations all may fail ultimately in their claim of pure, unmediated spontaneity. But far more interesting than their failures are the internal contradictions between an improvisation's longing for spontaneity and its recognition of that impossibility, our longing for freedom and the inherent constraints on freedom we inevitably face.



The claim of spontaneity isn't just the currency of professional writers. It permeates our culture. Wanting to convince your boss of an idea, you can choose one of two gambits. You can say: "I have thought long and hard about this, I have brought my best to bear" (hard work, skill, research, rational thinking, internet surfing, whatever the analytic tools *du jour*). Or you can begin: "this came to me this morning in the shower." The latter gesture is at once self-protective and self-assertive: don't blame me if this idea doesn't pan out; but perhaps it deserves special attention because it came to me in an intuitive moment. Both gestures—*thoughtful* and *thoughtless*—authorize and validate: value my idea because I've worked hard in creating it; or, value my idea precisely because I haven't worked at all. The mystery, a mystery I seek to unravel, is how the latter ploy could earn any credence. For it does, and we deploy it all the time. How? What is the logic that shores up such a tacit argument? And at least as interesting: why? Why might I choose thoughtlessness as a persuasive device—a rhetorical gesture—rather than the more reasonable persuasions of care and craft and rationality?

The literary equivalent of this rhetorical gesture is the claim of spontaneous composition, improvisation: I wrote this in a dream, when inspired, instinctively, off the top of my head, when drunk, but in any case without thinking, without effort, without plan, and even perhaps without purpose. Almost an accident, it just happened.

Once you go looking, texts heralded as spontaneously composed abound in literary history. From Homer's sung epics to Milton's **Paradise Lost** ("this my unpremeditated verse," he proclaimed), from Mark Twain's pseudo-*naïf* **Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** ("persons attempting to find a plot will be shot") to Ginsberg's drug-inspired rant, **Howl**—they are everywhere.

I underscore from the start that I do not know for certain whether such self-styled "improvisations" are improvised in fact; I am only sure that they so declare themselves. So, I rarely bother with the scare quotes, but given my skepticism, you can assume they are always implied. A text's spontaneity may be, in fact, to some degree or another, the real thing. But it is always a matter of degree, isn't it? So, as far as I am concerned here, the claim of spontaneity is a cultivated affectation. As Stephen Greenblatt says with brilliant succinctness of the Renaissance ideal of sprezzatura, cultivated carelessness, "We cannot locate a point of pure premeditation or pure randomness." Improv theorist and practitioner Whitney Balliett captures this in-between-ness describing jazz great Thelonious Monk: "His improvisations were molten Monk compositions, and his compositions were frozen Monk improvisations." Even the Homeric Problem speaks to this. The epic rhapsodists like Homer truly improvised on the spot. And yet Homer does so using, in Father Ong's words, "devastatingly predictable formulas."

Homer's improvisations too are both molten and frozen.

Improvisations claim by design to be in some way without design. Unshaped by human reason or craft, they transcend what mere craft or reason could achieve. But improvisations in their deep structure often finally call such transcendence in question. Positing a state of mind where to will is to create, but rarely in the end certain if such a state can or should be achieved, improvisation is perfectly fitted by its persistent figures, conventions, and themes to explore the boundaries of human will, reason, and freedom. At work in such texts is a kind of primitivist or naturalistic argument—an argument from nature—that relies on the equation of the natural and spontaneous with the authentic and true. But an opening gambit is not a final argument.

Philosopher Ernst Cassirer once said that a philosophic concept is "rather a problem than a solution of a problem—and the full significance of this problem cannot be understood so long as it is still in its first implicit state." Spontaneity is such a concept even among those improvisers who seem at first to insist upon its inherent and absolute value.

Spontaneity, I must quickly add, is fundamentally valuable. A.C. Graham points out in **Reason and Spontaneity** that "there are activities in which [man] is most intelligent when he is most spontaneous, in which to think may even be dangerous; the ski jumper or the tightrope walker cannot afford to hesitate and reflect. While still learning to swim or drive a car or speak a foreign language, he does have to think what to do next, but it is when he comes to trust his own reflexes that he will have mastered the skill."

All of us probably remember thinking—after laughing long and loud—that a particular comedian is crazy. The late, much loved Robin Williams and the politically inspired comic Stephen Colbert come immediately to mind. They make us laugh because they are a little crazy, rattling off all of the things we think about people and situations, things said spontaneously without the muzzling encumbrances of thinking, of reason, of propriety. They bring us joy because they are unleashed, relying on instincts, reflexes.

Yearnings for such peak states now permeate pop culture. University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's best-selling books on "flow" have brought analyses of this kind of "optimal experience," as he calls it, to the attention of a wide audience. Malcolm Gladwell teaches us how to deploy our "adaptive unconscious" in the *blink* of an eye. Jonah Lehrer urges us to solve complex problems using "the processing powers of the emotional brain, the supercomputer of the mind." Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, in work that underpins Gladwell's and Lehrer's more pop versions, describes the strengths and the many biases that weaken both the intuitive brain and the logical, deliberative brain. Drama



coach Keith Johnstone gives us lessons in “impro.” Improvisation is offered as the key to Christian ethics (**Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics** by Samuel Wells) and to business organizations (**Organizational Improvisation** by Ken N. Kamoche

Trying to learn where in the brain flashes of insight occur and under what conditions, Mark Jung-Beeman, a cognitive neuroscientist at Northwestern, has determined that “if you want to encourage insights, then you’ve got to encourage people to relax.” He explains: “The relaxation phase is critical.... That’s why so many insights happen during warm showers.” There are those shower brainstormers. In these many fields, improvisation is, as composer Alec Wilder puts it, “the lightning mystery . . . the creative mystery of our age.”

In a sense, improvisers throughout the centuries anticipate these peak experiences, offering representations of what D. H. Lawrence calls “Man Thinking”: “the direct utterance of the instant, whole man.”

So, the value of achieved spontaneity in life and in the arts goes without question. I am arguing, however, for the need here to bracket spontaneity-in-the-world. Doing so will help us to discuss on the one hand the rhetoric of spontaneity, its use as a device of persuasion, and on the other, an artist’s thematic treatment of spontaneity—both of which are deeply problematical.

Bracketing spontaneity itself, then, I’m more interested in the claim and I don’t care how spontaneous or premeditated the text is or should be. “How spontaneous?” is the wrong question. Rather than split hairs over a text’s degree of achieved spontaneity or get lost in the labyrinth of that oxymoron, let us instead bracket what I have called the Goldilocks questions of “if” and “how much.” My interest is, instead, why so-called improvisers are so insistent about their texts’ improvised provenance. Blind Milton may have composed **Paradise Lost** in his head and dictated it to his daughters, but what makes that unpremeditatedly inspired? And did he not have his daughters read each highly wrought verse paragraph back to him for his inner, sightless blue pencil? Why does Jack Kerouac always talk about composing of **On the Road** at one long Benzedrine-fueled sitting and on one long, 120-foot scroll of paper rather than the six long years of careful editing he took to get it to press? Far more interesting than calibrating the novel’s supposed spontaneity is the way Kerouac and fellow improvisers explore the tensions between spontaneity and craft, artlessness and art. And far more interesting than scrutinizing the degree of Homer’s improvisation is recognizing that his “devastatingly predictable” formulaic wingèd words (epea pteroenta)—at once constrained and free—delineate the formal and thematic tension at the heart of improvisations throughout the ages. The heroes of Homer’s improvised epic songs—the Western tradition’s foundational texts—face this very conflict.

Achilles is constrained by fate and free to choose long life and no fame, or eternal fame and short life

Odysseus is ever-crafty, many-turning; polytropos, an epithet he shares in the ancient Greek canon only with wing-heeled Hermes, in legend his great grandfather, who is often his guide (and the mythic spirit that infuses most improvisations). Odysseus improvises his way into and out of trouble, his men often paying the price. What interests me is not either side of these polarities, freedom and necessity, spontaneity and care and craft. What sets up improvisation’s conceptual field, and what inhabits it, is the conflict between these poles.

The matter of spontaneity is not just a matter for literature or abstract philosophy. As a literary scholar, I find it exciting to offer a fresh approach to the central texts of the Western tradition as I hope to do here. But there is more at stake. The rhetorical gesture of spontaneity is exceedingly familiar in everyday life (“it came to me in the shower”), though we employ it for the most part intuitively, without thinking, and hardly noticing. To my mind this gives us all the more reason to analyze the gesture of spontaneity, and the ideas behind it, if we seek either to deploy them well or not to be manipulated by those who do. The “rhetoric of spontaneity” is the basis for half the salesmanship of modern consumerism, from Coke’s selling “The Real Thing” to all the soap sold by means of hand-held-camera, cinema verité, slice-of-life mini-narratives of simple people doing simple things—all based on an artifice of the inartificial and the appeal of simplicity and the primitive or unsophisticated. Whether we are selling our idea to our boss direct from the shower or our company is hawking commodities in the larger marketplace; whether a poet is convincing his audience of the authenticity of his lyric voice or an epic poet or novelist is ushering in a new paradigm—at whatever register of the spectrum or point on the continuum—the rhetoric of spontaneity is a powerful figure or topos or conceptual field that permeates human discourse.

Rather like Rousseau, who knew his heart and so knew mankind (“*Je sens mon cœur et je connais les hommes*”), President Bush, *the Decider*, doesn’t need State Department analyses. He looks in Russian Premier Putin’s eyes and sees directly into his soul. On the basis of this unmediated experience, we, Bush’s constituency, should therefore trust Putin—an example that goes far in demonstrating how completely this rhetoric can be deployed to mislead us (and perhaps, in this case, its perpetrator). Thus, it is not too much to say that the gesture can be instrumental in matters of state, as well as in matters of life and death. In this case it served us ill, doing little to prepare us for Putin’s power grab and culture of oligarchy, or his invasions of Georgia, the Crimea, and the Ukraine. At least as important: it is a matter of life, how we live it, how we conduct it, what we take its meaning to be, and how we come to know that meaning. Improvisation is a



way to work through the twists and turns as mankind develops new tools of rationality and irrationality. Many of the central texts of the western literary tradition are about these life issues.

We are all the Ancient Mariner: now killing the albatross in a moment of thoughtlessness, now blessing the water snakes with “A spring of love, gushed from my heart.” How can the latter represent the mariner’s unequivocal redemption when his acte gratuite is equally spontaneous? The improviser’s final word is sympathy, ultimately embracing Coleridge’s favorite line from the Roman poet Terence, that “nothing human is foreign to me”— nothing, even our yearning to forsake, or to reach beyond, our humanity. Without spontaneity as an underpinning force humanity would become static, achieving the state of the “living dead” that drives the mariner from pole to pole. Spontaneity disrupts, but in doing so, it continually regenerates and resurrects the creative instincts that are hardwired into our DNA.

An Adventure...

Writing **A Taste for Chaos** has been an adventure and an education.

Forty plus years in the making, this book is anything but an improvisation, in the sense we usually mean: off the cuff, impromptu, and careless.

It is not, or so I’d like to think, unmediated by reason and logic, as improvisers like to claim. Nonetheless it was an adventure, because just as

“my” improvisers, as I’d begun to call them, follow any notion that pops into their heads, so too I let them lead me, pursuing any link to other self-styled improvisers or to any related concept.

The one rule in contemporary, Second City-type comic improvisation is that players must say yes. If I start a sketch saying I met a green alien, you must build on that premise. Keith Johnstone, creator of Theatresports, an early and influential form of improvisational theatre, offers this scenario:

*The first player to kill an idea loses; for example:
—‘You seem out of breath. Been running?’
—‘It’s my asthma...’*

This asthma attack loses because it rejects the idea about running.

“There are people who prefer to say ‘Yes,’” Johnstone sums up, “and there are people who prefer to say ‘No’.” Those who say ‘Yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those that say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain.”

I said yes a lot and this book is a record of the adventures that ensued.

To mention just one adventure chosen at random: Emerson’s celebration in his **Essays** of “that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct” led me to **The Essays of Montaigne** by Michel de Montaigne, that “unpremeditated and accidental philosopher,” as he called himself, who in 1572 retired to his estates to read and reflect and write essays. Renewing my acquaintance with the works of Montaigne led me to Francis Bacon and his **Essays** and thus to his **Advancement of Learning** and **Of the Wisdom of the Ancients** where I was surprised to find in the birth of the new science the same longing for unmediated experience that I’d found in “improvised” literary texts. My newfound interest in the history of science ensured that when it came out I glommed onto James Gleick’s **Chaos: Making a New Science**. Gleick’s book

*What Randy Fertel says in his opus on improvisation in the arts, **A Taste for Chaos**, is both important and rich with a perceptive imagination; it is a good match to Walter Isaacson’s **The Innovators**, and stands tall as another huge and hand-carved broom that removes so much dust from the floors of the academy. Fertel is about stepping up to the issue and using his head for much more than a hat rack.*

*—Stanley Crouch, author of **Kansas City Lightning**, the new biography of music icon Charlie Parker*

recounted the slow emergence beginning in the early 1960s but gathering steam in the 1970s and 80s in a number of fields—from meteorology to non-linear mathematics to economics, to name just a few—of a science that found hidden order within turbulence. Chaotics articulated for me what I was finding in “chaotic” literary texts, how order emerges without apparent guidance. Soon I was tracking French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s pursuit of “différance,” one aspect of which is its

“soliciting . . . in the sense that

solicitare, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety.” Improvised texts were not only turbulent but disruptive. What they disrupted were the reigning notions of systematic order and rationality. Cognitive neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist, in his superb **The Master and the Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World**, helped explain how that disruption was hardwired into the bi-cameral structure of the brain.

The adventure of following this and many other threads has thus been an education. When I was an undergraduate in the late 1960s, many of my English professors had gone to school in T.S. Eliot’s **The Waste Land**. A tissue of “fragments . . . shored against [his] ruins,” Eliot’s poem taught us that to achieve whatever individual talent we aspired to as artists or as critics we had to marinate ourselves in the Great Tradition. Eliot’s poem promoted a syllabus: Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—these were the eminences, the great and the near-great that surrounded them, whose work we had to master.

The present book is both a continuation of Eliot’s educational model and a departure. Trying to get



to the bottom of this meta-tradition or meta-genre improvisation took my liberal arts education in directions I never imagined pursuing. Improv was my vade mecum, a boon companion, and this book an omnium-gatherum, a place to store everything I learned along the way. Whenever I got intensely interested in some new author or field, eventually I realized it fit into my effort to understand improvisation. As a friend said (with a smile), it can't be right, Randy, everything fits. Goethe tells Eckermann in their **Conversations** that you must use what you study if you want to retain it. That's how researching, compiling, and writing this book has functioned for me. For that I will always be grateful.

Pursuing the adventure, it became clear that, while many of its examples are from the mainstream of the Great Tradition, improvisation is in fact its own tradition and one that interweaves with and shadows the Great Tradition. Improvisation is a kind of dark, disruptive force ever in dialogue with the mainstream. I started out to define a kind of literature. Before I was done, or before improv was done with me, I seemed to have defined an archetype, a state of being where fundamental polarities of our being contend. Eventually the adventure led to the further recognition that what I was looking at was an alternative narrative of Western culture, less linear or periodic than we usually see, more cyclical or spiral in nature. Hidden in plain sight largely because each claims to be unlike anything you've ever seen, improvisations are a countercurrent that "spins against," in Melville's words, the way Western culture "drives." In other words improvisations spin against the drive toward increasingly objective, positivistic rationality. Improv's spin urges us instead to embrace subjectivity and some version of the irrational, depending on what cultural moment it inhabits. In sum, the gesture of spontaneity works to dismantle the entire edifice of authority: how we make and judge value and how we know the world.

As for Mr. Faulkner...

So, I've spent 40 years trying to make sense of this habit artists have of insisting against the grain of common sense that the work you are reading, or looking at, or listening to — for improvisation is found in all the arts — was not the product of thought or craft or care. Recall Huck Finn's notice: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot will be shot." Without motive or purpose or shape, the **Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** is the product of a careless, carefree boy. Of course the ironies of Clemens are palpable and like most improvisations, Huck Finn at the outset insists on Huck's naturalness only to challenge it in the end. By portraying the limitations in Huck's carefree (and careless) innocence, the novel dramatizes the necessity of adding to the spontaneous

workings of the heart the care and insight that only the mind can provide.

What matters in my effort to make sense of this rhetoric of spontaneity is reading central texts of the Western tradition more clearly and more deeply. So, in this setting, this prologue to the keynote address that I will give during the Faulkner Society's festival, *Words and Music*, 2014, you may be wondering, what does this have to do with Mr. Faulkner?

Indeed.

Well, first of all, I would argue that whether or not Faulkner makes direct claims for a novel's improvisatory status, nonetheless the rhetoric of spontaneity that I have been describing is deeply if indirectly inscribed in the texture of most of what he wrote. When Faulkner says that he needs only tobacco, bourbon, and an empty room to write, it becomes almost inevitable that his churning, baroque prose will be associated with spontaneity even by his finest critics, as when Irving Howe claims that Faulkner's "central subject has remained constant, but each return to it has an air of improvisation as if he were forever seeing his world in a new way." As always what is in question here are not Faulkner's work habits, how much he revised, but rather the "air of improvisation" which not only his emotionally supercharged and free-associative style but also such authorial remarks as these about "tobacco and bourbon" help to create.

About **The Sound and the Fury Faulkner** in fact does make such a claim: "when I began the book," he boasts, "I had no plan at all. I wasn't even writing a book." By contrast, he intimates that **As I Lay Dying** was just a matter of craft. "Sometimes," he explained, "technique charges in and takes command of the dream before the writer himself can get his hands on it. That is tour de force and the finished work is simply a matter of fitting bricks neatly together, since the writer knows probably every single word right to the end before he puts the first one down. This happened with **As I Lay Dying**." In writing **The Sound and the Fury**, the dream seized him. Technical tour de force it may be, but according to his rhetoric, it was not by his doing. In an Homeric age it would have been the Muse at work; in a Freudian age it was of course a matter of dream work.

At the heart of Mr. Faulkner's masterpiece are those very antinomies so central to improvisation that **A Taste for Chaos** explores. Of the Faulkner novel's four centers of consciousness, two are characterized by their "naturalness," two by their lack of it. Benjy, the "idiot" of the eponymous Macbeth quotation, is what in the Renaissance was indeed called "a natural": he is God's or Nature's child in the long tradition of gifted or holy fools that populate improvisations at least since **Praise of Folly** by Erasmus. With something of the Trickster about her, Dilsey's voice and character too are free of the civilized degradations of character that plague Quentin and Jason Compson. Where improvisation urges us to embrace all of life, Quentin can't even



accept the dirty underpants he sees as Caddy climbs the pear tree. Nor can he embrace all that her dirty underpants represent: sex and the unchivalric world of the body's desires, including his own.

And Jason? Has there ever been a more complete portrait of a man less in touch with his "natural" self? Jason is "Logical rational contained," in the words of Faulkner's "Appendix," a phrase that, by forswearing commas, introduces an alternative to mainstream logic and rationality. (In **Essentials of Spontaneous Prose** Kerouac speaks of avoiding "timid usually needless commas"). Jason too is "the first sane Compson since before Culloden," which, given his character, offers another challenge to the value of rationality. Quentin and Jason's days are both improvisations, moment-by-moment responses to what life throws at them. Both, however, filter life through their overly-organized, accountant-spread-sheet approach to life. "Logos," says Victor Frankl, "is deeper than logic." Quentin and Jason have lost their way.

Like most improvisations, while its rhetoric of spontaneity flirts with it, **The Sound and the Fury** doesn't in the end simply beat the "civilized" over the head with the "natural." These polar voices, Quentin and Jason versus Benjy and Dilsey, invite us to consider how we say yes to the adventure of life and, saying no, how we keep life at a distance. That is the problem that the rhetoric of spontaneity introduces: how can we best and most openly live life. Like improvisers since Homer, Faulkner's narrative urges us to open ourselves to life's richness and fecundity. Carpe vitam: that is the buoyant message in improvisation's bottle. Don't just seize the day, seize all of life.

How? Improvisations demonstrate their answer on every page. What makes improvisation possible is that alertness to the moment that Kerouac recommended. Being "overtime awake from sheer mad joy" prepares both improviser and his audience to respond to life as it happens. As Stanley Crouch writes about that improvisation with which New Orleanians are most attuned, "Part of the emotion of jazz results from the excitement and the satisfaction of making the most of the present." New Orleans jazz may have



Randy Fertel at home

put improvisation on the map for us, but improv's been around a long time, serving the same master: our longing to be fully alive, to know and embrace the inspiration, the deliciousness of sense-titillating abandon to the moment at hand. 🌸

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*Randy Fertel, Ph.D., lover of fine wines and fine food, has long dined out on stories from his debut book, **The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steaks: A New Orleans Family Memoir**, (University Press of Mississippi, 2011), the tale of two distinctive people, his parents. His father, the late Rodney Fertel, a total New Orleans eccentric, once ran for Mayor New Orleans on the single plank, "Get a Gorilla for the Zoo." He did not win but the Audubon Park Zoo got not one but two gorillas from Rodney. Randy's mother, the late Ruth Fertel, created a national restaurant empire based on her highly successful New Orleans bistro, Ruth's Chris Steak House, which was the most favored castle of cuisine for Louisiana politicians. Pieces of the memoir have been published in **Kenyon Review**, **Creative Nonfiction**, and **Gastronomica** and produced for the stage in **Native Tongues**, playwright Carl Walker's theatrical love letter to all things New Orleans. Randy's essay, **The Soul of New Orleans: Katrina Five Ways** was named a "notable essay" in **Best American Essays of 2006** and received "special mention" from the Pushcart Prize (Best of the Small Presses). Fertel also was among contributors to **My New Orleans: Ballads to the Big Easy by Her Sons, Daughters, and Lovers**, edited by Rosemary James. His new book, **A Taste for Chaos: The Art of Literary Improvisation**, is forthcoming from Spring Journal Books.*

*For more on Randy and **A Taste for Chaos**, see **The Perennial Quest for Now** by Tony Gentry in the criticism section of this issue. For more on Faulkner's **The Sound and the Fury**, see Patrick Samway's article in the Classics Revisited.*



LITTLE BILL TO THE RESCUE

By Stanley Crouch

I subscribe to William Faulkner's view that history is not just about what we were before but who we are now.

—Ken Burns, Documentary Filmmaker, **Brainy Quote**

BECAUSE FAULKNER WAS SUCH AN impressive writer with the invisible ink of language, he is too often assessed outside of his time in favor of literary movements. Yet his context of high tensions pressed to the griddle of reality, has passed backward and forward in our highly advertised post racial age. What famed documentary producer/director Ken Burns has to say about history is much like what the southern writer said about the past; that it is always alive and kicking.

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

As recent midterm elections prove, the continuance of the Civil War—reinterpreted by wily modern redneck Washington politicians—bitterly looms over our land, claiming to be more about the teapot tempest than a retooled form of rebellion now cast as a modern response to government running wild, rather than the actuality of big bad wolves hiding in conservative garb and proving open to the presence of allies in the room never allowed into polite company before. Faulkner knew this because, for all of his troubles with drinking, he remained the most honest and comprehensive American modernist; he delivered works bent on refreshing the aesthetic techniques of 20th century fiction, so much and so deeply that his works were often individual experiments in form, united more by sound than anything else.

His concern with sound makes his time in New Orleans an aesthetic influence rising from the human things everywhere to be seen, most were miscegenation on all levels, something he had to notice because Faulkner had one of the best pair of ears, best pair of eyes, and one of best memories ever known to creative people—especially those like himself, sitting on the top shelf, where clichés and stereotypes are basically

forbidden to these very most gifted.

What he saw and heard were the roots of a seaport city of masking, stringent superstition, and celebratory improvisations. The writer made enormous vessels of brilliant, comic, and tragic fiction as well as films with extemporary dialogue, such as that between Humphrey Bogart and Dorothy Malone in their memorable scene in **The Big Sleep**. That Howard Hawks movie also connects Faulkner to Martine Scorsese, the grand master of improvisation within today's cinematic world of the darkness, light, shadow, and the motion of still images in mobile relationships. Hawks was the forerunner—allowing his writers and his actors access to improvisation—and affecting many contemporary filmmakers, in this land and abroad.

The New Moment In The Big Easy

As Americans, we often hate history and know much less about it than we claim to comprehend. At its best and worst, history is the abused child of competing ideologies, often mirroring one another through plastic gels convincing too many of us there is more to the meaning of difference than superficial colors.

Moreover, in our conveniently multi-colored world, now referred to as a division between whites and “people of color,” we find ourselves too often preferring lies that fit into an ideology dominated by straw men and women, all created to “prove a point.” We prefer lies rather than revelations of worth about the species at large anywhere in the living world we know of. We prefer to overlook the many ways of doing and thinking in which humans resembling one another, distinguished as a rule by style more than anything else. Revealing this universality but addressing ethnic



particulars, which are only shadings, is the heavy lifting job of the artist—he or she who is comfortable with the ongoing challenge of fresh passion and fresh forms.

Even straw people, however, can be reanimated by feeling, skill, and abundant aesthetic passion. They can be animated to survive the flames or break through the ice as Houdini once had to—if he was to live beyond a very dangerous trick. While improvisational art always gives the impression of the protean and inventive human being—the ever present individual—versus the machine of impersonal and tireless repetition, the artist’s care in crafting is what makes the inventive universal. While there is a horror to hearing something which goes beyond the way it felt when new, the actual value of art can be most deeply experienced when repetition is redefined during performance as a high styled kind of vitality, then proven by the printing press or film.

Little Bill, five feet six, was a strong man and a giant in both areas.

A person using our contemporary technology no longer speaks about printing presses or film, but fonts and images totally defined by electronic reproduction. The wonder of both printed words and film is that for all of the technological things that are to be used, perhaps mastered, art itself moves or functions within them all while transcending every last snippet introduced or left in the electronic cutting room’s trash, as aesthetic creation has never failed to do. The same applies to artistic formations of entire cultures. This is particularly true of Louisiana and its sense of improvised truth, best shown in the artistry of the Big Easy, a city much like Rome because it is as primitive as it is sophisticated, bringing those forces together into a mulatto aesthetic, one part European, one part African, Latin American, left over and vital heritage from the American Indian, another part almost a long ball hit from the Caribbean—the total mixture held in place by the varied tribes of Indians and the mix-ups brought to the islands by slavery, which one of the finest of American improvisers, William Faulkner made central to **Go Down Moses** and to the italicized sections opening every movement of **Big Woods**, little Bill’s collection of hunting stories, a variation on Hemingway’s **In Our Time**.

Faulkner is correctly thought of as Mississippi’s greatest modernist, but as a novelist, he is a son of New Orleans, although a visitor, a visitor who was surely touched quite deeply by its improvised standing in American culture. And in the touching, New Orleans gave Mr. Faulkner his voice as a novelist. The New Orleans ensemble collaboration known as jazz, came to its fullest force while arriving on the moment. The most artistic presentation of

improvisation avoids chaos by bringing form that is an optimistic expression of mobile betterment. Every style or approach is founded on belief in collaboration, in improvised performances that will “fill in the blanks” to a worthwhile point. And, Little Bill filled in lots of blanks to formidable points.

The Worthwhile Point

While Martin Scorsese was driven by his own intelligence to deliver an especially profound lecture at the Kennedy Center last year, he made it clear that there is something of essential human interest in the cinematic language, part of which can only be two-dimensional images, usually known as moving pictures. Whether or not a particular image itself is in motion, as a still form it becomes a format of dramatic geometry in which dimensional analysis is aesthetic, pleasing, beautiful, art. Words on the writer’s page are perhaps the greatest of still forms, since they never move, the eye does, something all writers SHOULD know and take care in how their words appear on their pages.

Moreover, as a master of form, Scorsese understands how words can enhance images and vice versa. His own scripted language made an addition to film language in the way that the voice over and dialogue gave opportunities for the urban grit of Italian-American street talk to become part of the huge canon of American language, available to be used by whoever needs it for a new creation. After something has been invented and put on the public record, you see, it becomes international and is left there for the taking and the using, transcending ideological purpose and the narrows of such purpose.

Originality is the ultimate goal, choice, and victory for the single artist working in the middle of the collective energy that creates the strokes and nuances of a work— human beings combining their God-given talents with the technological equipment necessary to bag the tale, making it all seem both bigger than life, to coin a phrase, and just the right human size for the theme.

William Faulkner did the same thing in his own original, improvised inventions playing off of Melville and Joyce, particularly the section of **Ulysses** that lets the anti-Semitic “citizen” loose, turning the language in the direction of minstrelsy, which Melville did well before the Irishman. Faulkner usually is thought of as a prime, vintage Mississippian, but, in fact, he stood up and took his first steps of literary genius in the embracing, inquisitive, ingenious, re-inventing culture of Bohemian New Orleans. He looked beyond the dreary, hard-rock, often mean-spirited fundamentalism of the rural South into the voluptuous exoticism of the French Quarter of the Roaring 20s, into the lives of



New Orleanians filled with their painted Saints and pageantry and coquettish ways and convivial “come as you are” acceptance of strangers and that inspired him to look abroad. He was quite taken by **Moby Dick** and **Huckleberry Finn** because Faulkner felt the need himself to take an extraordinary boat ride and make use of the many things as he had heard and seen in New Orleans, a secret southern capital of the powerhouse makers of fresh worlds. One, Louis Armstrong, made the romance and intercourse of jazz, a kiss of fire that indelibly smooched the entire civilized world and made New Orleans the international kissing place.

The new world of jazz and improvisation was created by the New Orleans commitment to group collaboration; it transformed what could have been chaotic material and made it into the art it was by empathy, assistance, variation on what someone else had played, even a few seconds before. Jazz is an art given to dialogue in the moment, the present, sometimes in a shifting sort of style. Faulkner created jazz but the instrument Faulkner played was the English language—like Melville and Joyce—by creating variations, in **Absalom, Absalom**, for instance, on the Odysseus tale. In Faulkner’s work, there are country themes, street rhymes, Shakespeare, folk tales and the abundant Greco-Roman mythic blues of Mount Olympus. Allusions to the **Bible** abound but are almost always twisted out of the conventional places, turning something common into the unique, high or low or somewhere in between, running riffs, his beats measured by the pressure of his inventive jewel of human feeling and acute perception. He struts his stuff before us.

Faulkner may not have known that **Moby Dick** was the most impressive struggle with form in the English language between **Tristram Shandy** and **Ulysses**, but the open battle with convention must have touched him—mammoth to terse sentences, narrator sliding from first, to second, to third person, form continually reshaping itself, over and over seeming an improvised slight of hand.

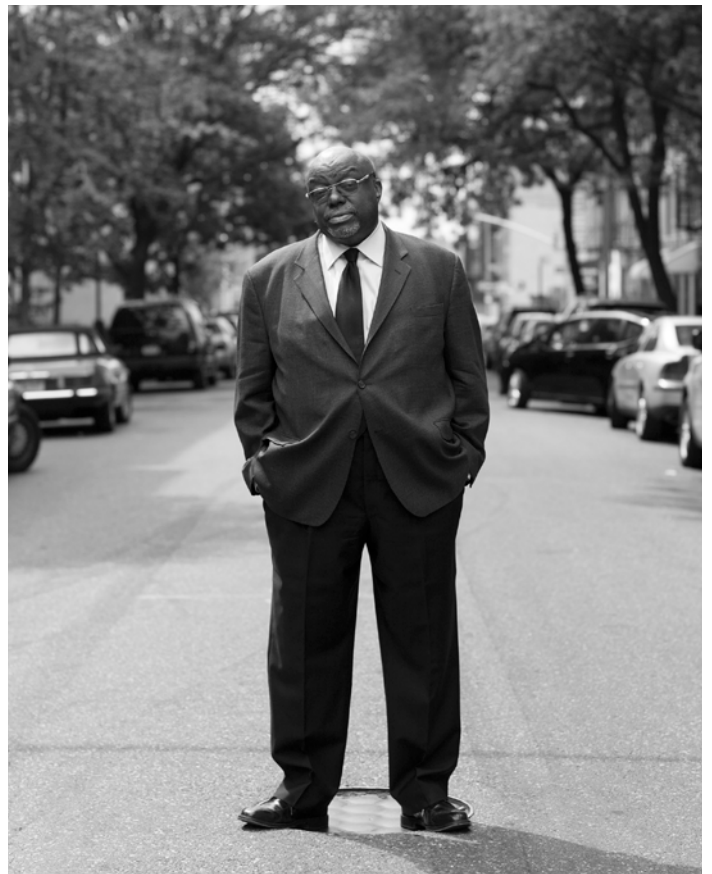
Such a world grew into his private magic mountain, where life and talent kept asking him to trust his ear, his observations, and what his imagination said was possible—if the improvisation was fluid enough to run differently as many times as the moods and dreams of his characters demanded.

Finally, as Louis Armstrong said of experience lived, heard about, or dreamed, “It’s all life.” Little Bill would agree. 🌸

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*Stanley Crouch, author of the long awaited new biography of famed jazzman Charlie Parker, **Kansas City Lightning**, has been writing about jazz music and the African American experience for more than 40 years. He has twice been nominated for the National Book Critics Circle award, for his essay collections **Notes of a Hanging Judge** (1990) and **The All-American Skin Game** (1995). His other books include **Always in Pursuit** (1998), **The Artificial White Man** (2004), and the novel **Don't the Moon Look Lonesome** (2000). His writing has appeared in Harper's, **The New Yorker**, **Vogue**, **Downbeat**, **Partisan Review**, **The New Republic**, **the New York Times**, and elsewhere. He has served, off and on, since 1987 as artistic consultant for jazz programming at Lincoln Center and is a founder of the jazz department known as Jazz at Lincoln Center. He is also executive vice president of the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation. On television, he has appeared in the Ken Burns documentaries **Jazz** and the remastered DVD edition of **The Civil War**; has guest-hosted Charlie Rose and appeared as a commentator on **60 Minutes**; he has been twice profiled by **C-Span** and has appeared as a guest on many radio and television shows. A winner of a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is a regular columnist for the **New York Daily News**.*

Stanley Crouch by Zack Zook





MUSIC



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

*...and as for music, after it's played, where
does it go?*

—Clarice Lispector



THE ART OF IMPROVISATION

THE HEART AND SOUL OF JAZZ ALONE? OR THE CRUX OF OUR HUMANITY

By *Alessandro Powell*

FOR YEARS MY FAVORITE book was **On the Road**. I had never read it, but always hated the question “What is your favorite book?” and felt Jack Kerouac’s masterpiece to be an agreeable answer. I eventually got to it as assigned reading. Little did I know, the improv I’d been shooting BS about for years may have been an affectation.

Great art is never without controversy, however. Who can possibly hold a little drafting against Kerouac? Arguing that improv is a lie is like teaching kindergarteners that the Easter Bunny does not exist. What’s the point?

More likely it is my own understanding of improvisation that has been askew. My only claim to fame with regard to knowledge of improv in music is, after all, that in my freshman year I bunked with a jazz guitarist and listened to him practice solos that he referred to as Dixie improv.

Lawrence “Larry” Sieberth, a virtuoso pianist who has played every genre of music on the great jazz stages of the world; **Bruce Raeburn, Ph.D.**, Director

of the Hogan Jazz Archives at Tulane University and a musician himself; and **Tom Sancton**, a jazz clarinetist and writer, have been kind enough to put me on the right path to understanding improv in music.

I realize I should find out if computers can improvise, but my guess is that they can’t, or at least not in the same way we can; that they can, so far, only do what they are told to do. Is it possible to improvise as a writer while using the spell checker? I think we can. The human part, the creation, comes first. And I believe improvisation is possible by any human, whether immersed in the creative process or just walking around the block. The spell check is after the fact of creation, human action. I punch a key and tell my computer to spell check what I have created.

So, maybe the art of improvisation is what makes us human. I like that idea.

I like to think that improv is about honesty in human action.

Sieberth, Sancton, and Raeburn put it better. Sieberth, who produces and directs music in addition to performing, has appeared on the bandstands and

been a musical director for the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival for more than 30 years; Sancton studied jazz in New Orleans and as a Rhodes Scholar in France; Raeburn has been described as immersed in jazz, equally as adept with the written word as with a pair of drumsticks.

Lawrence “Larry” Sieberth is at home in any musical setting. A fluent jazz pianist and synthesizer wizard, Sieberth integrates the many facets of music and performance. His own neo-bop improvisations and experimental diversions, combined with his classical interests, provide an extensive musical vocabulary for his compositions for television, film, and stage. Larry’s musical background is very diverse. He is a pianist, composer, arranger, musical director, educator, and producer. His collaborations with other musical artists have put him in the best musical company around the globe, and he has been honored as outstanding jazz pianist by both *New Orleans Magazine* and *Jazziz*. His soundtracks for television, film, and stage have earned a number of awards, including a **Telly** and the **Silver Gala Media Award**. His contributions as arranger and musical director for stage include **Hats! The Musical**, **My-O-My**, **Cocktails in the Ladies’ Lounge**, and **Joint’s Jumpin’**.

Tom Sancton, a New Orleans native, is a jazz musician, journalist, fiction writer, and educator. Tom has played clarinet from age 13. He was appointed Andrew W. Mellon professor of the Humanities at Tulane University in 2007. In his 2006 memoir, **Song for My Fathers: a New Orleans Story in Black and White**, Tom recounts his local roots. He also co-authored the international bestseller **Death of a Princess: The Investigation** and wrote **The Armageddon Project**, a political thriller. From 1992 to 2001 Tom Sancton served as Paris Bureau Chief of *Time Magazine*. He has recorded more than a dozen albums under his name. With his *New Orleans Legacy Band* Tom has held down gigs at Preservation Hall and throughout the city. Sancton graduated from Harvard with honors and was honored in 2013 by France with award of the title: Chevalier (Knight) of Arts and Letters. This year’s Double Dealer features an excerpt from Sancton’s novel in progress in the new



fiction section.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn is an academic percussionist. Formerly curator of the Hogan Jazz Archives at Tulane, he now supervises all special collections. Bruce is the first son of the band leader Albert Boyd Raeburn. His mother was a singer. He graduated from Tulane in 1991. Currently, he digitizes oral histories from their reel format while teaching history and music at Tulane. Appearing often on WWNO's *Crescent City* radio show, he collects music videos in his spare time. Bruce makes frequent pilgrimages to his birthplace, New York. While he has performed widely as a jazz drummer for 39 years, Raeburn is not opposed to rock and roll. Also a writer, his latest work, **New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History** is forthcoming. We feature an excerpt in this year's *Double Dealer*.

Interviewing these three well-versed professionals gave me a big leg up on understanding music. I hope it will do the same for you. Hear what they have to say, live, at **Words & Music, a Literary Feast** in New Orleans on Saturday, November 22. If you can't attend, here are their answers to my questions, some of which you might have posed yourselves.

Interview

Powell:

Did improv begin with jazz? If it has African roots, has Western music ever involved improvisation in its compositions of styles? And other cultures? When someone says improv, do you assume they are talking about jazz?

Sieberth:

No. It is difficult to know exactly what music was like before notation and recording. Music, for most of history, was handed down through instruction and listening without being notated in any way. Consequently, the reiteration of a piece of music most probably always included interpretation and improvisation. There are inherent principles underlying the organization of music and the performance is a wedding of the composer's knowledge—what he has heard and learned from those who have gone before him—and the performer's interpretation of what he has learned from those who have gone before him. The performer always brings his “being” into play.

Sancton:

There is nothing about improvisation that is intrinsic to jazz music. In its broadest sense, improvisation is part of everyone's daily life—from choosing what cereal to eat in the morning, to carrying on an impromptu conversation, to deciding whether to walk

or take the bus to work. Anything that doesn't follow a fixed blueprint is improvisation. If you are talking strictly about music, improvisation has been part of musical cultures as far back as there has been music. The first primitive instruments—flutes, drums, string instruments—were almost certainly played in a way that involved improvisation. As there was no written music, no set templates, early music relied on the creative efforts of the players, hence improvisation. Baroque music was full of improvisation. Bach and Mozart were said to be formidable improvisers at the keyboard. Classical composers regularly left blank passages for soloists to improvise cadenzas. Folk music and blues are full of improvisation, not to mention Klezmer, gypsy music, Anatolian music, etc., etc.

Raeburn:

No. To my mind, improvisation is a basic human trait, undoubtedly linked to such events as the discovery and applications of fire. One learns from one's mistakes, because improvisation does not always lead to good results. This is the nature of the beast. Thus, if fire burns down your hut because you let it get too high, then you find ways to curb the fire to get a different result—you improvise. If improvisation is viewed as the freedom to interpret and to play music spontaneously as a form of interaction with other performers, then the correlation of improvisational musical performance to dance in African culture would be a constant. As far as Eurocentric musical culture is concerned, improvisation has been emphasized to a greater or lesser extent depending on the fashions of the period in question, but is a consistent presence, from folk music to composed masterworks. Improvisation connotes innovation, but it is necessarily grounded in established tradition, either affirming it or reacting against it, whatever the musical system in question.

Powell:

Does improvisation have roots in religious traditions? Was it the product of popular taste?

Sieberth:

This is a chicken or the egg question. I imagine humans have always needed to make sense of questions which have no answers. Music is a part of creation and probably has always been along for the ride.

Sancton:

The earliest religious music certainly involved improvisation since there was religious music before there was written music. Gospel music is full of improvised inflections and ornamentations. I think the impulse to improvise is fundamental and instinctive, not a response to public taste.

Raeburn:



Religious restrictions often lead humans to find ways around them while still attempting to maintain an exterior semblance of good conscience or piety. I think this would qualify as improvisation, to the extent that it is systematic and intentional. The degree to which a given jazz performer indulges in improvisation can vary depending on personal preferences, in that some performers like to take risks in solos every time, while others tend to stick with a given solo if they feel it has been perfected. If it was dictated by popular taste, then the audience would be making the decisions rather than the performer. Is this what is meant by “selling out”? Most jazz musicians that I know want public approbation, but they are not willing to compromise their musical vision in order to get it.

Powell:

Can two players improv simultaneously in jazz? Does it happen outside of jazz?

Sieberth:

Jazz improvisation is a synchronistic dialogue among the performers. Think of a verbal conversation. There is normally a logic to the position of each sentence that is not predetermined. Jazz is a process that requires change from moment to moment. Improvisation applies to every transformative decision. It is the basis of evolution.

Sancton:

Of course. Collective improvisation, where two or more instruments improvise at the same time, is fundamental to jazz playing. It’s like a collective conversation, where the players listen to one another and respond to what they hear. And of course, actual spoken conversations between two or more people are full of improvisation in people’s choice of words, ideas, arguments.

Raeburn:

Thomas Brothers talks about “fixed and variable” models derived from Afrocentric cultural roots as intrinsic to the music of Louis Armstrong—that is a useful approach, but it does not preclude multiple improvisations occurring simultaneously. In Peter Brotzman’s *Tentet* one can find examples of several multiple improvisations happening at once in one group following a fixed theoretical prescription. If a Jehovah’s Witness and a Mormon missionary show up at your doorstep at the same time, a dual verbal improvisation outside of jazz is likely to occur. If one of them is the artist formerly known as *Prince*, the possibilities will expand exponentially. In musical terms, a creative improvisational ethos including one or more musicians is the underlying premise for the band *Phish*, among others, so it does occur outside of jazz. I have also seen scholars claim that the rock/blues power trio *Cream* operated under similar, jazz informed principles, in the 1960s.

Powell:

How much of a jazz solo is improv, and how much is a riff on standards? Is improv a riff off of scales, and is it vital to the improvisation that the melody remain in notes they play?

Sieberth:

I advocate the position that you can play any note on any chord. It’s the way in which you make it work that counts. “Intention” is the key. The understanding of music theory/theories is essential but does nothing to guarantee communicating with an audience. Giving life to a note is another mystery that cannot be explained.

Sancton:

It is impossible to generalize. It depends on the soloist, the tune, and the style of music. A jazz solo can consist entirely of the melody or it can ignore the melody and meander around the scales and arpeggios of the tune’s chord structure, or it may veer off into something discordant and atonal. Benny Goodman and Charlie Parker both improvised in relation to the chords and melodies of the tunes they played, but their approach was totally different.

Raeburn:

Improvisational “head arrangements” of tunes in rehearsal can be retained for performance in part or as a whole, depending on the choices made within the ensemble and the policy in effect for individuals within the group. In many cases, individual soloists will depart from what was done in rehearsal or use it as a platform to enable free, spontaneous expression. Since most skilled jazz musicians trust the abilities of the people they play with, this kind of freedom usually leads to good results, but not always, which is why some musicians, such as Sidney Bechet, developed a repertoire of solos on a given tune and then selected what they thought would work best in the moment. In addition, jazz performances and solos are often coded with reconfigurations of chord changes or melodies from popular songs. A riff, as defined by Jelly Roll Morton in his Library of Congress interviews with Alan Lomax in 1938, is a shared musical figure that can become the basis for improvisation, just as a melody or a set of chord changes can be.

Powell:

Is all music improv?

Sieberth:

The creation of all music begins with one note or sound that is chosen. One could argue that this act of selection is an act of improvisation.

Sancton:

Music *played as written* is by definition not improvised.



Raeburn: No.

Powell:

How about improv outside of music? Were musicians the first improv artists? By all accounts, traveling bards like Homer altered the details of the tales they never set down on paper, depending on their audience. How similar is this to jazz improv?

Sieberth:

Improvisation essentially is “decisions made in time.” Those decisions may or may not include reaction to an audience.

Sancton:

Back to my first answer, improvisation is part of life. Of course Homer and all practitioners of the oral tradition of storytelling improvised around the themes of their tales. A politician improvises alterations in his stump speech. Lindy-hopping dancers improvise their steps and turns. Painters and sculptors improvise their brush chisel strokes. Everybody improvises.

Raeburn:

Good example with Homer. Oral traditions almost always have improvisational components to enable creative expression of the performer, but if one is telling the story of the *Iliad*, certain key points have to be included. This is where tradition and innovation intersect.

Powell:

What is method acting? And is there a correlation with music?

Sieberth:

I always enjoyed the thought brought up in “An Actor Prepares” by Stanislavski, that the time spent in preparation e.g. characterization, drawing on personal emotions and memories, etc. has to be relinquished when the curtain rises or the camera rolls. It is the same when improvising in music. The goal is to ‘hear’ something new rather than to delve into your ‘bag of tricks’. Being in the moment is essential. There is no time for reflection.

Sancton:

Not my department.

Raeburn:

Developed in the 1940s, Constantin Stanislavski and later Lee Strasberg used a method of teaching actors to draw on their own emotions in translating the persona of the character they are portraying. There is a correlation to jazz solo improvisation.

Powell:

In today’s jazz scene, do musicians improvise more or less

than in the past? In popular music?

Sieberth:

There definitely has been evolution in jazz. Also in pop music, which unfortunately is highly driven by commercialization. It is not a question of “more or less” but “how and why?” In our time, all art has evolved to the point of “anything goes.” This is not bad in of itself. It does, however, require not only the diligence to technique by the artist and but also comprehension by both artist and listener of the basis for an individual artist’s unique reasoning for his or her decisions in the creative process.

Sancton:

It depends on the style of music, the nature of the band. If it is a band playing off charts with solos spritzed in that’s one thing. If it’s more of a free jazz group, it’s almost all improvisation. But I don’t think you can generalize. Louis Armstrong’s *Hot Five* musicians of the 1920s were not reading charts—they were all improvising collectively. So I don’t think you can necessarily say that “today’s jazz scene” (whatever that is) involves more improvisation than in the past.

Raeburn:

Impossible to generalize given lack of statistical information on the topic.

Powell:

What is the role of repetition in improv? Do you remember after you improvise?

Sieberth:

Repetition is an organization tool. Art is a balance between the expected and the unexpected. It is difficult to explain the state of mind when the creative process is at the forefront. I remember being there.

Sancton:

Repetition is essential to solo playing. You build your phrases on the phrases that went before. The structure of the 12-bar blues, a fundamental building block of jazz, is all built on repetition. Do you remember after you improvise? I think you instinctively assimilate everything you play into your subconscious mind. Sometimes a phrase you invented before will pop up again, but often your phrases are built on bits of melody or chords or scales that reappear, so you inevitably wind up repeating things even if you didn’t specifically memorize them. And of course a lot of ostensibly improvised solos are actually improvised first, worked out in advance of a performance and memorized. Armstrong did this all the time.

Bruce Raeburn: Some jazz soloists really love monotony and will repeat a figuration to achieve maximum dramatic effect. Others seek to avoid it or recycle in order to transform, achieving the appearance



of repetition but altering inflections in subtle ways. The possibilities are endless.

Powell:

Does the audience know (so far as you can tell) when your improv begins, is ongoing, or what?

Sieberth:

Some people in an audience are more aware of the theoretical process than others. What is more important in art is communicating. Music can convey and instill or bring to the fore all aspects of the human emotional fabric.

Sancton:

I can't really say what the audience knows or thinks about what I am playing. If they applaud afterwards, I assume they liked it. But whether they understood it or not I don't know.

Raeburn:

Ditto.

Powell:

Is improv necessarily a live art?

Sieberth:

As opposed to what?

Sancton:

No. Writers, composers, artists all improvise as they construct their works.

Raeburn:

I would add...

Dead people don't improv.

Powell:

What is bad improv? Who does it wrong or doesn't get it?

Sieberth:

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder or, for music, in the ear of the listener. I have my own opinions but they are not universal.

Sancton:

That's all a matter of taste and subjective judgment.

Raeburn:

If the drummer does not come back to the "one" (downbeat) after an improvised solo, he may be blamed for the tenor player's or someone else's mistake—I have seen presentations given on mistakes in the solos of the Miles Davis Quintet, where the rhythm section got off track from a soloist, and then the process of elimination, sometimes misguided, that occurs among the players before they figure out how to get back together. This is often a timing issue, thus the onus on the drummer. It's an interesting process

to witness, very instructive to learn that soloists who take risks sometimes get bad results, but also that professional jazz musicians can be very resourceful in solving the problems that result from "bad" improv.

Powell:

In improv, is it best to allow harmony or rhythm to serve as organizing principle?

Sieberth:

Harmony and rhythm are but two of the organizational principles at one's disposal. There is no time to think when improvising. Thinking is best done in the practice room.

Sancton:

Musical improvisation is always based on melody, harmony, and rhythm (unless you're talking about atonal free jazz). A good player will always have the melody and chords in his head as he plays. And of course he has to respect the beat.

Raeburn:

Some drummers do melodic solos that are entirely improvisational—the drummers David Lee and Max Roach are good examples. There's no set formula. Check out what Ornette Coleman does and then rethink the question.

Powell:

Surely there must be some organizing principle, or is the jazz improv an act of musical orgasm?

Sieberth:

The desire to understand art is secondary to enjoying it.

Sancton:

I try to keep music and orgasms separate. The organizing principle is the structure of the tune—the melody, chords, rhythm, number of bars, etc. Those are the parameters in which one improvises. It's not just "anything goes."

Raeburn:

Usually, but not always, the chord changes are the organizing principle. See my previous reference to Brotzman and company's strategy for collective improvisation.

Powell:

Explain to me the difference between a solo and improv.

Sieberth:

You might say the soloist is the one directing the conversation.

Sancton:

A solo can be a simple statement of the melody, or it can skirt the melody completely. In the first case, it is



not improvised although the player's inflections and phrasing and tone make it an original interpretation. In the second case, it is improvised. But both performances are solos.

Raeburn:

A solo is one person playing, possibly from rote memory or creating spontaneously in the moment; improv can be one or more people creating spontaneously in the moment or a combination of both approaches.

Powell:

Have you ever witnessed improvisation in non-traditional forms (e.g. painting, mathematics)?

Sieberth:

Of course, I am improvising right now as I select the words I am using in my conversation with you.

Sancton:

Of course. As I said originally, improvisation is a fundamental part of life. We all do it and we all see it in every day life and in the creative process of the humanities and sciences.

Raeburn:

Many times. James Lallande of New Orleans is a good example of an improvisational graphic artist; Jackson Pollock, is another better known national example. I don't hang out with mathematicians.

Powell:

Do you ever improvise to cover up mistakes? Is improv all mistakes?

Sieberth:

There are no mistakes, only consequences to your actions.

Sancton:

I don't know what you mean by "mistakes". But I would add that a player who does not know or forgets a precise melody can improvise phrases that fit. This happens all the time in traditional or "Dixieland" jazz.

Raeburn:

That is what vibrato is for, especially if you play reeds and are accompanied by an out of tune piano.

Powell:

During improv, who is in control of you?

Sieberth:

I am not sure.

Sancton:

Tom Sancton.

Raeburn:

Perhaps it's about letting go of control principles, perhaps it's all about control. Each "you" is different.

Powell:

Have you ever done anything you regretted while improvising? Please elaborate. Did you grow as a musical person afterwards?

Sieberth:

"Musical Regrets" — Sounds like a sitcom.

Sancton: I don't know if I'd use the word "regret," but there are plenty of times when I have improvised a phrase that didn't work, went off the chords, or had bad timing. Naturally, I wish I hadn't done that.

Bruce Raeburn: Yes, fail to pick up the check after the gig. By the time my solo was done, everyone in the club, including the club owner, had abandoned the building.

Powell:

Is improv opposed to editing? I know I am not supposed to try and correct mistakes when I play (scales, for instance) but to proceed as well as I can. Is improv a middle ground between editing and whimsy?

Sieberth:

You can't edit real time, only what's been recorded. Mistakes result from laziness or ignorance. Evolution and transformation evolve hand in hand, not as mistakes but as options for further consideration.

Sancton: As a writer, I'd say editing consists of cutting out deadwood passages, and replacing awkward words or phrases with more effective ones. That takes time, concentration and thought. You don't have time to do that when you're blowing a solo. Of course, you can work out a solo ahead of time and "edit" it to make it more effective. But that's not improvisation. It's more like composition.

Raeburn: I suppose the brain edits as it creates, since choices are involved. Sometimes those choices are limited by what a given musical instrument can or cannot do. Jazz musicians value improvisation for its own sake and as a means of connecting with sympathetic players to achieve surprising results (probably).

Powell:

Does improvisation lead to innovation?

Sieberth:

All innovation requires improvising.

Sancton:

It can.



Raeburn:
Sometimes but not always.

Powell:
Can improvisation be described as a jigsaw puzzle, wherein existing pieces are applied into a new context, although notes need not be spontaneous?

Sieberth:
Improvisation as a process is either rearranging the pieces of the puzzle, finding a new piece or finding a new puzzle.

Sancton:
Yes, that works as a metaphor.

Raeburn:
Should the writer seek to deploy that particular metaphor, he is free to do so.

Powell:
Is improvisation based on deceit?

Sieberth:
I've often thought that of acting. Deceit has a negative connotation, however. Let's just say that music and the other arts encourage the listener or viewer or reader to enjoy another reality, one not of their own making.

Sancton:
If you mean trying to fool someone, I'd say no. You're just trying to find a creative and original way to weave your notes around the structure of an existing tune.

Raeburn:
Only when drugs are involved.

Powell:
Do you believe musicians should have to prove themselves through improv? Or that jam bands, for example, are too improvisatory to deserve respect?

Sieberth:
There is nothing to prove.



*Improvisation...and...all that Jazz was a special event of the Faulkner Society's annual **Words & Music** festival November 20-23, 2014. The discussion featured three oldies but goodies of the music world, along with four talented young jazz musicians on the make, all students at Tulane University and University of New Orleans. Shown here, left to right, are Lawrence Sieberth, Telly winning music producer and pianist; Bruce Raeburn, Ph.D., curator of special collections at Tulane University and drummer; Ben Russell, drummer and Tulane student; Phil Sylve, UNO student and Trombonist; Tom Sancton, journalist, author, bandleader, and clarinetist; Sam Weil, Tulane student and bass player; and Aurelien Barnes, Tulane student and trumpet player. The group discussed how improv works in jazz and life and then played together demonstrating how musicians who have never played together before can seize the musical moment and create great entertainment for themselves and their audience.*



Sancton:

I don't see music as a competitive exercise in which one must prove oneself. If a player's improvisations are respected by other musicians, that's great. But music is not a contact sport with winners and losers. I prefer to see it as a collective creation in which all the players support one another with the objective of making the whole band sound good.

Raeburn:

No and no.

Powell:

Do you improve on a scale, or out of it, or between scales? Do you think about scales? If so, then what?

Sieberth:

I prefer to think about note sets. Scales imply a beginning and end as well as a linearity. Being brought up in the Euro-American tradition I practiced scales and understand the theoretical implications in the diatonic system.

Sancton: I don't specifically think about scales when I play. I practice lots of scales and I suppose I have assimilated them and instinctively understand the relationships between notes, what fits what chord and what doesn't. But I don't specifically think about this or that scale when I play. I just play. However, more modern jazz musicians, starting with the be-boppers, often do rely heavily on scales in constructing their solos.

Raeburn:

I'm a drummer--such thoughts are beyond me.



*Alessandro Powell, a senior English major at Tulane University, has interned with the Faulkner Society and **The Double Dealer** for two years. He also has stories in this issue on Dinaw Mengestu's book, **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears**, in the BIG READ Section, and on Luis Alberto Urrea in the Pan American Connections section of this issue. His work also appears in the 2013 edition of *The Double Dealer*.*

"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent."

-Victor Hugo



THE TENNESSEE WILLIAMS THEATRE COMPANY

There's a new theatre company in town, and their mission is to stage Tennessee Williams plays exclusively. The Tennessee Williams Theatre Company was founded by Augustin J. Correro and Nick Shackelford, two Williams devotees who recently moved to New Orleans. The company's first production, *Kingdom of Earth*, was staged this summer. It was a truly haunting performance, particularly as it was timed to coincide with the ten-year anniversary of Katrina. The next production will be *Small Craft Warnings*, scheduled for December. One of the troupe's goals is to stage lesser-known Williams works from the later decades of his life, after his commercial success had fallen mostly by the wayside. New Orleans was the city where Williams always felt he belonged, and it is fitting that it is now home to a company devoted to widening the range of Williams' work being performed. For more information, visit twtheatrenola.com.





DRAMA



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

She wasn't crying because of the life she led: because, never having led any other, she'd accepted that with her that was just the way things were. But I also think she was crying because, through the music, she might have guessed there were other ways of feeling.
—Clarice Lispector



"IT'S JUST FUCKIN'

 *THERE!* 

LESSONS IN THE IMPROVISOR'S ART FROM THE LEGENDARY DEL CLOSE

By Alexandra Cichon, Ph.D.

It's just fuckin' there is the phrase that Second City/ImprovOlympic improvisation genius Del Close would repeat in his slightly manic rants to rouse the group of us—actors, not improvisers—out of our “script-bound” mind-set into the free-form parallel universe of the scene that was “just fuckin’ *there*” to be “stepped into,” he insisted.

The actor simply had to trust in the coordinates to these parallel realities—*Who* (the character is), *What* (situation they find themselves *in*), and *Where* (*beyond the stage*, the scene unfolds)—all to be accomplished in the first three utterances and physical acts exchanged between two improvisers, and to follow Close’s prime directive:

Fall, then figure out what to do on the way down.

As we descended into Alice’s rabbit hole, he added from the wings, “Play it at the top of your intelligence. . . . The only real mistake here is ignoring the inner voice.” There’s nothing like imminent crash and burn (if only of the performer’s ego) to relativize the power of the rational mind; as firewalker Edwene Gaines taught, from a slightly different vantage point, “fear is a membrane.”

Del Close’s riff was a gift, for this improvisatorial lesson was no less than a challenge to recognize (as expressed in Carl Jung’s rather more sedate language) the psychophysical background world of the *Unus Mundus* (One World), the imperishable “whole” to which we are indissolubly linked, as it “irrupts into this more transitory one” in experiences Jung called “the only moments of my life worth re-telling.” These moments cannot be willed but are “just fuckin’ *there*,” to use Close’s pithy phrase, when we wake up to the erotic dance of interpenetrating fields of energies revealed in moments of synchronicity (the acausal principle of connection based in the interpenetration of time, space, matter, and psyche).

Such parallel realities were mapped within the depth psychological tradition by Henri Corbin, scholar of Islamic philosophy and Sufi mysticism, who insisted

on the ontological reality of the imaginal as a *place to which individuals may go*: “an intermediate world, a world of idea-images, of archetypal figures, of subtle substances, of ‘immaterial matter,’ . . . the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories *appear* in their true reality.” Though not overtly perceptible to the five senses, and outside of ordinary time and space, this imaginal world is as real as the world of waking consciousness which constitutes collective consensual reality. The improviser’s mandate is thus kindred to mythologist Joseph Campbell’s infamous directives:

When you follow your bliss, . . . doors will open where you would not have thought there would be doors, and where there wouldn't be a door for anyone else. . . . If you are falling, . . . dive.”

Close goaded us to “follow the fear” into the work, undaunted. We knew that he knew whereof he spoke, and he knew we knew it. Infamous for a hard-living, heavy-drugging past, in one notorious incident, he was with John Belushi, who called him “my biggest influence in comedy,” the night Belushi died of a heroin overdose. Close then stopped his years-long heroin use in homage, he said, to Belushi. Colorful past aside, Close’s career is a history of the evolution of theatrical improvisation: with Elaine May and Mike Nichols in the **Compass Players**, as director of San Francisco’s legendary improvisation troupe **The Committee**, as director of **Second City**, and tagged as **Saturday Night Live’s** “resident metaphysician.” Yet he maintained his ties to so-called “legitimate” theatre. Having won a Joseph Jefferson Award for his performance of *Polonius* in **Hamlet**, he bequeathed his skull to Chicago’s Goodman Theatre that he might, in death, play *Yorick*.

Following our own compulsions down rabbit holes, invisible (trap) doors, and membranes of fear in our lives, we are forced to “improvise,” while the ego—archetypally cast in the Heroic mode, ever seeking to maintain control—is “made, unmade, and remade” (Jungian revisionist Susan Rowland’s phrase) by the superior but unknowable forces of the unconscious.



Rowland noted that Jung's conception of the unconscious—his pivotal contribution to psychology—refers not only to personal mental contents unavailable to the ego but also to an autonomous, objective psychic realm with its own laws and functions, seat of meaning, feeling, and value. As Jung said, "the collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution born anew in the brain structure of every individual."

The unconscious is thus not entirely separate from the body; its locus is the intermediate realm in the duality of body and spirit. Jung called this dance (of the ego's un-remaking) *individuation*, a process of becoming, rather than a state of being, and an initiatory ordeal characterized by descent and renewal. This process has a marked affinity to writer James Gleick's description of the unlimited possibilities and "twisted changeability" of the nonlinear systems of chaos theory. Individuation, too, is like entering a maze in which the walls rearrange themselves with every step forward. Underlying patterns of order may be difficult to perceive, yet chaos is now seen by science as the study of irregularity; as with contemporary computers' capability to analyze previously impossible amounts of data, patterns emerge.

Chaos theory holds that if you can visualize the shape, you can understand the system, just as theatrical improvisers shape limitless random potentials through the portal *Who, What, and Where*.

Close's long-form improvisation technique, the *Harold*, was born in the 1960s, out of necessity, said Close, "as a way to get all of the performers in The Committee all on stage at the same time, all improvising together . . . I wanted to do a show where we could create *art by committee*." He explained:

What goes into Harold? Well, everything we know about improvisation, basically, reduced to three elements: monologues, scenes . . . and large improvisational games involving all the people who are on stage at the time. . . . We take this single [audience] suggestion like God, or laundry, or cardboard, and we're not going to do a long improvisation about God, or cardboard, we're going to use this suggestion to be inspired by. There'll be four improvisational games, nine scenes, in groups of three, and that is it, that's Harold.

As for the iconic name, in the 60s Beatles' film **A Hard Day's Night**, a reporter asked George Harrison what he called his haircut. "Arthur," he infamously responded. When Close asked his group what this evolving, long-form improvisation might be called, one of his actors quipped "Harold," and the name stuck. Close claimed the chaos inherent in performing his long-form improvisation technique, postulated that the *Harold*, is "like building a 747 mid-flight." The only rule "is that there are no rules," he liked to say, but in his rants and post mortem performance notes,

he articulated (and his partner Charna Halpern later recorded) fundamental precepts—trust, support, acceptance—as "givens" of the art form. Like the physicist's "laws," immutable until proven otherwise in his ongoing creative process which former students, like the inimitable Bill Murray have called "the most important group work since they built the pyramids," and while another former student, Mike Meyers has described the Del Close process as "the Zen approach to comedy." Close, having set out in the 1960s to prove it was possible to create "art by committee," evolved the long-form technique with Halpern at a time when nearly all improvisation focused on creating single scenes. One anonymous writer has proclaimed that "Going to this from conventional sketches was like going from arithmetic to calculus."

Following Close's improvisation principle of *agreement*, known as "Yes, . . . and," the improviser accepts and adds to the other's "initiation" of character, relationship, place, idea; each improviser's prime responsibility is to *support*. *The Harold* has been compared to a sonata form. Beginning with a one-word audience suggestion, *The Harold* combines *monologues* (psychologically, the ego's narrative voice), *games* involving everyone on-stage at the time (e.g. the *Time Dash*—a three-part game, where the created situation is carried out across a span of time), and *scenes*, which Close said are "never about the words being spoken." Themes emerge, with characters, phrases, and images reappearing and playing off one another in deepening comedic counterpoint. Scenes, commented Close:

. . . begin to interrelate, to be affected by each other, to mirror one another, to rhyme with each other in some sort of mad conceptual way. . . . We blend it all together into some sort of extravagant musical finale. . . . And what the audience laughs at, and indeed will cheer at . . . are these moments of discovery, moments of connection where the group brain really does start functioning.

With *The Harold*, "we're not eliminating short-form [improvisation]," said Close, "just creating a meta-game that ate the short-form games." Halpern reflected on its continual evolution: "It gets out of control. You follow it. It leads you. . . . *The Harold* is still based on remembering everything and wasting nothing while weaving together unrelated scenes that soon come to be a non-linear story." Close queried, "Is what we're doing comedy? Probably not. Is it funny? Probably yes. Where do the really best laughs come from? Terrific connections made intellectually, or terrific revelations made emotionally."

Though my focus here has been comedic improvisation, whose roots go back to and beyond Italian Renaissance *Commedia dell' Arte*, theatrical improvisation is not confined to comedy. Improvisation is a widely used rehearsal technique/



adjunct to scripted drama, a method of generating material later scripted, and, more rarely, a theatrical format in its own right. Like the revolutionary work of Jacob Moreno's Viennese Theatre of Spontaneity in the 1920s—which spawned psychodrama, sociodrama, and the "Living Newspaper," a precursor of topical sketch comedy—improvisation is powerful, cathartic, sometimes therapeutic, not *necessarily* funny, not funny by intent, yet its comedic and dramatic forms, like iconic the comedy/tragedy masks, are inescapably linked. Close's *a priori* assumption was "*truth is funny.*" As physicist Niels Bohr said, "Some things are so serious they can only be joked about."

Close embraced the sadism and masochism inherent in an art form that involves hurling oneself into the unknown as spectator "sport" but also chided us, "You may *not* use this process to feel bad about yourself," what with the ineffable being so elusive and the ante being inescapably upped by the presence of an audience, the "hit" of danger, judgment, being laughed at, potential humiliation.

Still, it *is* comedy. Yet Close warned of the *seduction* of the audience and being "deluded by the audience, because they laugh." He cautioned, "Don't let them make you buy the lie that what you're doing is for the laughter." Reckoning with the scientific breakthroughs of quantum physics and chaos theory, we are forced to acknowledge, within our ways of knowing, that the constitution of any atomic object can only be understood in terms of its interaction with the human observer. As for the implications for performers, the improviser's *conscious* fear may be of humiliating failure witnessed by an audience. Yet, playwright Tom Stoppard cut to the heart of the matter, in this scene, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—sole witnesses to the performance of a troupe of Tragedian/Improvisers—abandon the performers under cover of darkness and are confronted by the *Player*:

You left us. . . . We can't look each other in the face! You don't understand the humiliation of it—to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable—that somebody is watching. . . . Don't you see? We're actors—we're the opposite of people! . . . We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade, that someone would be watching. And then, gradually, no one was. We were caught, high and dry.

The theatrical game requires audience. Stoppard's meta-game (in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern violate that implicit contract) echoes humanist Erich Fromm's "truth"—that overcoming separateness, "the prison of . . . aloneness," is humans' "deepest need," and the "*absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity.*" As are psyche and matter, *we* are indissolubly linked. The Cartesian split between the *I* and the world, or the *other*, or between observer and observed no longer holds at subatomic levels, whether the other is

conceived as a fellow performer-collaborator, a full-house in the theatre, or the unseen intended audience of a manuscript written in solitude ("Dear Reader" as the Victorians wrote, and Daniel Defoe's variant "Vicious Reader").

Breakthroughs of quantum physics/chaos theory force upon us new realizations of the subtle realities of interconnectivity, of co-creation in life as in art, which can be maddening for the order-and-control-seeking rational mind. "For Madmen Only," wrote Hermann Hesse of entry into his *Magic Theatre*: "Price of Admittance Your Mind." Theatre visionary Viola Spolin advised, "Shut off the rational mind. When the rational mind is shut off, we have the possibility of intuition." For what Close attempted to browbeat us into was the simple radical act of trusting our intuition, knowing that once improvisers truly begin to trust and to follow their own inner voice, they can begin to trust the inner voices of their fellow players. Close said that when the improviser "puts his own ego out of the way, he stops judging the ideas of others—instead, he considers them brilliant." Only then does the improviser follow those ideas like Alice following the White Rabbit into Wonderland; for if we regard each other, he said, "as if we are geniuses, poets, and artists, we have a better chance of becoming that on-stage." Close goaded improvisers toward a creative leap of faith founded not on the verbal swordplay of egos competing for the biggest laughs but in a creative, erotic alliance, forged in the unseen possibilities of the evanescent moment. His directive to "play at the top of your intelligence" a call to surrender ego and rationality to the greater whole in a free-fall no less fun, or less funny, than the best set-up punch-line.

Close's edicts regarding improvisation are fitting, if strange, bedfellows to radical Jungian Veronica Goodchild's sketch, from the domain of depth psychology, of the shifting archetypes of our emerging collective worldview, anchored in Jung's concept of *synchronicity* and in quantum physics. Goodchild identified the coordinates of this emerging reality, built on our current foundation in rational consciousness, first, as the reuniting of psyche and matter as *Unus Mundus*, or One World—the felt sense recognition of the physical and psychic as, in Jung's words, an "indissoluble unity." In the discoveries of the new physics, Goodchild noted the eroding of the conventional Cartesian boundaries of time and space, allowing for a new paradigm in which one is no longer a detached observer behind the glass, a position the new physics has shown to be an illusion, nor limited by ordinary time and place but rather a participator in science, life, and art and thus a participator in creation, moving between permeable realities. In this act of co-creation, the individual seizes the *kairos*, the right or propitious moment, embracing *creatio continua*, the continuous act of creation, in life as in art, born of the individual's on-going reciprocity with the *Unus Mundus*, or in physicist David Bohm's words, the



Implicate Order.

This radical act of co-creation is embodied by the improviser—with ego *checked* by the stress of the “free falling moment” before spectators, sans script—who leans into the moment, channeling the collective unconscious flow between fellow performers and witness/participants. The one-word *audience suggestion* of *The Harold*, akin to the flap of the butterfly’s wings in chaos theory, signals the audience’s unexpected impact on the whole. In chaos theory, said Gleick, “only half-jokingly known as the Butterfly Effect, is the notion that a butterfly stirring the air today in Peking can transform storm systems next month in New York.”

The final coordinate underpinning all other changes in this shifting worldview, said Goodchild, is the eruption of Eros awareness, which awakens a sense of oneness without diminishing individual differentiation. Long witnessed in the improvisers’ art in theatre, literature, and music, such acts of imagination, Goodchild wrote, can erode “the barriers between the seen and unseen worlds to arrive at the mysteries of the unitary background world, a third domain comprised of a subtle psychophysical reality and its inhabitants,” which Close would say is “just fuckin’ *there*.”

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*Alexandra Cichon, Ph.D.—wounded healer, researcher, actor, and psycho dramatist—received her doctorate in clinical psychology within the tradition of depth psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in California. As an actor, she is the recipient of the Oxford University Dramatic Society’s Best Actress Award for a performance piece she conceived and directed for ensemble on the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Ereshkigal. She also received the Joseph Jefferson Award for Performance. Among her interests in improvisation, she has directed (jointly with the playwright) and performed in the English premiere of **Commedia** at the Oxford University Playhouse (a work in the improvisatorial Commedia dell’Arte tradition); she clinically directs psychodrama, founded in Jacob Moreno’s Viennese Theatre of Spontaneity; and she currently explores the interface of ritual and theatre within Goddess spirituality as a member of the Priestess of Avalon training in Glastonbury, England.*



BELLOW ON FAULKNER

 IMPROVING 

OUR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

Saul Bellow, in his recently published nonfiction collection, **There is Simply Too Much to Think About**, tells an amusing William Faulkner anecdote. In an effort to improve our relations with other nations, President Eisenhower formed a People to People group of novelists and poets. He named William Faulkner the chairman, and Bellow was one of the many members. At the initial meeting, Faulkner made the following recommendation to his fellow writers for consideration:

- All U.S. passports should be revoked, preventing citizens from traveling to and touring foreign countries, and
- Invite people from behind the Iron Curtain to come live and work in our small towns, play baseball and eat fried chicken and ice cream on Sunday afternoons. When they return, they will tell everyone at home about their time here.

All were stunned mute. Finally, someone broke the embarrassing silence, asking, “Don’t you think, Mr. Faulkner, that people behind the Iron Curtain are already aware of the differences between our countries?”

Faulkner quickly replied, “Sir, knowing is one thing, and experiencing quite another.”

-Joe DeSalvo, owner, Faulkner House Books



☞ FAULKNER & FRIENDS ☜



*Photo by New Orleans photographer **Richard Sexton**, who did a pilgrimage to Oxford, MS this summer to pay his respects to Nobel Laureate William Faulkner. Sexton is author of the new book, **Creole World** and was a member of the 2014 faculty for **Words & Music, a Literary Feast in New Orleans** with other well known photographers discussing improvisation in the art of photography. He is co-author of the popular style book, **Elegance and Decadence**. His new book, **Creole World**, is a treasure for anyone's library, a great gift for the collector of fine photography. Faulkner House Books has signed copies available. To reserve yours, call (504) 524-2940 with credit card info or e-mail faulkhouse@aol.com*



WILLIAM SPRATLING, WILLIAM FAULKNER AND OTHER FAMOUS CREOLES



By *W. Kenneth Holditch*

WHEN WILLIAM SPRATLING first arrived in New Orleans in 1921 or 1922 (the date varies depending on whose account you read), he became a pioneer in the resettlement of the French Quarter, which in the late 19th century had deteriorated. Except for a few isolated pockets of preservation, the area was little more than a slum, albeit a romantic one, when the young artist moved there from Alabama. There, he had completed his studies in architecture at Auburn and worked for a while as a draughtsman in Birmingham. A native of New York state, he had come South as a child to live with his grandfather in Alabama following the death of his parents. When he moved to New Orleans it was to take a position as instructor of architecture at Tulane University.

In 1927, reporter Frederick Oeschner (later to appear in *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles*, the collection of Spratling's caricatures for which William Faulkner provided the text¹) wrote that Spratling was "one of the oldest inhabitants of the Vieux Carré in point of duration of residents," since his 624 Orleans Alley (later renamed Pirate's Alley) apartment "was a settled nook before some of the places now considered established had crept from the dust of their long sleep." The seven-by-thirteen block Frenchtown became a home for hundreds of artists, writers, and musicians, drawn there by the Bohemian atmosphere and attitudes, its low-rent apartments in beautiful buildings, its wonderful food and liquor that flowed fairly freely, despite the constraints of Prohibition that had dried up much of the rest of the country. Within that small Bohemian enclave, they created a world of their own, for, as another reporter asserted at the time, "There is something about the French Quarter that makes the whole world kin." Some of them began to restore old, long-neglected buildings, or, at least, to refurbish their own apartments or rooms into work and living spaces. Lyle Saxon, a member of the French Quarter circle of writers, wrote in his *What's Doing* column in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* for October 25, 1925, that "Artists in the Vieux Carré are like homing pigeons. They come sailing back from the far corners of the earth when the leaves begin to fall in Jackson Square."

Spratling's second-floor apartment was in a building facing the garden of St. Louis Cathedral, the same

building that now houses Faulkner House Books. The owner of the building was Natalie Scott, another "Famous Creole," whom Spratling credited with having "integrated" him into life in the Quarter. In the Pirate's Alley apartment, Spratling employed a woman named Leonore, soon rechristened "Eleanora" by William Faulkner, to wash clothes and to prepare for him and his many guests such as New Orleans specialties, he recalled four decades later, as "shrimp poulette, soft-shell crabs and a very fine gumbo." She cleaned his apartment as well as the rooms downstairs, which were later shared by William Faulkner and Louis Piper, who worked for a local newspaper. Oliver LaFarge, a professor at Tulane, "Famous Creole," and later a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, also shared cooking expenses and dined with them there.

By the time Faulkner settled into the Quarter, Spratling was well established as a mover and shaker of the artistic and social life there, drawing to himself a wide variety of people, not only the Quarter Bohemians but also academics such as Franz Blom, the distinguished anthropologist, who was at the time a professor at Tulane. Although he was three years older than Spratling, William Faulkner seems to have looked up to the artist, praising him in *Out of Nazareth*, included in the *New Orleans Sketches*, as one "whose hand has been shaped to a brush as mine has (alas!) not."

Spratling, who was tall, slender, and dark, with sharp features, a somewhat stern visage, and a "twinkling sidewise turn" to his large brown eyes, seems to have possessed a strong magnetism. Elizabeth Anderson, who was struck by the "thrust-jawed angularity" of his face, wrote of seeing him in a favorite French Quarter bar, Max in the Alley, wearing a seersucker suit and standing out from his similarly clad companions, "looking as slight and dark as a Mexican, with his jutting jaw and eyes that squinted half defiantly at the world." Gordon, the sculptor in Faulkner's *Mosquitoes*, who is based on Spratling, is described as having an "intolerant hawk's face" that is "like bronze." Possessed of a strong and slightly wicked sense of humor, by all accounts, he laughed a lot, as Elizabeth Anderson recalled, with "a slow, quiet, chuckling ripple." He was variously described as "very warm" on the one hand, and eccentric and taciturn on the other. That reputation for crankiness, according to Elizabeth



Anderson, “was only half earned,” although she did acknowledge that he was “persistent, even stubborn, when he got an idea in his head”; he “hated having his schedule disrupted,” and “was always arranging people’s lives with the very best of intentions, though not always the best of results.” Often he was unconventional and daring, as when, “Out of sheer bravado,” a *New Orleans Picayune* reporter, Jack Gihon, wrote in his review of a 1924 exhibit at the Arts and Crafts Club on Royal Street, the artist included “a glaring nude.”

Spratling loved parties, cigarettes, and liquor – Elizabeth Anderson recalled that for him, mixing and serving drinks was “a ceremony,” the details of which must be “fastidiously observed.” He loved animals, and would later keep deer and cats on his ranch outside Taxco. While living in Pirate’s Alley, he adopted a yellow kitten and named her Jobena, but he found her to be so ill-tempered that he put her in a basket and left her in front of the courthouse. He loved as well to shock people, to allow them to wonder about his private life, and, Elizabeth remembered, had absolutely no religion at all. Despite his social schedule, however, he was described as “the most indefatigable worker, quite simply absorbed in his work.”

Much of the above would seem to belie that assertion made by Frederick Karl in his Faulkner biography that Spratling was “socially an outsider,” hardly the case given the fact that his grandfather had been a Confederate veteran and owned a plantation in Alabama. Several friends wrote of “Southern” qualities in Spratling’s character, one noting his “excellent feeling for the table, which was probably a part of his Southern inheritance.” Robert David Duncan, in his *Afterword* to the 1966 edition of **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles**, reported that Spratling had “very nearly the same voice and delivery” as Faulkner. In short, he seems to have been in many ways an archetypal Southern gentleman, as that term was understood at the time. If he was “outside” New Orleans society, it was only because all those not from the city are forever excluded from that small and tightly knit circle of Uptown “carnival aristocrats” and because he chose to live in the French Quarter, a raffish place then as now in the eyes of very proper natives of the city.

Frederick Karl may, of course, have believed Spratling’s homosexuality made him an “outsider,” but that, in and of itself, has never been sufficient cause in New Orleans to exclude one socially. “New Orleanians,” an old saying goes, “don’t care what you do. They want to know about it, but they don’t care.” Residents speak jokingly of what is termed an “Uptown marriage,” a not-uncommon union in which a gay man, born into New Orleans society, marries an appropriate debutante from his own class and fathers children by her but keeps an apartment in the Quarter for liaisons with male companions.

Whatever his sexual proclivities, Spratling was

anything but an outsider in the French Quarter. In his newspaper column, Lyle Saxon reported on a party at Spratling’s apartment in the mid-1920s as being “of the unique kind which only the French Quarter at its best can produce.” The guests included Sherwood Anderson, his wife Elizabeth, novelist Hamilton Basso, playwright Flo Field, and, one would like to believe, although Saxon does not mention him, William Faulkner. From the second-story window, Saxon could see “a line of the cathedral visible across the quiet space of the alley; a feathery edge of trees with starlight flickering through.” Inside he found “a pleasant harmony of things chosen with discriminating taste; the bright color of a long oblong cloth woven in Egyptian design over the mantel” and decorating the walls “a grateful weaving of lines which played with interesting blues,” the “somewhat subdued richness of a Paisley,” and one of Spratling’s sketches of Venice “catching the spirit of the place, with unerring ease; a Piranese of bold outlines. And the glass in the hand! What could offer a more perfect evening?”

On March 4, 1925, Faulkner moved into Natalie Scott’s building in Pirate’s Alley, sharing with Louis Piper the three rooms and a small courtyard on the ground floor and using the bathroom upstairs in Spratling’s apartment. The view described above by Lyle Saxon delighted Faulkner, and in a letter to his mother dated March 5, 1925, he pronounced the apartment “the best spot in New Orleans in which to live.” The author from North Mississippi knew virtually nothing from personal experience about Roman Catholics, and in letters to his mother related in detail their goings and comings from cathedral and priest house and nunnery. He reported that Spratling was friends with several of the priests. The cakes that his mother sent regularly to her son he shared with friends, and Spratling seems to have been particularly appreciative of Miss Maud’s culinary skills. It was in this apartment, according to Faulkner, that he first met Helen Baird, whom he described in a letter as “a sullen-jawed yellow-eyed belligerent humorless gal in a linen dress and sunburned bare legs sitting on Spratling’s balcony.” That “humorless gal” was, of course, to become one of the great loves – perhaps the great love – of the novelist’s life.

The young Louis Piper, a native of Illinois, soon developed the “strangest kind of admiration” for Faulkner. When Faulkner completed the manuscript of **Soldiers’ Pay** on May 12, 1925, Piper and a friend agreed to help him type it: “I am drafting every man woman and child who can use a typewriter into service,” Faulkner wrote to Miss Maud. Piper was later to benefit materially for assisting the man he very much admired.

On July 7, 1925, four months after moving into 624 Pirate’s Alley, Faulkner sailed for Europe with Spratling, while Piper, presumably, remained in the apartment. On Spratling’s return from the trip, his second-floor apartment seems no longer to have been



available, for he rented a low-ceilinged attic space around the corner on St. Peter Street in a house being leased by Marc Antony and his wife Lucille, two more “Famous Creoles.”

In 1926, Faulkner returned to the city and moved in with Spratling again, although he was also spending considerable time on the Gulf Coast. It was in this fourth-floor apartment where the two of them collaborated on **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles**, while Spratling also worked on a book called **Little Mexico**, and Faulkner directed his attention to **Mosquitoes** and other fiction projects. They did not spend all their time in creative labor, however, for it was also from this apartment that they used an air rifle to shoot out windows of an abandoned building across the street and at people passing in the street below, aiming so as merely to sting them, not to injure. Robert Anderson, the novelist’s teenaged son, was so fond of being with the two men that he became something of a pest, visiting their apartment at all hours, until Spratling and Faulkner stripped him, painted his penis green – or blue, depending on the account – and pushed him out into Cabildo Alley to fend for himself. It was also here at a party that novelist Oliver LaFarge and a group of the younger artists and writers, after drinking from the Venetian crystal Spratling had borrowed from Lucille Antony, tossed it into the alley below. Genevieve Pitot, another of the “Famous Creoles,” told me what she remembered most about the St. Peter street attic was that it was so hot for so much of the year that she wondered how the two Bills ever survived there. That heat may account for the fact that they and their guests were given to the foolhardy act of climbing onto the roof four floors above the street and scampering about on other roofs in the block.

A *Morning Tribune* report in 1927 by Frederick Oeschner, another of the “Famous Creoles,” described the St. Peter Street apartment as “a rendezvous for a small group of friends who admire without flattery, who criticize without unkindness, and who are themselves occupied in artistic and scientific pursuits.” During those halcyon years in the Vieux Carré, the circle of “Famous Creoles” gathered almost every evening somewhere, at the Andersons’ Pontalba apartment, at Roark and Mary Rose Bradford’s on Toulouse Street, at author Lyle Saxon’s, or at Spratling’s, to drink and talk and share their creative efforts. In his *Preface* to the 1966 edition of **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles**, Spratling recalled gathering with “grand or later to be grand people” not only for pleasure but also for “a constant stimulation of ideas.”

Their favorite drink, Spratling recalled, was a pitcher of Pernod, which he said was made in New Orleans, but since Pernod is a Swiss product, he surely meant Herbsaint, another absinthe-flavored liquor, which was and still is bottled here. Elizabeth Anderson recalled Spratling’s purchasing ten jugs of absinthe from a

bootlegger’s widow and sharing the bounty with all his friends. Another frequent libation was bathtub gin, produced by mixing illegally imported Cuban alcohol with bottled essence of juniper berry, the latter acquired, according to Genevieve Pitot, at Solari’s, a popular grocery and delicatessen at Royal and Iberville Streets. The mixture was then aerated by rolling barrels of it on the attic floor.

Late in 1926, Faulkner was back in Oxford, but Spratling was to remain in New Orleans until 1929, when he moved permanently to Taxco and began the silver business that would make him famous. The “Famous Creoles” that followed him there created their own “French Quarter in exile” in the Mexican town that became synonymous with the artist-architect. In discussion with Robert David Duncan, quoted in the *Afterword* to the 1966 edition of **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles**, Spratling would look back on the French Quarter in later years as “a wonderful scene” and describe his years there as “a very vivid epoch,” during which he was surrounded by people who were or would someday be famous. Spratling would return to New Orleans a few times, once in 1938, again in 1956, observing on the latter occasion that although the Quarter had not changed in appearance very much, “so many of my old friends have died or moved away” that walking through Pirate’s Alley, Jackson Square, and along St. Peter Street “made me feel a little sad. I feel like Rip Van Winkle.”

In Mexico, Spratling went deep into the hills to find an old man who knew the silver business and, with his expertise, created a new industry. A reporter in a Mexican magazine wrote that “the name Spratling, when applied to silver or woven articles, has the same connotation as the word Lalique when speaking of glassware in Europe.” Another stated at the time of Spratling’s death that “his name and the name of Taxco are almost inseparable.” When this “Cellini of Taxco” died in an automobile accident on August 7, 1967, he was accorded an unprecedented state funeral attended by 20,000 people.

What of the other “Famous Creoles” and their associates? Louis Piper disappears from this story for more than half a century after 1925, but in 1979 he surfaced again under strange circumstances, when Robert A. Wilson, a bookseller on Fire Island, published a limited-edition booklet as his Christmas card. Wilson relates that one of his island neighbors, an elderly man named “Louie” Piper, inquired about the value of a Faulkner manuscript. Piper told Wilson that he and Faulkner had been roommates “after the war,” but when the novelist “decided to get married, we split up” and Faulkner gave Piper the manuscript of **Soldiers’ Pay**. Piper presented Wilson with a large box, “addressed to Faulkner with Phil Stone’s return address in the corner.” The carton contained approximately five hundred pages and included several holograph poems, the typescript of several short stories



and of the novel, as well as an alternate ending that has never been published. Piper, with the substantial sum he received for his treasure, was able to fulfill his long-time dream of retiring to Portugal, apparently to spend the rest of his life. His kindness in typing part of the first novel of the man he very much admired had been amply repaid.

Flo Field, "our Flo," as she is called in **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles**, remained in New Orleans and reared her son, Sidney, who had, she claimed, been fathered by O. Henry when he resided in the French Quarter. She died in her late nineties, still a local celebrity. Oliver LaFarge, a young Tulane professor of anthropology who was a member of the Spratling-Faulkner circle, went on to become an author and to win a Pulitzer Prize for his novel about the Navajos, **Laughing Boy**.

Genevieve Pitot, trained in Paris as a pianist, went to New York where she ultimately would write the dance music for some twenty-five musicals, including **Kiss Me Kate**, **Kismet**, and **L'il Abner**. She returned to New Orleans in the 1970s after, as she insisted scornfully, "**Hair** killed the Broadway musical." Natalie Vivian Scott followed Spratling to Mexico and remained there for much of her life, leaving to serve in the Red Cross during World War II (as she had done during World War I) and to aid in relief work in Korea, and winning numerous honors from several countries. In the 1930s, Lyle Saxon directed the WPA Writers Project, which created **The New Orleans City Guide** and the state guide to Louisiana. Saxon wrote several non-fiction works and a novel and remained in the city until his death in 1946, only a few weeks after he had done the first radio broadcast of Mardi Gras. Hamilton Basso became quite a popular novelist with such works as **The View from Pompey's Head** and **Sun in Capricorn**, but all of his books are unfortunately out of print today. Sherwood Anderson's most productive years were over by the time he came to New Orleans, but he continued to write until the time of his death. We all know, of course, what happened to William Faulkner.

All the "Famous Creoles" have gone on to their rewards now, and I hope there is some Bohemian niche in heaven or Elysium in which they are still carousing. Among them, it seems to me, none was more interesting and few as talented as William Spratling. Novelist Budd Schulberg, one of a multitude that made the pilgrimage to Taxco to meet him and share in his wisdom and charm, perhaps defines Spratling best in the following passage from his introduction to **File on Spratling**:

Author, Architect, Cartoonist, Silversmith, Merchant, Pioneer, Sailor, Aviator, Tropical Horticulturist, Expert on Medicinal Plants, Pre-Columbian Authority... Mexicologist... Renaissance Man.

An exploration of his career and life, along with

those of William Faulkner and others of the group, demonstrate more clearly than words can what remarkable times the 1920s in the old French Quarter truly were. 🌸

Endnotes

1 William Faulkner and William Spratling, **Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles (New Orleans: Pelican Bookshop Press, 1926; reprinted Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).**

2 William Spratling, **File on Spratling: An Autobiography (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), p.16**

3 William Faulkner, *Out of Nazareth*, **New Orleans Sketches**, ed. Carvel Collins (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 46

4 Elizabeth Anderson and Gerald R. Kelly, **Miss Elizabeth (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), p. 83**

5 William Faulkner, **Mosquitoes New York: Liveright, 1927), pp. 318-319**

6 Frederick Karl, **William Faulkner: American Writer (New York: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1987), p. 202.**

7 **Stark Young: A Life in Letters**, ed John Pilkington (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), pp. 604-605.

8 **Thinking of Home: William Faulkner's Letters to His Mother and Father 1918-1925**, ed. James G. Watson (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), p. 187

9 Joseph Blotner, **Faulkner: A Biography (2 vols.; New York: Random House, 1974), I, 419**

10 Robert A. Wilson, **Faulkner on Fire Island (New York: Privately Published, 1979)**

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W. Kenneth Holditch, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Literature and Writing at the University of New Orleans, is a co-founder of The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society and was one of the founders of the Tennessee Williams Festivals in New Orleans, Clarksdale, MS, and Columbus, MS. In 1974, he created the Literary Tour of the French Quarter and later a Tennessee Williams Walk. He has lectured on Tennessee Williams and other Southern authors in the United States and Europe and has appeared on BBC radio, NPR radio, and other media. His play about the women in Tennessee Williams's life and dramas was given a staged reading at Lincoln Center. Dr. Holditch has written numerous articles on Southern literature about such important authors as William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Lillian Hellman, Walker Percy, and Anne Rice. He edited *In Old New Orleans*, and is co-author with Richard Freeman Leavitt of *Tennessee Williams and the South*, both University Press of Mississippi releases. He is co-author with Marda Burton of *Galatoire's: Biography of a Bistro*, Hill Street Press; and co-editor with Mel Gussow of the two Library of America volumes devoted to the works of Tennessee Williams. His honors and awards include: Southern Fellowship, 1958-1960; Louisiana Teacher of the Year, 1985; Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, Lifetime Achievement Award, 2001; and The 2007 Tennessee Williams Award.



Recommended Reading

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: MAD PILGRIMAGE OF THE FLESH

By John Lahr, ISBN: 0393021246

784 pages, Hardcover

John Lahr's latest book, **Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh**, a biography of Tennessee Williams, follows Lahr's other ground-breaking theatre biographies to give intimate access to the mind of one of the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century. Williams's work ushered in – as Arthur Miller declared – “a revolution in American theatre.” Williams put his best self – and most of his life – into his plays: **The Glass Menagerie**, **A Streetcar Named Desire**, **The Rose Tattoo**, **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, **Sweet Bird of Youth**, **The Night of the Iguana** among many. The plays, later made into films, defined their times and also gave defining roles to many of the century's greatest players: Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski in *Street Car*, Laurette Taylor as Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, Maureen Stapleton and Eli Wallach as Serafina and Alvaro in *The Rose Tattoo*, and Geraldine Page as the Princess in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. This brilliantly written, deeply researched biography sheds a light on Williams's warring family, his lobotomized sister, his guilt, his plays, his turbulent homosexual life, his misreported death, even the shenanigans of his estate. In the sensational saga of Williams's rise and fall, Lahr captures not just the man's tempestuous public existence but also his thrilling backstage life where the director Elia Kazan, his agent Audrey Wood, Marlon Brando, Anna Magnani, Bette Davis, Maureen Stapleton, Diana Barrymore, Tallulah Bankhead, Eli Wallach, and Laurette Taylor have scintillating walk-on parts. **Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh** is a biography of the highest order: a book about the major American playwright of his time written by the major American drama critic of his time.



AN IMPROVISED LIFE



LYLE SAXON AND *THE CENTAUR PLAYS CROQUET*

By Nancy Dixon, Ph.D.

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, LYLE SAXON was a charming, likeable, yet troubled man.¹ Much like New Orleans grande dame, Mollie Moore Davis, he fictionalized his early years, painting a portrait of romantic plantation life growing up in rural Louisiana. But in fact, he was born in Bellingham, Washington, in 1891, to Hugh Allan and Katherine (Kitty) Chambers Saxon, a fact he seldom, if ever mentioned publically. Both Saxon biographers, Chance Harvey and James W. Thomas, set forth conflicting accounts of Saxon's birth, especially concerning his parents' marital status. Harvey discovered an Orleans Parish marriage license dated December 10, 1890; however, Thomas maintains that a marriage license does not guarantee a marriage, simply an intent to marry, and that the common belief at the time among their Baton Rouge friends, where they met while attending LSU, is that they were not married. Nonetheless, before the year was out, Katherine Saxon had returned to Baton Rouge with her son, and his father Hugh returned to Los Angeles where he pursued both writing and acting careers and where he remarried and remained until his death in the 1950s. Saxon never mentioned his father, and his mother, according to Harvey, was listed in the 1900-1906 Baton Rouge City Directory as "widow of Hugh A."²

Lyle Saxon was reared by his mother and her maiden sisters, Maude and Elizabeth Chambers, in his maternal grandfather's house in Baton Rouge. Not only did Saxon not come from a family of planters, but, indeed, his antecedents were shopkeepers. His grandfather, for instance, owned a bookstore in downtown Baton Rouge. Saxon attended Louisiana State University, but left just three credits shy of graduating, a fact he later omitted from his résumés.³ The reason for his early departure from LSU is a matter of debate. Harvey claims that he might have dropped out due to financial reasons; however, Rosan Jordan and Frank De Caro, in their essay, "*In This Folk-Lore Land: Race, Class, Identity, and Folklore Studies in Louisiana*," claim that he left due to a sex scandal involving Saxon and his best friend, George Favrot. The two were discovered drunk and dressed in women's clothing. Nevertheless following the pattern established with the plantation myth of his youth and

as a Louisiana boy, he added LSU, Class of 1912, to his resume.

Saxon seemed to drift for the next few years, working several odd jobs before settling down to journalism, first selling house paint in Mobile, Alabama, then teaching remedial English in Pensacola, FL, in a small school house accessible only by boat.⁴ However, by 1917, he began his journalism career in earnest as a cub reporter for the *Chicago Daily New*. The job might have suited him, but the freezing Chicago winters did not, so he returned to Louisiana in less than a year, partly due to his failing health. While in Chicago he underwent a physical examination for the draft but was rejected for having tuberculosis, a charge he denied.⁵ According to Thomas, he worked briefly as a reporter in Baton Rouge, but by 1918, he was reporting for the *New Orleans Item*.

Most critics agree that Saxon aspired not to be a journalist, but a fiction writer, like many of the famous writers with whom he became friends in New Orleans in the 1920s, including Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, Hamilton Basso, and John Steinbeck, who in 1943 was married in Saxon's Madison Street home.⁶ That degree of success and fame always eluded Saxon, and he is probably best known today for editing the WPA Federal Writing Project's 1938 **New Orleans City Guide**. However, that WPA guide was considered to be "the masterpiece of the whole series. . . a literary gem."⁷ Unfortunately, Saxon came to the WPA project late in his life, and it took a toll on his already failing health. His editorship also took time away from his fiction writing, which he lamented repeatedly in his nine years on the job, but it was a job, and Saxon needed the money. The same year that Saxon's **City Guide** appeared, so did the film, **The Buccaneer**, directed Cecil B. DeMille, and based on Saxon's nonfiction book, **Lafitte the Pirate**, giving Saxon some recognition on the national scale.⁸

When Saxon took on the *New Orleans City Guide*, he was writing his novel, *Children of Strangers*, and most of that book was written at Melrose Plantation up near Natchitoches, Louisiana, even though he was living in the French Quarter at the time. According to Harvey, Saxon met Cammie Garrett Henry, the



appears and their lives are forever changed.

Saxon cleverly creates a frame narrative in which six different narrators describe “The strange case of Mrs. John David Calander of Mimosa, Louisiana, and the fabulous monster which she kept as a pet, thereby causing great scandal in the community. A complete history of the unfortunate affair, taken down from sworn testimony of competent eye witnesses.”¹¹ The bulk of the story is told by the most dignified and reliable source, “*Matthew A. Fleming, M.A., Ph. D., Member of the American Association of Sciences and head of the Department of Ancient Languages at the University of Mimosa.*”¹² Surely it’s no accident that the good doctor is named Fleming, the same name of the Nobel Prize winning doctor who discovered penicillin, which of course revolutionized the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. The story is comprised of four main characters: John David Calander, his wife Ada, a centaur named Horace, and a white mare named Alice. The contrast between the utter seriousness of the deposition and the ridiculousness of the tale is a touch of brilliance on Saxon’s part, and his use of reportage to substantiate the fantastic tale that ensues seems almost ironic, especially in scenes like the one in which Ada and Horace attend the opera (*Faust*, naturally), as recounted by Miss Amélie Boudousquié, whom Ada met while honeymooning in New Orleans. Nonetheless, until Horace appears, we have little reason to suspect the esteemed doctor’s testimony.

Ada’s true origin, like Saxon’s, is rather pieced together up until her adoption by Mr. and Mrs. Alphonse Adams Weatherford of Mimosa. What Dr. Fleming does report is that as a child, she was known to have a “preference for moonlight” and to “talk constantly to unseen companions” and that she was seen “riding upon the back of a white goat, through glade and grove.” In preparing his deposition, the Dr. Fleming has in front of him Ada’s favorite copy of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and “upon the fly leaf, there is a creditable drawing of a Centaur, possessing a handsome man’s head with pointed beard and wild eyes.”¹³ The fourth of those being deposed, Miss Amélie Boudousquié, also recalls that when Ada and John spent their honeymoon in New Orleans during carnival season, “Among the nymphs, mermaids, satyrs and fauns of the Carnival land of make-believe, she [Ada] was radiantly happy.”¹⁴ We can see that these narrators are trying to establish that Ada is some sort of freak, but nothing prepares for the story that ensues once she and John return from the madness of the carnival season. In fact, Saxon’s ensuing story makes Mardi Gras look tame.

David Calander also hailed from Mimosa, and when they married, Ada was only 18, and David, 20 years her senior, but he was devoted to his wife until the time of his own death. When they returned from their honeymoon and settled into married life all seemed well, though “they lived, these two, in that lonely place, seeing few people and entertaining visitors but rarely.”

chatelaine of Melrose, at one of Grace King’s Friday literary salons in 1923, when he was writing his *Literature and Less* column for the *Times-Picayune*, the column which led to his being dubbed “Mr. New Orleans” by his adoring readers.⁹ Saxon would continue to visit Melrose for decades, and that is also where he completed the very strange yet fascinating story, *The Centaur Plays Croquet*. It is no accident that this story, like many of Saxon’s works of fiction, is set on a plantation, in this case located in fictional Mimosa, LA.

First published in the short story collection, **The American Caravan**, in 1927, *The Centaur Plays Croquet* is a wild and sexy story of a married woman swept off her feet by a handsome centaur. Saxon often wrote of the fantastic, and Harvey speculates that the inspiration for this short story is Edward J. Trelawny’s **Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron** (1858), a copy of which Saxon owned and annotated, especially noting that perhaps Byron was a satyr.¹⁰ Like Saxon, the protagonist, Ada is fatherless, and also like him, she is thrilled by Mardi Gras when she visits New Orleans on her honeymoon with her much older husband John Calander. Shortly after the couple’s return to Mimosa, however, the centaur, Horace



Ada did take up writing and managed to get her first poem, “The Were-Wolf,” naturally, published in *Harper’s Magazine* no less!¹⁵

Just two years after their wedding, Ada introduces a centaur named Horace into their house and their marriage, much to David’s chagrin, but he simply adores Ada too much to object, fearing he might lose her, and rightly so. From this point on, the story is hilarious, fantastic, and downright kinky. Naturally, Horace is a vegetarian, so David orders the cook to prepare only vegetarian meals, as Horace now joins them at the dinner table often wearing David’s dress shirts. The other meals Ada and Horace eat away from the house, where they spend most of the day enjoying their picnics and, apparently, their sexual relationship. Ada will no longer let David come near her and is instead off into the woods all day with Horace, returning at twilight when “she rode upon his back, sitting sideways, her arm around her neck.” David is crushed by this scene, but rather than risk losing Ada, he abides this freaky threesome, until the gorgeous white mare, Alice appears, then Horace abandons Ada instantly following what Saxon calls “the true nature of the beast.”¹⁶ In the end, Ada, jealous beyond repair, poisons the white mare, Alice, runs off with Horace, who dies a year and a half later, and David blows his brains out. My goodness what a story!

The story’s title is supposedly taken from the title of one of Ada’s prose poems that she wrote to Horace at the beginning of their courtship. The sexual symbolism in the first stanza is undeniable, with the “colored balls . . . like painted flowers” that must move through the wickets, while Horace stands swaying his tail while “holding the mallet poised” and Ada lifts her skirt to strike the ball “with an affected scream of excitement . . . for fear of splitting [her] polonaise of striped silk.” But in the second stanza goes beyond sexual symbolism into utter sensual-sexual abandon, soft porn, even:

*Your body, tamed by the sun, is like creamy ivory, and the texture of your flesh has the humid quality of a magnolia petal. You stand before me, my simple, sinewy fellow, with shoulders drooping—shoulders strong and hairless like those of the men of Castile. Your black curls shine sleekly; your teeth are of snowy whiteness and your lips are vivid beneath your beard. At the loins, where your man’s body melts into that of the stallion, you become wholly animal; there your hide has the sheen of stain and is mottled like moonlight under trees.*¹⁷

Saxon even has Dr. Fleming excited enough about this poem to include it in its entirety in his deposition.

Saxon often pushed racial boundaries in his fiction, as he did in his most well known short story, *Cane River*, but here he is pushing the envelope of propriety and sexual boundaries, as he did in his personal life. The French Quarter has long been known for its

tolerance concerning sexuality and many of Saxon’s rather famous friends were also homosexuals: William Spratling and Stark Young, for example. However, this was the early 20th century, a rather intolerant time, and this story was outside the limits of propriety in many of the social circles

in which Saxon circulated in his day.

Much like his heroine, Ada, Saxon remained lonely and unfulfilled, leading to a sense of alienation and real depression, which he tried to relieve with alcohol. He was thrilled that this story was selected for publication by the editors of *The American Caravan*, but his literary success remained elusive. By the end of his life, “Mr. New Orleans” joked that he was “internationally famous locally,”¹⁸ a fact that was unfortunately true. Saxon’s last public appearance was during Mardi Gras, which he so loved. He delivered a live broadcast of the Rex Parade from the balcony of St. Charles Hotel where he spent the last decade of his life and where Ada and David spent their honeymoon, of course. 🌸

Endnotes

1 For more on Lyle Saxon, and from where much of this biographical information comes, see Chance Harvey, *The Life and Selected Letters of Lyle Saxon (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 2003)*, and James W.

Thomas, *Lyle Saxon: A Critical Biography (Birmingham: Summa, 1991)*.

2 Harvey, 28.

3 *Ibid.*, 39.

4 Harvey, 43.

5 *Ibid.*, 45.

6 Jordan and DeCaro, 48.

7 Lawrence N. Powell, Introduction, *New Orleans City Guide, 1938 (Washington D.C.: Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1938)*, 1A-7A.

8 James W. Thomas, “Lyle Saxon.” *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, edited by David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010–. Article published May 20, 2011. <http://www.knowla.org/entry/513/>.

9 Harvey, 80–81.

10 *Ibid.*, 93.

11 The version of the story quoted here is found in Nancy Dixon’s *N.O. Lit: 200 Years of New Orleans Literature (New Orleans: Lavender Ink, 2013)* 339–352.

12 Saxon, 339.

13 Saxon, 340.

14 *Ibid.*, 341.

15 *Ibid.*, 340–41.

16 *Ibid.*, 343.

17 *Ibid.*, 342.

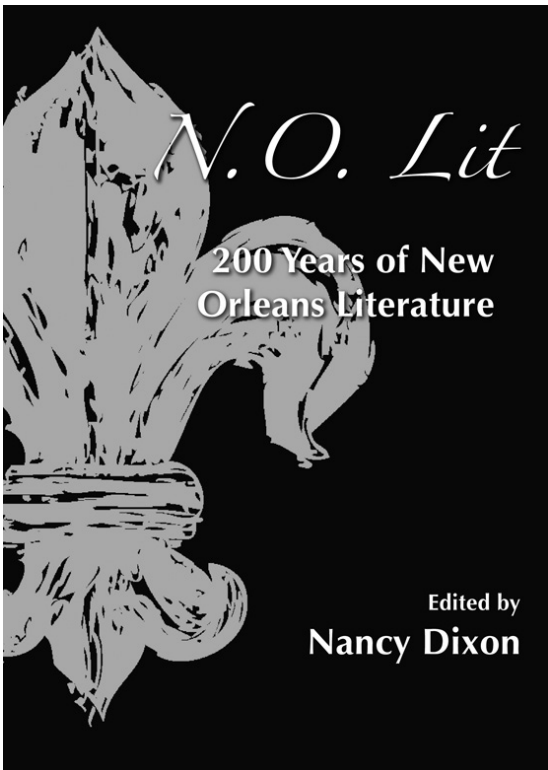
18 Thomas, ix.



*Nancy Dixon is a longtime scholar of Louisiana Literature. Dr. Dixon's book, **Fortune and Misery, Sallie Rhett Roman of New Orleans**, won the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) Book Award in 2000. Since then she has published articles on Louisiana writers in **Louisiana Literature** and the anthology **Songs of the Reconstructing South**. She has an upcoming article, **Armand Lanusse, Les Cenelles, and the Censorship Laws of 1830**, in the anthology, **Turning Points and Transformations: Essays on Language, Literature and Culture** to be published in 2011 by Cambridge Scholars Press. Nancy received a Publication Initiatives grant from LEH for her current project, **NO Lit: An Anthology of New Orleans Literature from 1803 to Post-Katrina**, published in 2013 by Lavender Ink Press. Dr. Dixon is a professor of English at Dillard University in New Orleans.*



Recommended Reading



N.O. Lit: 200 Years of New Orleans Literature is, quite simply, the most comprehensive collection of the literature of New Orleans ever. Designed as an introduction for scholars and a pleasure for everyone, this volume will set the standard for years to come.

Writers from around the world have long been drawn to New Orleans, but not until **N.O. Lit: 200 Years of New Orleans Literature**, edited by Nancy Dixon, has their work been collected in a single volume. Dixon has gathered some of the most prominent writers long associated with New Orleans, like Lafcadio Hearn, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and Eudora Welty, but perhaps more fascinating are the ones we can discover for the first time, like the writers of **Les Cenelles**, French Creoles of color who published the first anthology of African American literature in 1845, or **Los Isleños**, descendants of the 17th-century Spanish immigrants from the Canary Islands, still a close-knit community today. From the first play ever performed in New Orleans in 1809, through Tom Dent's compelling 1967 drama of violence in the streets, **Ritual Murder**, this collection traces the city's history through its authors.



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THE BIG READ



*The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society was awarded a grant by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to create a **BIG READ** project for the greater New Orleans area focusing on the novel by Ethiopian-born American fiction and non-fiction writers Dinaw Mengestu, **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears**. The title refers to a line in the classic work of Dante: **The Divine Comedy**.*



THE BIG READ: WHAT IT IS

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT LITERACY

VOLUNTEERING TIME & DONATING DOLLARS

By Rosemary James

FOR 24 YEARS, the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society has been creating projects to excite the imaginations of both dedicated readers and those who have not yet discovered the joys of losing yourself in a good book or transporting yourself to exotic places or back to times gone by or into the future, times only imagined so far. We have been well rewarded by seeing how great literature can transform a failing student into an eager reader and how the experience of reading well can ensure a successful learning experience, future career success, and lifelong personal satisfaction.

The Faulkner Society and its grant partners—the Jefferson Parish Public Library and the State Library of Louisiana—were selected by **The National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Midwest**, and the **Institute of Museum & Library Services** for a grant to stage a 2014 **BIG READ** literacy initiative designed to stimulate reading among Metropolitan New Orleans at-risk teenagers, their parents, and other residents of Greater New Orleans.

The Society's 2014 **BIG READ** project focused on **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears** by the young Ethiopian-born American author **Dinaw Mengestu**, who holds an endowed chair at Georgetown University and has won exceptional recognition for his fiction, including the Ernest Gaines Prize and a MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Fellowship, one of the most coveted awards in the world of the arts.

The **BIG READ** kick-off for the general public was the focus of the Society's fall toast to its namesake, **Happy Birthday, Mr. Faulkner!** celebrating the birthday anniversary of Nobel laureate William Faulkner and concurrently outlining the details of the **BIG READ** project for 2014 and presenting details about the focus author and readings from his book. The event, which took place on September 28th, was hosted by Honorary Co-Chairs Mary and Roland Von Kornatowski at 818 St. Charles Avenue, their residence, a spectacular renovation of a commercial building, which has the lovely feature of an interior atrium with entertaining spaces opening into it. The Von Kornatowskis, owner of the world renowned music venue, Tipitina's, are creators of the Tipitina

Foundation, which provides grants for music education and for music equipment for young, budding musicians. Dedicated philanthropists, the Von Kornatowskis and their partner also purchased and currently are renovating the Orpheum Theatre, a grand performance hall which was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina and had been out of commission since the storm. **Happy Birthday, Mr. Faulkner**, attracted an audience of 179, who came to toast Mr. Faulkner with his favorite libation: mint juleps, served in silver julep cups, a tradition the Society instigated at its founding event in 1990.

The Faulkner Society's 2014 **BIG READ** project, was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and in part by matching funds secured from local sources. Funds netted from donations to the Kick-off event helped offset the NEA's required local match.

When the Society has been fortunate to receive grants for **BIG READ** projects, the activities created have as primary audiences at-risk middle, junior, and high school students, their parents, disadvantaged men and women, seniors, and other shut-ins.

A major goal of the Society is distributing free copies of focus books, with book ownership a proven method of instilling the love of books and literature. Recipients include participating teachers and their students, some of whom hear **BIG READ** speakers at a Master Class for area students and teachers; disadvantaged adults and senior groups. High School students and teachers also are invited to participate free in other **BIG READ** events during the Society's annual **Words & Music** festival which take place at the Hotel Monteleone, the only hotel in the Deep South designated as a national literary landmark, and at other New Orleans area venues. The elements of **BIG READ**, both nationally and the Society's 2014 project, were outlined by Faulkner Society co-founder Rosemary James during **Happy Birthday, Mr. Faulkner!** Donor brochures were distributed at the event.

After her talk, New Orleans fiction writer Laura Lane McNeal, author of the popular new book, **Dollbaby**,



auctioned off a watercolor painting, “Mr. Faulkner Returns to Pirate’s Alley.” The Nobel Prize winner got his start as a novelist in New Orleans, writing his first novel, **Soldiers’ Pay**, while living at 624 Pirate’s Alley in 1925. The painting was created as a gift to the Society by **Grayce DeNoia Bochak**, a fine artist who divides her time between Cape May, NJ and New Orleans, where she owns a condo on Pirate’s Alley. There was lively bidding on the painting, with the high bid by Elaine and Douglas Grundmeyer, long time members and patrons of the Faulkner Society. The party was a brunch with a scrumptious menu created by Chef Glenn Vatshell of Palate New Orleans and included his divine grillades and cheese grits as well as a heart-healthy risotto of wild rice, barley, kale, chicken, and walnuts and a variety of salads. The focal point of the menu, of course, were the birthday desserts: Mr. Faulkner’s favorite cakes: devil’s food with boiled icing, concocted by Chef Vatshell, and coconut creme cakes made by Mary Von Kornatowski, along with some of her other legendary desserts. The decor for the event was Fall inspired: pumpkins, mums, and colorful Fall leaf arrangements, all created by Mary.

Guests of Honor included interior style writer Bonnie Warren and photographer Cheryl Gerber, co-authors of the new style book: **New Orleans Homes at Christmas**. The Von Kornatowski residence is featured, decorated for Christmas, in their new book, launched at the event. Copies of the BIG READ focus book also were available for sale at the event and, as part of its **BIG READ** commitment, Faulkner House Books donated net profits on such book sales to the Faulkner Society and purchased the books distributed free by the Faulkner Society at its cost.

Why Was Mengestu’s Novel Selected as the Focus for 2014’s BIG READ?

Grantees all over the country select works of literary art from a list dictated by NEA. Grant projects focus on a single work of literary art. The Faulkner Society selected **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears** for many reasons, including the quality of Mengestu’s storytelling and his ability to draw the reader into the lives of his characters. The book focuses on the life of an immigrant and his two close friends, also immigrants, and the challenges an immigrant faces in everyday life, the necessity for daily improvisation, the emotional challenges of loss of national identity and fitting into a Society that is not always accepting of the cultural traditions of newcomers. Because of the growing population of immigrants in Louisiana, including recently a wave of immigrants from Ethiopia, his book is timely. The fact that he was born in Ethiopia, immigrated to America with his parents, and has achieved great success, combine to make him a great role model for youngsters who may be at risk for



*Dinaw Mengestu, author of **The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears**, 2014 **BIG READ** focus novel.*

illiteracy.

The fact that **Dinaw Mengestu** was selected for the 2012 Ernest J. Gaines Prize funded in honor of the Louisiana literary master **Ernest J. Gaines**, was an important factor, as a previous BIG READ project focused on the work and life of Mr. Gaines and we liked the continuity of featuring an author selected by Mr. Gaines.

For more information on Dinaw Mengestu, visit his web site:

<http://www.dinawmengestu.com>

Why Are We Giving Away Books?

A major thrust of the Society’s project is putting the free copies of the book in the hands of middle, junior, and high school students and other target audiences, such as disadvantaged seniors, of the New Orleans area. We have seen with our own eyes how important it is to students to have their own copies of books, how eager they are to possess them. Many of the participating students never have owned a book of their own and ownership, we have found, inspires readership and a desire to get more books and the knowledge contained within the covers of these books. As part of Faulkner Society **BIG READ**



projects, free books also are provided to teachers, including some home school teachers, and librarians, as well as disadvantaged adults participating in BIG READ activities. In addition to the books, teachers and students receive **BIG READ** bookmarks and participants are directed to the teachers' guides and readers guides relating to Dinaw Mengestu and his work available on-line at:

<http://www.nea/BIGREAD.org>

The **BIG READ** Grant requires that the grantee match the grant with non-public funding. So, when the Society receives a grant, we solicit matching fund donations from the general reading public. Cash donations received are used to purchase free copies of the book and offset our out-of-pocket costs for the master class and other BIG READ activities, costs over and above those covered by grant funds. And the Society also earmarks a portion of grants received from local public agencies and private Foundation to BIG READ projects.

For 2014, the NEA grant was \$15,000. The total cost of the project, including event costs and human resources, was \$61,585.

Why should you participate in this project? Read on!

And, then, join us in future literacy initiatives, be in our number!

BIG READ is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American popular culture. **Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America**, a 2004 NEA report, identified a critical decline in reading for pleasure among American adults. The Big Read addresses this issue by bringing communities together to read, discuss, and celebrate books and writers from American and world literature. The National Endowment for the Arts instituted **the BIG READ** to combat the shocking trends discovered in the NEA's extensive national survey and its compilation of all other available data on 21st Century reading habits of teenage and adult Americans. NEA learned that:

- * More than 50% of Americans, including college graduates, do not read literature. At risk especially are men.
- * Nearly one third of American teenagers are dropping out of school because of declining literacy and reading comprehension. At risk especially are young men.
- * Lack of employment opportunities and low wages result from poor reading skills.
- * Deficient readers are less likely to be active in civic and cultural activities, less likely to vote or volunteer for community causes.
- * Deficient readers are more likely to end up in prison or otherwise become burdens for society.

It's in your own best interests to help stimulate interest in reading good literature and to help our New Orleans area teenagers develop the reading skills they need to achieve the American Dream, a slice of the economic success pie and acceptance as worthy citizens.

How can you participate?

You can open the eyes of at risk teenagers...you can introduce them to the joys of reading with a gift of great literature.

The Faulkner Society is once again applying for a **BIG READ** grant in 2015, with the focus book selected for our application to be: **Brother, I'm Dying**, the highly acclaimed memoir of the brilliant Haitian-born author **Edwidge Danticat**. We have selected this as our focus book because of the long history of ties between Haiti and New Orleans. An invitation has been issued to Ms. Danticat to appear as a BIG READ presenter during Words & Music, 2015.

As we go live with this edition of *The Double Dealer*, there is no guarantee, of course, that the Society's grant application will be approved. There are hundreds of applications from organizations all over the country and funds available to the BIG READ organization only permit awarding of some 75 grants each year.

Regardless, however, the Faulkner Society will create a literacy initiative, which includes the distribution of some free books and the distribution of some free classroom resources such as lesson plan brochures. The extent of our distributions will depend on donations.

We are asking for donations in \$15 increments. \$15 will almost cover the wholesale cost of one copy of a selected book in paperback format, including shipping and distribution costs, and the book plates to be printed with one line for the recipient's name and one line for the donor's name. If you would like to help us in our literacy initiative, use the Donor form in this edition of *The Double Dealer* or e-mail us at faulkhouse@aol.com and we will send one to you.

In Summary:

The NEA's studies have shown that students who do not read and, specifically, who do not read good books, are more likely to become serious burdens on society than those who are good readers and who regularly read important works of literature.

Books light the fires of imagination and those whose imaginations have not been ignited, frequently lack the power to imagine the consequences of their actions and so become involved in incidents with tragic consequences.

Help us light a bonfire of imagination!



DONOR FORM

DONATIONS FOR LITERACY INITIATIVE BOOK PURCHASES

To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.

—Victor Hugo

I/We would like to make a donation to the 2016 BIG READ for purchase of books to be distributed free to participating high school students of the New Orleans Area.

Name: _____

Company, If Applicable: _____

Name to Be Used for Book Plates Identifying Donors _____

Amount of Donation _____

Enclosed is a check. Make payable to Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society to take a tax credit. Mail to:

The Faulkner Society's 2015 Literacy Initiative
24 Pirate's Alley
New Orleans, LA 70116

Credit Card Information

Name as it appears on card _____

Type of Card: Visa Mastercard American Express (No other cards are accepted)

Expiration Date _____ Code _____

Credit Card Account Number _____

Authorized Signature _____

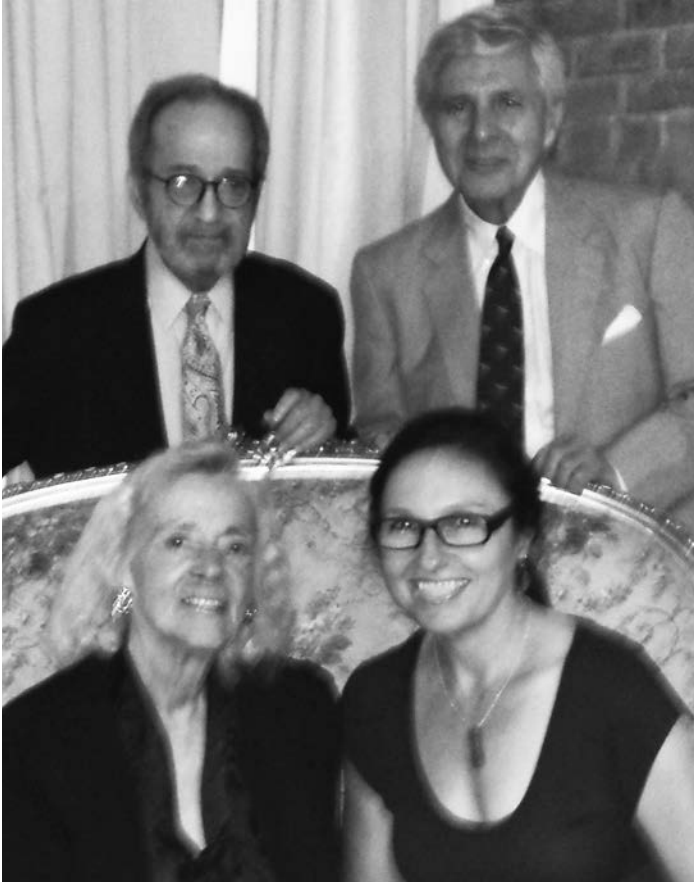
Date _____

If you prefer, you can call in a donation with credit card information to:
Faulkner House Books, (504) 524-2940, which is taking credit card donations for us. You may also pay on-line through our Pay Pal account at www.wordsandmusic.org/

The Faulkner Society is an all-volunteer (501) (c) (3) non-profit literary organization and all donations for this purpose are fully tax deductible.



👉 BIG READ 👈 KICKOFF PARTY!



Randy Fertel, Ph.D., long time umbrella sponsor of the Faulkner Society's annual fall festival, Words & Music, is shown here with writer Kimberly Corbett at the Society's BIG READ, 2014 kick-off.

Faulkner Society Co-Founder Joseph J. DeSalvo, Jr. and Board Member Alex Sheshunoff are shown with literary guests of honor for the BIG READ Kick-off, Bonnie Warren, left, and Cheryl Gerber, authors of the new lifestyle book, New Orleans Homes at Christmas, which features the BIG READ Kick-off Venue, 818 St. Charles Avenue, residence of Honorary Co-Chairs, Mary and Roland Von Kornatowski.



Rosemary James, center, Co-Founder, Faulkner Society, is pictured here with long-time patron Marian Wallis, left, and Mary Von Kornatowski, right, Honorary Co-Chair of the Society's fall salute to all great writers—past, present, and yet to come—and general public kick-off for BIG READ, 2014, Happy Birthday, Mr. Faulkner!

Photos Courtesy of Society columnist
Margarita Bergen and Alex Sheshunoff



*Dr. Carlos Trujillo, a Faulkner Society patron, is shown here with **Helen Frammer** and her husband, **Raúl Fonte**, Executive Director of the New Orleans Hispanic Heritage Foundation, a partner with the Faulkner Society in Pan American Connections programming during **Words & Music**.*



*The Rev. **William F. Maestri**, left, is author of some 40 books and Director of the **Bishop Perry Center**, a cultural center for downtown New Orleans neighborhoods and mission for the disadvantaged, a partner in **BIG READ**, 2014. Father Maestri is shown with author and long-time Faulkner Society patron **Carol Allen**, President of **Vieux Carre Property Owners and Associates**, and author and journalist **Jason Berry**.*



*Mississippi members of the Faulkner Society **Bebe and Bill Marchal** are shown here with long-time Faulkner Society volunteer and patron **Jeanie Clinton**, a Mississippi native, who has lived in New Orleans for many years and is a past member of the Society's Executive Board.*



*Attorney **Frank DeSalvo**, founding member of the Faulkner Society, with **Sybil Morial**, author and former First Lady of New Orleans.*



*Author and long-time Faulkner Society volunteer and patron **Mary Helen Lagasse** and son **Gary Lagasse**, left, with founding Faulkner Society member **Rheba Schlesinger** with daughter, **Susan Rigney** at **BIG READ** kick-off party.*



BIG READ

DINAW MINGESTU'S DIVINE COMMEDIA DELL' ARTE

THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS THAT HEAVEN BEARS

By Alessandro Powell

Dinaw Mengestu's **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears** takes its name from the last lines of Dante's *Inferno*. The poet emerges from hell and gets just a glimpse of heaven before entering purgatory.

The character Joseph, a frequently inebriated waiter who sees himself as a reincarnation of Socrates, delivers the title line, a line he has collected during a summer semester at Georgetown. He is one of a band of three immigrant musketeers, who left behind war and devastation in Africa, and are seeking adventure and fortune in the New World. Sepha Stephanos, the Ethiopian-born protagonist is more or less the leader of the band and initially seems even-keeled, but in actuality is suffering from a form of post traumatic stress, unable to confront life, let alone live it to the fullest. Then, there is Kenneth, the workaholic who fancies himself the successful businessman in the making.

They spend their free time reciting the various African dictators of their mother-countries. The farce takes on absurd proportions when the trio begins reusing dictatorships. Then a gentrifying white liberal, Judith, whose neighbors resent her intrusion and whose construction workers first peg her as a lesbian, renovates a house in the neighborhood, close to Stephanos, moves in and comes on to him. Judith is divorced from the Afro-American father of her daughter and both mother and daughter apparently envision replacing him with Stephanos.

Concerned, because he is spending less and less of his time with them, his sidekicks, reconnoiter at his failing deli—failing because Stephanos can't get his act together to keep it stocked with the things neighborhood people need and might actually want to buy. They go to his shop to play their nostalgic mind-games and get the skinny.

The fallout allows us to witness a stratification

of the triumvirate, as isolation turns these aspiring Americans into cartoonish figures. Despite their best efforts, the three fledgling Americans grow together at the same pace. Their standard of living, for instance, never varies significantly—his banged-up red sedan hardly catapults Kenneth into the golden parachute CEO or trust-fund leisure classes. Mengestu's deli is an appropriately meager front for his own mediocre existence. The ivory tower Joseph envisions for himself is all pie in the sky, as he contents himself with channeling his intellect into a plethora of under-achievements. His relationship with American academia could not be less symbiotic.

The three could be fused into one without altering the plot.

It has been said that immigrants and African-Americans relate most definitively to clear-cut images of New World life and Mengestu's groundbreaking novel seems to confirm the axiom. But the images they have formed of American life are more often than not those of a better time for America itself.

It is no great stretch at all to read Mengestu's characters into one another.

The African, especially Ethiopian, pre-ancient tradition of Adobe bricks involves the synthesis of three elements—sticks, and Kenneth is their unflagging stick; manure, and Joseph is full of that well known waste material; and straw, bending without breaking, like the beautifully pretzeled psyche of Sepha. So did man build his earliest cultures, with his domicile the foundational societal unit, one brick at a time, one adobe house at a time. Near the conclusion of **The Beautiful Things Heaven Bears** Mengestu postulates that a people can be understood by the objects they appropriate at times of civil unrest. Africans have resorted to the machete; the French to the guillotine; and, meanwhile, Mengestu's D. C.



neighbors throw bricks. This brick metaphor ties the principals together while a close reading might suggest that the immigrant trinity represents the foundation of the American way.

Kenneth believes in the power of a well-tailored suit. But he is out of step in an era when more and more truly successful American business magnates (e. g. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs) are dressing down in t-shirts and jeans. The result is an anachronistic affect. Kenneth becomes a caricature, the funhouse reflection of the success-craving American workaholic. Joseph seems to be the other side of that coin with his grand, pedantic gestures, most of which are launched from the seated or slouching position. To be fair this philosopher is a waiter, often bone tired, and a developing alcoholic. But Joseph's sedentary gospel cannot be denied, Dante summed up their lives long before they were conceived.

In America, Joseph becomes a drunk with a rhetoric problem instead of a master orator, which he might have been in many African countries. Joseph complains to Stephanos, "Everything is beautiful to you." To which the protagonist replies, "Not everything." But Joseph insists; "But damn close." "You just have to have the right perspective. Indifference. You have to know that none of this is going to last. . ."

As Mengestu writes his dialogue with a minimum of tags the lines between his characters blur

even more.

Even the title, **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears** is an oral tour de force. The dialogue is simply impeccable. Mengestu weaves the tragic tones of **L'Étranger** by Albert Camus (often labeled **The Stranger** in English but more reasonably translated as **The Outsider**) with those of Walker Percy's **The Moviegoer** with the ease of God-given expertise, his rhetoric bending the rules successfully. His plausible characters trapped between two worlds—homeland and New World, black and white, native citizen and arriviste—engage in high tension, witty small talk about all of the necessary accouterments for achieving success and their dialogue has the ring of actuality.

That said, Mengestu could have taken more time with seeing the scenes of his narrative structure, basically back and forth between flashbacks to Africa and current reality. While the way he handles time lapses suggests careful drafting and while the details of his bare bones plot are strung together into an eloquent, coherent argument there is not a lot of action or local color in the narrative to engage readers. Possibly, he could have made his story more compelling for readers by expanding the episodes in Africa to give readers a clearer understanding of what these characters experienced and what they lost to generate some sympathy, especially for Stephanos, the principal character. While Mengestu is also a first



class freelance journalist who has covered such African tragedies as Darfur, most American readers have not even been to Africa, let alone seen for themselves the horrors of the wars and genocide that have plagued the continent for generations. or experienced the cultures and environmental beauty of Africa.

And if Mengestu's bread-crumbs trail had ended a bit more decisively, then his story might be more satisfying. The conclusion, in fact, proves more maddening than cathartic; Mengestu shrugs off his characters in a nebulous ending. We want to think that these musketeers will not only survive but thrive. But Mengestu does not encourage us to think this might actually happen. Sepha meanders, grinning as his world falls down around him.

Sepha's lifestyle is one of daily improvisation, one of knee-jerk reactions and actions, his behavior bordering on irrational. He lives like Hollywood's version of the good immigrant son. He sends money to relatives, while the surviving members of his effectively noble family send more money back. To borrow a title from Mario Puzo, Stephanos is a faux **Fortunate Pilgrim**.

No wonder gentrifying Judith falls into something impermanent with Stephanos, who is more attached to her precocious daughter and the idea of having a child than to her. His neighbors are aware of his relationship with her, however, and in their eyes, Stephanos probably is as guilty of gentrification as Judith; the color of his skin is the only thing keeping away the brick his "imaginary rioters" leave outside his deli, unlike the one that actually finds its way into the backseat of Judith's car.

Stephanos is wide-eyed in his observations about routine aspects of Washington life:

The red-line train bound for the suburbs of Maryland is delayed. The trains of this city continue to marvel me, regardless of how long I live here. It's not just their size, but their order, the sense you get when riding them that a higher, regulatory power is in firm control, even if you yourself are not.

He is wide-eyed and concurrently offhand about things that mean something to him, reluctant, apparently, to admit that he cares. Of his father's cuff-links, he thinks:

They were just cheap cuff-links from an old,

decaying regime, but you hold on to what you can and hope the meaning comes later. .

He is on the run from the ambition for his country that may well have resulted in seeing his father executed in his own living room. The daily farce of his life masks the post-traumatic stress he is suffering.

Stephanos is a contemporary *Paggiacci*, or *Harlequinno*, the mask of blackness merging with the player. It is appropriate that Stephanos personifies the darker side of *Commedia dell'Arte* and his anti-Western outlook syncs up ironically with the transmogrification of the American culture originally created with the Puritan migration.

While this quasi-Zen protagonist has the ability to lift everyone's spirits, even his own, the high spirits quickly fade. His actions are too ineffectual, too self-destructive, too much based on his subconscious guilt at the loss of his father and his homeland for him to keep his spirits sufficiently high long enough to drag himself up and out of the morass of guilt-fired apathy.

His first American job is as a porter with his uncle. And possibly the uniforms he wears remind Stephanos of the soldiers who shot his father before his very eyes. Certainly, the trauma has pulled his psychological strings tight so tight that he cannot untie those strings and re-tie his life.

The tragedy of Sepha Stephanos is that his desires are not realized because of his own inaction. Even though the careful reader cannot help but realize that Stephanos is the victim of great suffering and feel compassion for him, you just want to grab him and shake him and scream, "give the guilt a rest. Get over it," not out of anger but out of deep-seated longing for him, after all he's been through, to find a life in his adopted country.

He is already a lot more American than he knows or would care to admit. Like the musings of many Americans we all know, his inner-narrative is surprisingly unpatriotic. "I didn't want anything from America." This coming from a man who lost his family because Ethiopia has lacked the infrastructure to support legitimate elections—and so he is now living off this land that he does not love. Already Stephanos is an ungrateful American.

The alienation Stephanos sees as a symptom of his immigrant status, however, is really just another quintessential contemporary American characteristic.



Capitalism works in America if for no other reason than because slackers like Joseph and, increasingly, Stephanos, can live off the more productive mania of people like Kenneth. The book's ending centering on the growing lethargy of Sepha might, therefore, be read to insinuate that the few who hold our economy afloat are increasingly outnumbered. Certainly, that is today's popular complaint.

Although the narrative concludes as Stephano's life is in a downward spiral, we know that he will never become truly desperate. He is not a junkie, rather he is a Zen-parasite-Siddhartha. Only profit is sacrificed... and the self esteem that comes from multiplying one's God-given talents.

Ultimately, in fact, all three might best be understood as loveable parasites. And that is not to knock parasites.

Radiolab said, in introducing a recent episode:

Could parasites be the shadowy hands that pull the strings of life? We explore nature's moochers, with tales of lethargic farmers, zombie cockroaches, and even mind-controlled humans (kinda, maybe)...some parasites may actually be good for you.

If the Radiolab parasite stories are to be trusted, our parasite friends are not without fringe benefits—one American flew to Western Africa to waddle barefoot around outhouses, because the right parasite cures allergies and sometimes asthma. Another man turned his passion for hookworms into a business. He deliberately infected himself with hookworms to combat allergies and asthma and sold his domesticated hookworms to others profitably.

Kenneth bails on Christmas with his buddies just to work overtime at his dead-end job (he will never become the administrative engineer he desires to be without earning an American degree. Kenneth's Christmas defection is cause for great sadness for Stephanos. It is during Christmas, the book's turning point, that he realizes anyone can survive safely in America doing absolutely nothing. So, Stephanos resolves to live off the fat of the land, off of the kindness of strangers, reaping the benefits of his adoptive capitalist society while denouncing it.

The Bible tells us the meek shall inherit the earth, and, indeed, they even get a vote in the New World.

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About Dinaw Mengestu

If one imagines that Dinaw Mengestu himself—raised and schooled in America by immigrant parents sees his three African characters as distillations of his own psyche, that likely would be a mistake. Mengestu is an experienced observer and his characters reflect his keen powers of observation. He obviously broke the mold of displacement, longing, feelings of being the “outsider,” and resulting apathy often seen in refugees, immigrants.

He came here young with parents and this young author has successfully grabbed—not just dreamed of—a huge slice of the American pie for himself. Still in his 30s with a MacArthur “Genius” fellowship, the Ernest Gaines prize, and an endowed chair at Georgetown University, and numerous publications both as a fiction writer and as a journalist to his credit. He is the epitome of everything his characters are not.





RECOLLECTIONS

By Joseph DeSalvo

Rummaging Through An Old Newspaper

Rummaging through excess accumulated personal and bookstore papers with culling in mind, I found a *New Orleans States* newspaper dated August 14, 1945. Does the date ring a bell? The headline is a single 5-letter word in 9-inch type: **PEACE**. On that date, the Japanese, accepting defeat, surrendered unconditionally. World War II was over.

My memories of the celebration are still very vivid: in the late afternoon, my father driving the family—my mother, very young sister and brother, and me—downtown in our 1934 Chevrolet sedan. We joined a caravan of pre-war automobiles circling a divided Canal Street, horns honking and blaring without cease. People jammed the sidewalks and spilled into the streets and the area between where the electric streetcars (trolleys) ran. They were singing and dancing to music coming from everywhere. Gone at last the years of dread and war worries; in their place, a glorious and unbounded happiness. Their loved ones will be coming home.

Amid the crowd, newsboys were shouting “Extra! Extra! The Japanese have surrendered, read more about it.” I asked my father for a nickel to buy the copy that resurfaced a few weeks ago.

For me, the War began very early in the morning on December 4, 1941, the day before my 9th birthday. My mother’s 20-year-old brother, a favorite uncle, who lived with us and shared a bedroom with me, was leaving for the army induction center. When he hugged me goodbye with teary eyes, I cried. He assured me he would be home again for my 10th birthday. I believed him. A patriotic song with the refrain “Goodbye, dear, I’ll be back in a year, ‘cause the army needs me now” played often on the radio.

Three days later, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a surprise attack on a portion of our Pacific fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. When the war ended, three years, eight months and seven days later, my uncle was en route to Okinawa, an island a few hundred miles from Japan.

So an 83 year old man will keep the 13 -year-old boy’s newspaper a bit longer and will not forget that noisy, victorious day, 70 years ago, when he bought it.



NEW FICTION



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

Reality doesn't surprise me. But that's not true: I suddenly feel such a hunger for the "thing to really happen" that I cry out and bite into reality with my lacerating teeth. And afterwards give a sigh over the captive whose flesh I ate. And again, for a long while, I do without real reality and find comfort in living from my imagination.

- Clarice Lispector



TRAIN WRECK

by *Thomas Sancton*

Le Havre, January 16, 1945

THE PALE WINTER SUN had just disappeared over the English Channel when the USS Henry Gibbons, a 10,000-ton troop transport, nestled up against a splintery wooden pier. French dockers secured her moorings, their Gallic shouts mingling with the screams of seagulls. On board were armor, engineering, medical and quartermaster units—more than one thousand troops in all. Originally slated for duty in the Pacific, they had been hastily rerouted to Le Havre to reinforce Allied lines in the face of Hitler's counter-offensive in the Ardennes, the Battle of the Bulge.

Recaptured from the Germans in September 1944, three months after the Normandy landings, Le Havre had become the main entry point for U.S. troops and supplies bound for the European Theater of Operations. From here, harried U.S. transportation officers, under orders to double the pace in the war's final, critical phase, hastily dispatched arriving troops and equipment by truck or rail to one of the six so-called Cigarette camps that served as U.S. staging bases in Normandy.

Camp Lucky Strike, located on the outskirts of Saint Valery-en-Caux, was the largest of these bases, a sprawling tent city and airstrip that could accommodate up to 66,000 soldiers en route to the front. That was the destination of these newly arrived troops, who trekked through the rubble of the war-ravaged city to the railroad station. They had to wait several hours while the French rail crews assembled the 45-car train behind an English-built locomotive.

It was nearly 1 a.m. when the troops began boarding train 2580 bound for Saint Valery. The French engineer, complaining about the age and rudimentary design of the English locomotive—it didn't even have a speedometer—told the American transport officer it was a *vielle merde* that could not safely carry 45 fully loaded cars. He insisted that the convoy be divided into two trains, since it was well over the weight limit allowed by the SNCF, France's national railroad agency.

The American officer greeted this argument with a sneer. "You're not working for the Krauts anymore, Frenchie, you're working for the U.S. Army. My orders are to get these men on the move right now. Let's go."

At 2 a.m., the train finally lurched into motion, set-

ting off cheers and whistles from its weary passengers. But its snail's pace soon dampened their enthusiasm. Using their helmets for pillows and field packs for cushions, they settled onto the hard floor of the unheated freight cars and tried to rest. But the lurching ride and the incessant groan of steel on steel made sleep impossible. To while the time away, some G.I.'s played cards; others smoked and dangled their legs out the side doors that had been opened for ventilation. One man pulled an alto saxophone out of a battered case and began playing jazz riffs to the rhythm of the clattering train wheels.

A black soldier, reclining on his backpack, eyed him silently and tapped his foot to the music. After a while, he sat up cross-legged and addressed the player in a voice that was all smoke and gravel. "How'd you learn to play like that?"

"I was in a band at Yale—till I got drafted."

"Yale, huh. You goin' back to Yale, saxman?"

"If I don't get killed."

"Study music?"

"Law."

It was well past dawn when the train lumbered into Saint Vaast-Dieppedale, where it stopped and switched tracks for its final leg. The six-mile stretch leading to Saint Valery sloped steeply towards the Channel coast. As the overloaded train gained speed, the engineer tried to slow its pace, but the pneumatic brakes failed to respond. The passengers, at first delighted to be moving faster, now realized that the train was hurtling out of control.

At precisely 10:30 a.m., the locomotive plowed into the station at 50 m.p.h., ripping through the structure and shattering the opposite wall. The boiler punched through the front of the building, hissing loudly as steam escaped through the cracked metal casing. The coal car fell into the basement, and the front cars piled up on each other six or seven tiers high. The rear cars were scattered around the railyard like dominoes. Wheels, bumpers, couplings, doors, flew randomly and murderously through the air.

The casualties were horrendous. Legs and heads amputated by sliding doors. Soldiers impaled by flying metal. Necks, backs and limbs snapped like dry twigs by the force of the crash. Bodies crushed flat between the floors and roofs of collapsed rail cars. As dazed



survivors struggled to crawl free of the wreckage and help their comrades, the people of Saint Valery rushed to the site. Many of them carried bottles of wine, calvados and cognac, bed sheets, blankets, whatever they had at hand. Military medics began to perform triage, piling the dead in one row, the injured in another. With the few medical kits they could salvage from the crash, they applied bandages and tourniquets, and amputated crushed limbs.

John Adams was lying on the snowy ground when he regained consciousness. He felt no pain, only a frigid numbness that crept up his legs and arms like a thousand tiny needle pricks. He heard screams and groans on all sides, mingled with the shouted orders of American officers and strange French mutterings that he did not understand though he sensed their urgency.

To his left, an Army doctor huddled over a wounded man. Adams turned his head and recognized the black G.I. who had spoken to him on the train. The man's thigh was crushed; his pants leg was ripped off at the hip and a sharp fragment of white bone protruded from a mass of bleeding pulp. The doctor lit a cigarette and placed it between the soldier's lips. "I'm out of anesthetic, son," he said. "This is all I have to give you." The patient took a puff and inhaled deeply. "Do what you gotta do, doc." The doctor began to saw the bone just below the hip. The patient remained perfectly silent, but Adams found the high-pitched whine of the saw teeth unbearable. He tried to cup his hands over his ears, but his arms would not move.

When the doctor had finished cutting, he looked up at the black soldier and shook his head. He removed the cigarette, still lit, from the man's gray lips and pulled a blanket over him. Then he turned and knelt down at Adams's side.

The young man gazed up at the doctor as he swabbed the saw blade with alcohol. "You're not going to amputate me?" he cried.

"Gotta do it, soldier. Your left arm is crushed. You'll die of gangrene if it doesn't come off."

"But I'm a saxophone player."

"Not any more, son." 🌸



Thomas Sancton grew up in New Orleans and attended local public schools. After studies at Harvard and Oxford, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar, he began a 22-year career as a writer, editor, and foreign correspondent for **Time Magazine**, serving most recently as Paris Bureau Chief, where his reporting earned him an Overseas Press Club Award. While living in Paris, he authored the international bestseller **Death of a Princess: The Investigation** and a political thriller, **The Armageddon Project**, set against the backdrop of the war in Iraq. His forthcoming novel, **Off the Cliff**, is a historical work set in Normandy under the Nazi occupation. In 2007, Sancton was named the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Tulane University, where he has taught advanced classes in creative writing. Sancton is also a well-known jazz clarinetist and a former student of the late, great **George Lewis**—an apprenticeship he lovingly chronicled

in **Song for My Fathers**. Featured on more than a dozen CD's, **Tom Sancton** (a.k.a. Tommy) has toured widely in Europe and the U.S., and has played at major international jazz festivals, including numerous appearances at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. He also appeared alongside **Woody Allen** in the 1998 film **Wild Man Blues**. Since his return to New Orleans in 2007, Sancton has played regularly at such legendary jazz venues as Preservation Hall, the Palm Court Jazz Cafe, and Snug Harbor. A stage version of **Song For My Fathers**, featuring the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, was presented at Tulane University's Dixon Hall in 2010, the Chat Noir theater in 2011, and the **Tennessee Williams Literary Festival** in 2012. In January 2012, Sancton was featured at a gala 50th anniversary Preservation Hall Jazz Band concert at Carnegie Hall. In 2014, the French government named him a Chevalier (Knight) in the Order of Arts and Letters.

©Thomas Sancton 2014. An excerpt from the forthcoming novel, **Off the Cliff**.



OLD FAVORITES



By Joseph DeSalvo

Revisiting Italo Calvino's Cosmicomics

A beautiful new edition of Italo Calvino's **Cosmicomics** brings together all of the Cosmicomics for the first time in one place, including a few stories that have never before been translated into English. If you have never read these stories before, you are in for a treat: Calvino's vision of a primordial universe as playground for his protagonist Qfwfq is transportative. We follow Qfwfq and his friends from the Big Bang through to the creation of life on earth and evolution. One of the most beautiful stories is the first, "The Distance of the Moon," in which Qfwfq remembers when the moon passed so close to earth that he and his companions would take a boat out to the sea and climb a ladder to its surface. He tells us,

On those nights the water was very calm, so silvery it looked like mercury, and the fish in it, violet-coloured, unable to resist the Moon's attraction, rose to the surface, all of them, and so did the octopuses and the saffron medusas. There was always a flight of tiny creatures—little crabs, squid, and even some weeds, light and filmy, and coral plants—that broke from the sea and ended up on the Moon, hanging down from that lime-white ceiling, or else they stayed in midair, a phosphorescent swarm we had to drive off, waving banana leaves at them.

Calvino's prose is where poetry and science mingle, and these stories, collected for the first time in their entirety, tell not only of the creation of the universe, but of love and loss. These tales are richly imagined, and the stunning images of the early universe as envisioned by Calvino will stay with you for a long, long time.



LEGS



By Terri Stoor

I COULDN'T GET THAT OLD ZZ TOP song out of my head. She's got legs, alright, I thought. But does she know how to use them? I stood in what was once the back doorway of my father's house, now the entry onto an enclosed, uninsulated porch. My half-sister Jory, already dressed for the funeral in a black skirt and blouse, held open the lid of the deep freeze and scowled at me.

"Need some help here, Callie," she said. "I don't think I can carry even one of these by myself, but I know I can't carry both of them, and they're by-damn going to the funeral home," she said.

Frozen air wafted from the freezer, and I leaned on the ancient washer next to it and looked in. Inside, wrapped in aluminum foil but still recognizable by shape alone, were my father's legs. One appeared to end just below the hip, the other just above the knee. They'd been in there, best I could figure on the spot, for nearly 15 years. Probably freezer burned by now.

Jory looked like a cherub with her tight blonde curls, but I didn't think cherubs got pissed-off.

"Don't even think of leaving," she said. "You swore to God you'd help."

I wasn't sure I'd done that, exactly, but I reached in, pushed a few freezer packages aside, and hesitated, then grabbed the closest leg by the ankle and pulled. Nothing moved. I pulled harder, tried to give it a shake, and still nothing happened. I leaned further in and gave the other one a shove. It didn't move, either.

"They're stuck," I said.

"Here." She sighed, sounding disgusted with me, and reached into a peeling tool box on a shelf to hand me a rusted hammer. "Give them a whack with this." She looked at me expectantly, and I shrugged and took it.

"What if I break one?" I asked.

"Dear God, Callie Jane! Do you have to make this any worse than it already is?"

I wasn't being sarcastic - I really wondered if they would shatter if I hit them too hard - but she wasn't having any questions, so I started to tap gingerly at the frozen legs with the hammer.

"I knew this was going to happen," she said. "I told him a hundred times to defrost this bastard, but he never did."

"He was in a wheelchair, Jory. You couldn't have helped him?" I asked.

"Oh, that's easy for you to say, off wherever the hell

you were. He did whatever he wanted to do just fine, but anything he didn't want to do he either ignored or lied about," she said. "You know how he was."

I did know how he was, maybe better than she did. The year before my parents divorced I was ten, and my father still had both his legs and a girlfriend, Twila, who would become Jory's mother, living in a trailer park across the field from our house. Sometimes he'd offer to take me for ice cream, and instead of going to the Dairy Barn, he'd drive the long way around, past City Lake, and we'd go to Twila's. He didn't have to tell me that this was a secret from my mother. I listened to them at night, my mother small in her housecoat with her restless hands, my father telling her she was crazy, and that there wasn't anyone else, when I'd sat on the front steps of Twila's battered double-wide eating cheap chocolate ice cream from the carton just that afternoon. My father and Twila sat close together on her worn sofa and talked softly, their heads bent close together. It was years before I realized that I'd never seen him behave as tenderly toward anyone else.

Jory was rummaging through the toolbox, her head bent, and I felt suddenly protective of her. She'd definitely had her hands full with him, and I hadn't been there to help. Still, if we could have avoided the task at hand, I think I'd have flown in from downtown Hell to defrost this thing any number of times over the years. It didn't appear that my tapping was getting us anywhere, and my fingers were starting to go numb. I hauled back to give the closest leg a good wallop, and Jory grabbed my elbow, a pained look on her round face.

"Don't. Shit. I'll get the hairdryer."

She ran back into the kitchen, and I stood there, looking at the foil covered limbs surrounded by white-butcher paper packages marked "venison" and "pork sausage" that had been shoved to one side when excavating the legs. It was surreal to say the least.

Two days ago, I'd been in New Orleans, freshly fired, drinking coffee at a sidewalk table on Magazine Street and trying not to wonder how long my money would last, when my cell phone rang.

"Callie Jane," Jory said, "Daddy's dead," and in those four seconds several things happened at once. I lost my father, my lack of employment gained its proper perspective, and a longing for the little town and the big people I'd worked so hard to leave behind overwhelmed me. I used what was



left of my savings to buy a plane ticket and a black dress, and was standing outside the airport in St. Louis the next afternoon, waiting for Jory. I'd stayed sleepy and numb at first, but now, leaning over my father's legs in his musty house, I was definitely awake. I wasn't much more than a kid when they amputated his legs, and it never occurred to me that he might want to be buried with them.

"Okay, stand back."

Jory was back with a blow dryer, and plugged it into a half-secured electrical socket dangling over the dryer. When she pressed the button to turn it on, there was a loud pop, a frizzling sound, the smell of plastic burning, and the single bulb in the porch light went out. More importantly, the solid, loud hum of the deep freeze stopped dead.

"Shit." Jory stood there, looking at the hair dryer like she expected it to speak. When she finally looked at me, her eyes were big and round. "This could be a problem," she said.

"Where's the fuse box?"

"In here." She jogged into the kitchen, bust bouncing, and opened a metal panel in the wall next to the silent fridge. "It looks okay to me."

I looked over her shoulder. All I knew to look for was a switch thrown to 'off' when it should have been 'on', and nothing looked like that. I flipped a few switches anyway, but nothing happened. It appeared in attempting to free Daddy's legs, we'd fried something serious, and flipping a few switches wasn't going to fix it.

"We're screwed," she said.

"Well," I said, "maybe not. I mean, we wanted them to thaw out a little."

"What about everything else in there?" she asked.

"Hey," I said, "It's not like anyone was going to eat it anyway."

"Fine," she said. "Then help me get it out to the dumpster. When that freezer defrosts, it's going to stink."

We each grabbed a plastic laundry basket from the top of the dryer, and began to layer butcher-paper-wrapped packages inside. Water quickly started to condense and drip onto the floor boards from the back of the old freezer. It was indian summer here, close to eighty degrees, and my father's house had never been air conditioned. We'd better make this snappy, I thought, or what was left of Daddy would start to get real organic, real fast. I stopped to rest after a few trips to the garbage, and brushed off the bits of ice clinging to my dress.

"Jory," I called out to the next room, "how did Daddy get his legs in the first place? They didn't just let him take them home from the hospital, huh?"

I stepped into the kitchen. Half-way to the front door with a load of venison steaks, my sister put them down and pressed her hands into the small of her back. Bad backs run in my family. I think it's the price we pay for having big boobs.

"No way, the hospital made this big deal, said it was a health hazard and against the law about 20 different ways. They wouldn't even consider it. I'm pretty sure they were supposed to be incinerated. But Daddy had a guy who

owed him a favor, and that guy knew a guy who knew a guy. I guess when it came time to burn them, he had them brought here instead. I know Daddy wrapped them up himself. Said he wanted to be sure they were his legs, and not somebody else's. He said it took four rolls of Reynolds Wrap, those big rolls, like you use for turkeys."

That sounded like my dad, I thought. He might have lived on no-name macaroni and cheese, but nothing but name brand would do for his extra body parts. By the time we cleared out everything not-legs, and with a little careful use of the hammer, the legs lay lonely on the bottom of the freezer.

Jory stared at them. "I don't know about you, but I'm not looking that forward to picking those things up," she said. She looked up at me hopefully. "You're the one with the strong stomach."

She was right about that. Not long after she was born, my father had left her mother, too, but he wanted us to spend time together as sisters, so on the weekends he had visitation with us both, he took us camping, to the park, and anything that offered him an opportunity to meet women, since we were great bait. The problem was, Jory threw up. Not only was she car sick on drives as short as a few blocks, but even an unfamiliar smell could make her nauseous, as could being tickled, going swimming, eating ice cream. Daddy said that looking cross-eyed at Jory could make her vomit. We traveled always with a change of clothes, a roll of paper towels and a bottle of Formula 409, which my father would use to wipe down the car and Jory. More than one woman wound up dating my father after taking pity on him while he cared for his youngest daughter after yet another stomach upset. For her part, in spite of the discomfort she must have felt, Jory remained an unfailingly pleasant child.

"Well," I said, "we can't just put them in the trunk like this. We'll have to wrap them in something. They're," I paused, trying to think of a better word, but none came to me. "They're *dripping*."

Jory grimaced and flipped me off, which made me want to laugh, but I had the firm impression that if I actually laughed out loud, I might not be able to stop, ever.

Jory grabbed my hand and pulled me through the kitchen to the bathroom. She pointed to the shower curtain, a water-stained plastic sheet decorated with smiling rubber ducks.

"Would this work?" she asked.

I raised one eye-brow, and gestured toward a particularly jaunty duck sporting a sailor hat.

"Oh, hell," she said, sounding exasperated. "I got him a shower curtain with duckies, okay? Get over it."

She reached up and yanked on the curtain, tearing it away from the rings and the rod holding them with a series of loud pops. She dragged it through the kitchen and lay it on the floor next to the freezer.

"I'm serious," she said. "I don't think I can touch them."

I nodded, and rotated my shoulders, bending my head from side to side as though warming up for a run. I decided that no matter what, I was going to be stoic about the legs. No matter how weird or awful it was, I was going



to protect Jory from this. I would be matter-of-fact, and I would get the legs onto the shower curtain without incident. *You can do this*, I told myself.

I reached in with both hands and grabbed the longest leg at the ankle and the thigh, and lifted.

“Oh, God!” I yelled. I dropped the leg, leaped back from the freezer, and tripped over the shower curtain, landing solidly on my backside. Jory nearly jumped out of her skin.

“What the hell was that?” she shrieked.

We were silent as I tried to catch my breath, and when I looked up at Jory, she had the smallest smile starting at the corner of her mouth.

“Don’t!” I warned her.

Her smile grew wider, and a chuckle began, low in her throat.

“Jory! Don’t do it! Don’t laugh!”

I tried to look away, even pinched myself, hard, on the soft skin at the inside of my elbow, but it was too late, and when she opened her mouth, a deep belly-laugh bubbled out, and it was as contagious as I’d feared it would be. As my laughter joined hers, she slipped to the floor beside me, wrapping her arms around me, burying her face in my neck. When we were finally laughed out several long minutes later, we were cried out, too.

She reached over and wiped mascara from beneath my eyes with the hem of her blouse.

“Really, Callie Jane, what happened?” Jory asked.

“Why’d you jump?”

“I don’t think you really want to know, but if you promise not to barf, I’ll tell you,” I said. She held up the two fingers required for the ‘Girl Scout promise’ and I went on.

“Okay, you know how the thigh bone is connected to the leg bone?” Jory looked puzzled.

“There’s a knee in between, so when I pulled the ankle and the thigh, well, it *moved*.”

Jory, who was well-intentioned if a liar, jumped to her feet and ran for the toilet. I got up and steeled myself, prepared this time, and lifted first one and then the other leg from the freezer, placing them on the shower curtain, and had them wrapped in cheerful, overlapping ducks by the time she returned. She brought me duct tape from the junk drawer in the kitchen, and I secured them, fashioning handles at either end, so Jory could help me carry them without having to touch the parcel itself.

“Ready?” I asked.

We’d carried the legs outside without incident, and they rested on a towel on the back seat of Jory’s ancient blue Kia. We straightened our clothes and makeup and collected our purses. The drive to the funeral home was quiet. For once, Jory didn’t have much to say, and I didn’t much mind. 🌸



***Terri Stoor**, winner of the 2011 William Faulkner–William Wisdom gold medal for the short story, is a founding member of the Peauxdunque Writers Alliance, the New Orleans Chapter of the **Words & Music Writers Alliance**. This past summer she was invited to and attended the inaugural Oxford American Summit for Ambitious Writers. Terri was also the second runner-up in the essay category of the 2011 Faulkner–Wisdom awards, and placed a short story on the short list for finalists in the 2010 Faulkner–Wisdom awards. A former actor and comedian, she lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans, where she is working on a collection of short stories and teaching her Labrador retriever to smile on command. Terri will read at the annual meeting of the **Words & Music Writers Alliance** on Thursday, November 20.*



THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF HOME

By Tad Bartlett

MY NAME IS CALVIN, but only Julie calls me that anymore. I'm in a village. I'm surrounded by friends and enemies, though sometimes it's hard to tell which is which. Everything is brown. The houses, the streets, the gardens, the clothes everyone wears. The only things not brown are the guns we carry and our choppers in a semi-circle on the edge of the village.

I don't want to do this anymore. Bullets sink into bodies or the earthen walls of the houses. Puffs of blood and dust. I've lost track of who we're fighting or where we're fighting. We've been in jungles, deserts, mountain passes and caves, sunny beaches, river deltas, rainforests, arboreal highlands, rice patties, old European river gorges, dusty African street towns—anywhere eyes stare out from behind gun sights or frightened from windows. I want to go home now. I want to take my daughter, my wife, into these arms.

I fall to my knees. I look at the dry dirt and rocks. I could bury myself here. I could wait it out. Then I could rise and go home.



"Oh Calvin," Julie said, the first night I met her, "Italian ..."

"No, Cuban," I said, "by way of Brooklyn."

"Whatever, loverboy," she said, her red fingernail drawing constellations on my chest. "Your mother a poor working girl on New York streets?"

"Shut it. My parents were professors of Chemistry and Romance Languages."

"And now you fight."

"And now I fight."

That is a long time ago, maybe back to when I knew what drew me to her, or more puzzlingly, her to me, what led to the beckoning, the bad whiskey in her kitchen, the long undressing.



I've headed north for three days, through swamps, remembering childhood and the smell of raw sewage in the bottomland, sex, hotels, homes, wars, battles, pottery sold in roadside bazaars, drinks in kitchens and in cheap bars, brothers, friends, enemies, images blending ceaselessly while my pack gets lighter. The gun abandoned in a ditch on the first day, the MREs emptied into my stomach at the end of the first night.

Flash-bangs traded to a young bearded man in an SUV the morning of the second day in exchange for some olives, half a mango, and a handful of red chilies. A smile to a child the afternoon of the second day, a little girl, colorful silks and irises, hiding behind her mother's stern legs, a girl like my own.

The morning of this third day, I give all my American dollars to a dwarf with three fingers on each hand—the land mine from the last invaders, he said—for a map and a cup of strong tea and a bowl of smoke and a wishing of luck. There's a chuckle after my back turns and I walk into growing highlands, unburdened, the mud of the swamps replaced by granite beneath my boots, grit in the folds of my smile, three days old beard.

Planes fly overhead in pairs every hour—too high, I think, to make me out. It's the sunset of the third day, and I crouch by a bush on a hillside above a river valley, picking berries from its branches and chewing them slowly, thinking of poison. I hear the telltale electric buzz and catch the sunshine glint off the rotors of a drone scanning the valley floor below, unaware of me.

I check the map again, dried skin of a goat beneath my fingers, old brown blood sketching a tracery of the goat's generations in these hills, showing the gambol spots and the grazing centers and the place where his grandfather was eaten by a wolf. According to the map, just beyond that beautiful and tragic rocky outcropping, is the entrance to the city. I must not be more than a hundred feet from it, but I can't see it.

"Let go." I've heard the voice for months. "Let go."



"Latin is not for lovers," said Mom, the chemistry professor. "It never was, dear."

"I know," said Dad, the professor of romance languages. The whiskey lit him up in the center of the room. He was surrounded by adult legs and the undersides of boobs bound up in silk dresses and cigarette smoke and laughter. This is how I saw it as I crouched, unnoticed, behind the easy chair in the corner, looking up at it all. "Love's all in the periodic table of the bloody elements, right honey?"

Mom threw a highball glass at dad, missed, and the glass hit the side of the chair and rolled down onto the carpet next to me. "*Felix bene futuis*, dear!" Mom said.



The laughter in the room only grew louder. I ran my finger down the inside of the glass, where the liquor's viscosity kept it clinging through the throw. I sucked my finger and it tasted like peat smoke and the waxiness of my mother's lipstick and the eye-watering sting of a skinned knee.



I unshoulder my emptied pack and swallow the last berry. I wonder if I'll be alive when I wake or if I'll wander dead down the slope and swim into the middle of the river whose name I don't know but which is just like the Danube or the Nile or the Yangtze or the Amazon or the Mississippi—but smaller, more polite—to carry me out to a sea. I unlace my boots and set them by my pack, then lay my head on the pack and close my eyes to stars like the ones that rise in home skies.



Were we in Paris? Madrid? It was a city of limestone and marble and granite and art. The food was bathed in olive oil and hints of garlic, little flowers scattered about the plate. We were young and strong. We didn't know the language.

"A baby? You really think we should try?" I asked.

"Of course," Julie said. "It's the next thing, right?"

But we didn't try for it then. She threw the pills away that night in the hotel room trash can and we held each other, platonic, in the darkness, thinking about losing our youth to become parents, not wanting to be our parents, wondering at the inevitability.

A month later, dripping from a Venetian rainfall and our veins electric with wine, we fucked well, in an alley and in a gondola in a narrow canal and in the water closet in a dingy music club and in the confessional of a basilica and in our bed in yet another hotel room and, from all of this, on a hot asphalt afternoon in Houston nine months later, our freckles and pigtails was born.

Of course, I wasn't in Houston. I've never been in Houston. I'll never be in Houston. I was in a foreign town, staring into the eyes of our enemies and friends, pretending we didn't see each other, walking down streets listening to the call to prayers, thinking about fasting and food.



When I wake on the hillside it is still night and the moon has a brilliant ice ring around it, magnifying the light on the rocks around me. I wonder, for a moment, if this is home.



The old orange-skinned bartender in the drooping one-piece swimsuit, warm beer in one hand and a half-ash cigarette hanging from her lip, said to me to swim out as far as I could go, that no matter how far it was when I tired out I could put my feet down and find the bottom.

"You could walk to Cuba," she said, and guffawed a cloud of year-old smoke. "Bring Castro himself a god-damned Co-Cola."

I smiled at her, then I looked over at Julie. She

appeared to be forcing her own smile. Then I looked down at our daughter, our girl, our pigtails and freckles, cheeks stained by oil-streaked tears and a hopeful look. She'd been begging all morning to be allowed out into the waves. I couldn't go with her. Julie, herself a non-swimmer, had been adamant she couldn't go alone. The sun was hot, even in the shade of the thatch-roofed beach bar. My arm ached, or I imagined it did. This was before the last arm-replacement, the next redeployment, when in my mind the stub still leaked blood over everything and everyone. "Stay out of the water for three days before the operation," the surgeons had said, stern behind their glasses of rum. Clear as the sky.

"You can swim," I told our pigtails and freckles. "You can swim." She ran into the surf.



I sit up. My boots are gone. The pack is gone. My bare feet feel good against the rock and the grass. I stand and walk easily in the moonlight, noticing details that had been lost in the afternoon's escaping sun. I hear flutes, faintly, and walk in their direction. Before me is a hole in the hillside, bordered in diamonds like crystal, rubies like fire, emeralds like the Gulf of Mexico the last weekend before I'd left.



A dream, not long after we landed at the big base on some Pacific island whose name I don't recall, where all soldiers came and went on their ways to other places, where no one shot anything but dope, where no one fell in love but everyone fucked, where everything was sacred and for sale, an island that was no one's home. The dream:

"Hello, Calvin," the Italian man said, fountains behind him and three women beside him, their backs turned to me. "Welcome to Venice. We're glad you've come, but be careful you don't slip into the canals."

"I can swim."

"Not here, you can't. Too many of the dead will reach up and pull you down to join them."

And Julie's face had looked almost relaxed as she retreated into that slimy green water. I thought I saw the fingers clutched around her ankles before her gown swirled up around her and she was gone.



A cloud covers the moon, and it becomes dark this third night feeling a fourth morning coming, the jewel-framed hole before me, another beckoning, another long undressing, waiting for me to enter. A hooded figure appears at the entrance, shrouded in green cloth. By the way she turns away from me I know she is a woman. She walks down into the dark, and I follow.

After I squeeze through a pinprick opening beyond the entrance, my feet are on solid granite again. What appears to be the city stretches out below. The shrouded woman is just ahead of me on a path through dense forest and undergrowth that couldn't grow all together in one place anywhere else but in this space—swamp cypress, blue fir, water oak, slash pine, wild rose,



magnolia, eucalyptus, azalea, sago palm, camellia, dandelion, milkweed, loblolly, cedar, olive, honeysuckle, kudzu. A phosphorescent-star-pocked sky lights up a riotous day in the valley. Men gaze up, their bodies still muddled by the distance, but their eyes sparking like dying embers.

The guide stops in the middle of the path, removes her hood, shakes out her hair and turns to face me.

"I left my gun behind," I say.

"You are among enemies and friends," she says.

"I have nothing."

"We are all rich with that, here."

"I have nothing to grasp onto."

"There is no killing in the city," she says.



"Oh Calvin, don't go away again."

"I have to."



The guide leads me through the outskirts, mile upon mile billowing out like big box store petticoats, the city opening its boulevards wide to receive us. Nothing is too tall, but I can't see beyond what is right beside us, right ahead of us, right behind us. The suburb of the sub-city never stops, the same buildings and asphalt and concrete over and over, no going back, always forward. The citizens pack around us, in cars and in rickshaws and on foot, but they are indistinguishable from each other—blurs, eyes, mouths, teeth, looking and talking a roar. Traffic lights in concentric patterns and full-spectrum color direct the endless streams. The guide's name is Anna. Her hair is red.

"Let go," Anna says. "Let it go."

I'm startled. "Let what go?"

But she's already through the next intersection and onto the next street. "The city is a joy," I hear, but the voice is Julie's, not Anna's.



"This will blow your mind, Meat," my staff sergeant said from the open door of the helicopter, the blades circling slower as the engine whine cuts off. He held out a joint toward me. We were landing at the new forward base. More villages. More villagers. More patrols. The sergeant was smiling. I held a letter in my hand, the words killing whatever they had tried to capture, the illusion of home, always ungraspable. A picture, a facsimile of a child, pigtails, freckles. I spat at the sergeant and walked the other way. Too many illusions.



I look down at my map and see we've traveled the blood-line well off the edge of the goat skin. "Anna, when will we arrive?" I ask.

She is suddenly against me, her body full and present, her arms wrapped around me like vines, her breath like orchids soft against my face. "Arrive where?" she asks.

"Where you've been leading me."

"We arrived hours ago. We're here."

"This is the city?" I look around. All that has been moving has stopped. The buildings have grown to skyscrapers, shining and black, metal, glass, stone.

Gargoyles, capitals, columns, gingerbread molding, cast-iron vents belching steam, and neon tubing everywhere. Impossible balance of proportions, upside-down pyramids stretching hundreds of stories to the distant sky ceiling. The packed crowd stares at us, surrounds us, breathes our air, listens to our words.

"You could fuck me," says Anna.

"I couldn't."

"You could make love to me, then. Whatever." Her hands pull at my pants, rove under my shirt and over the skin of my back.

"It matters, what we call it," I say. "I have Julie, and a daughter."

"What if we just call it sex? Pleasure?" Anna says.

"Procreation, fine, whatever." I'm exasperated.

"No, not that. We don't make life here, in the city."

"What is this? Why have you led me here?"

"Why did you come?"

"Anna, do you love me?"

"I can."

"But we're enemies."

"And we're friends," she says, and then she vanishes. I look around, and all the rest of the people are gone, too. The streets are gray. The neon lights extinguish, their tubes turning black. A cold wind howls through the concrete canyons. I walk onward.



"Oh, Calvin, why did you have to go again?" Julie cried on the other end of the phone, on the other side of the world.

"Is she going to make it?"

"Fuck you, Calvin. She's gone." Our pigtails and freckles.

"I thought she'd pull through, that she'd come home, that she'd be there when I came back."

"Do you even know where home is anymore?" Julie. Julie is home.

"Was it Houston?" I asked. It could have been anywhere that she picked it up. Houston, Lake Charles, Gary. Or one of the small places with dangers hidden, not in big factories and dark streets, but in the small summer places of swimming holes. Cloverdale, Satsuma, Sunset, Happiness, Utopia. A different town every year.

"It was home, Calvin. It was home. And you weren't."

I'd sat in the communications tent, the phone to my ear, for a half-hour after she hung up on me.



As I walk through the streets of the city, I notice that the windows of the buildings are busted out, shards hanging in gaped openings like young jack-o-lanterns or bombsites. Indistinguishable faces appear in the window openings, dark, their eyes staring and blank. They fear me or pity me or hate me. I'm with them, if I only could know where I am. Ahead, I see a figure standing in the middle of the street, facing away from me. I hope it is Anna. It might even be Julie. As I approach, the skyscrapers flatten again into the endless scream of rectangular boxes; the neon tubes reignite; I feel the rush of the crowd on all sides. The figure ahead



remains still, waiting.

Close enough, suddenly, to reach out and touch, I put a hand up to her shoulder, but the figure melts downward. When she turns, she is neither Anna nor Julie nor even my freckles and pigtails, but the old dwarf, three fingers on each hand. In one hand he holds a rope, on the other end of which is a goat, flayed of its skin, all taut muscle and ropey veins and flies. Eyeballs, meat. The dwarf looks at me, laughter across his wrinkled face. "You have found where you are going?" he asks.

"The map came to an end." I hold up the skin map to show him where the line of dried blood came to an end on the edge of the map, leaving me lost and without my guide.

"The map is not ended," he says. "You only need to turn it over." And he takes the map from me, folds it, then unfolds it so that the other side is facing up. I see nothing but spots, splotches of blood, fresh red blood. He smooths the map over the back of his goat, pulling the map tight and tucking it into crevices between the muscles covering the ribs, tying a corner around one of the horns, stretching it until it covers the goat. The goat rears its legs and kicks, then tugs the rope out of the dwarf's hands and runs down the road.

"What do I do now?" I ask the dwarf. I suppose he's long since spent the dollars I gave him.

"The goat is the map. Follow him." His chuckle follows me again, as this time I run after the goat, little more than a bleating cloud of dirt ahead of me.

They called themselves "men." With their guns and their grenades and their rockets and their drones and their bombs and their flame-throwers and their hashish and their prostitutes and their moonshine and their letters from home—they called themselves "men." "Let's go fuck some shit up," said the men. "Let's go out on patrol," said the men. "Let's build roads and schools," said the men. "And a new water purification system," said the men. "But first let's kill us some gooks, some spics, some fags, some chinks, some ragheads, some sand niggers, some kikes, some jungle monkeys," said the men. "Let's get some of that pussy pussy," said the men. They called themselves "men."

I closed my eyes on the roomful of men and feigned sleep. My freckles and pigtails was covered in dirt. The men said, "Thomeone getting thoft? Thomeone want hith mommy and hith loverman?" I thought the men could go fuck themselves. It hadn't always been like this. Life hadn't always been like this. It had been like a home.

I've been following the goat. The phosphorescent skies dim and brighten in regular cycles, but I don't remember time outside the city any longer. Always he runs, just within my sight but outside my grasp. The city seems to end, then springs up again, and always we run.

"Why's this important?" I asked over the rumble of the helicopter.

"Shut up, Meat," said the sarge. "They're the enemy. You shoot them. We go home." The men were high-tech, deadly statues, silent in their helmets and goggles and packs and guns and clips and com equipment, waiting for the chopper to set down. But inside, I knew, they were thinking cheers of victory, whimpers of fear, moans of ecstasy, because they were men and this is what they'd always been.

The skids hit the ground hard. Men, women, boys, girls, poured out of the open doors of houses, colors swirling around them, then just as quickly drained back through the doorways, but doors or walls didn't matter against those who called themselves men and the weapons they brought with them. These buildings were home, but it didn't matter. Then shots thundered from behind us, then from either side, unexpected. These were our friends and our enemies. I sat in the dirt behind a house. I pulled a spade from my pack and tested the loose soil, turning over a few shovels-full. This was home.

The phosphorescent starlit sky dims a third time in my run. The city finally seems to have come to an end. A light in a house window comes up and falls behind. The goat slows. If I had it in me to keep sprinting, I could catch him quickly. Instead I jog, getting close enough I can see the glow of a map formed on his skin, but not close enough to grab him in my arms, hug him, weep.

The road feels ancient under my feet, pavers hewn from long-ago hillsides, when women and men watched the sun and the stars and discovered geometry and built temples to the gods of love and intellect. Ahead, a distant spark grows into a roaring campfire, a circle of cloaked figures sitting around it.

The dirt covered me like a fine shallow grave—rocks, too. I'd left only two holes, my goggles like windows between rocks as the firefight raged above me, enemies and friends on all sides, until the shooting died down and the cussing rose up, the American "fuck," the dragging of bodies, the calls of "Where's Meat, fuck" and "fucker been weird" and "where the fuck" and "no fucking body" and "did he fucking run off with them bastard children or get fucking captured" and "fuck fuck fuck" and "fucking paperwork catastrophe," and then boots beating back and chopper rotors lifting off and then quiet punctuated only by the occasional scrabble of rodent feet, then darkness, then the slithering skin of serpents, tongues flicking goggle panes, and then nothing and nothing and nothing.

At the beginning of the first day, I rose, dirt falling loose from around the mask covering my mouth, from the full pack on my back, through the laces of my boots, from the smile on my face, stubble starting to grow. A scorpion slid into and then out of my pocket, nothing for it. The swamp stretched ahead.

As we near the fire circle, I catch up to the goat, reach down and grab the rope that has been hanging loose from his neck. The goat stops. I look down at his back



and see a red line of fresh blood run across to an x low on his left flank, near his heart. We are here.

“Come. Sit with us,” says one of the figures. They all pull their hoods back. In the firelight, they are men and women. Some are dark. Some are not. Some look like the doctors who cut off my arms. Some look like the doctors who sew on new arms. Some look like the old bartender by the beach. Some look like the dwarf. Some look like my third grade teachers. Some look like Julie. Some look like Anna. They aren’t really these people. But they could be.



I have a picture in my mind, something more than a facsimile but less than a dream. A hotel room bed with sunlight from some vacation spot blazing through the window. Julie is snuggled up against me. Our pigtails and freckles, maybe she’s four in this picture, is all smiles, and she comes running into the picture and jumping onto the bed, climbing over Julie and me. There is tickling and giggling and my heart feels like it will bust and my cheeks feel like they will crack and then we are indistinguishable from each other and the image halts and I think, if I can only get back here.



I approach their circle and sit among them. The goat sits behind me, gently butts its horns against my back, boring into my shoulders, penetrating my heart.

“It took you a long time to arrive,” says one who looks like a surgeon.

“You’re not easy to find.”

“You only needed to follow the map,” says another, who looks like the old bartender. The goat begins nuzzling and licking my neck and the backs of my ears. He nibbles my hair. I feel a warm oozing under my shirt.

“I did,” I say. “I followed the map for many days. I thought you would be in the city.”

“We are in the city,” one says.

“You did well,” says another.

I reach under my shirt and bring my hand out. It is covered in blood, warm and sticky, and I feel more pouring down my sides, filling my lap, pooling around my legs.

“You should tell us your stories,” says the one who looks like Anna. I imagine her body pressed against mine again.

“That’s what I’ve been doing,” I say. “They’re the only stories I know.”

“Then you should be rewarded,” says the one who looks like Julie. I imagine her lips on my lips. I imagine the lips of our pigtails and freckles on her breast. I imagine lips.

“What would you like?” says the one who looks like my mother, though she could also be a geometry teacher or a temple-builder.

“To be home,” I say.

And then I was.



*Tad Bartlett is a New Orleans author and attorney. His work has placed numerous times in the **Pirate’s Alley Faulkner Society’s William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition**. **Through the Valley of the Shadow of Home** appeared originally in the October 2014 issue of *Bird’s Thumb*. Tad Bartlett’s essays are found in the online **Oxford American**; his poetry in **The Double Dealer**, and his fiction in **The Rappahannock Review**. He is currently an MFA student at the Creative Writing Workshop at the University of New Orleans. Tad is a founding member of the **Peauxdunque Writers Alliance**. He also is a practicing attorney with the New Orleans law firm of Jones, Swanson, Huddell, and Garrison.*



THE FRONT MAN

By J. Ed Marston

DAMN I LOOK SHARP IN THIS SUIT. I mean so sharp seeing my reflection about gives me a paper cut. And this elevator is just a box of mirrors on all sides. No getting away from my image. And why would anyone want to? A young white buck looking as put together as a brother on Sunday. The middle-aged lady standing next to me, she knows it too.

I give her a sidelong look and smile with all my teeth. She pretends to ignore me, but when the doors open on the fourth floor, she fans her nose with her hand and says, "A little strong," before disappearing into the cubicle farm.

Shit. Must've gone too heavy on the Givenchy. I spritzed it on thinking about Shelley Blakely coming in for her job interview this morning. I want to impress her enough to move halfway across the country to work for me. To blow her away with my confidence, not out of the room with my cologne. It's the details that get you. That's what Malcolm says.

When the elevator opens on my floor, I make a beeline for the bathroom and try to tone the smell down. Some guy I've seen around the break room catches me standing at the sink with one hand up under my shirt trying to swab the smell out of my chest hair with hand soap. Break room guy smirks at me in the mirror but doesn't say anything. Better not. In a few months, I'm going to be his boss. Of course, he doesn't know that. No one does except me and Malcolm.



When I get to my cubicle, Malcolm calls almost as soon as I sit down. I figure he wants to give me a pep talk before I interview Shelley. From a corporate perspective, Malcolm is an inclusion officer's ultimate dream. African American? Check. Inner city background? Check. Summa Cum Laude at Princeton? Check plus. The kind of leader folks gladly follow? Check yeah! At ease shooting the shit with billionaire board members? Hot damn triple check!

But, to me Malcolm isn't just a set of corporate data points. He's the man who saw what I have to contribute even though I don't look good on paper like he does.

I answer the phone with a smile, but Malcolm's voice is cold. "Why couldn't you find someone local?" I imagine him sixteen floors above, standing at his wall-size window like a superhero keeping watch over the average citizens below. The last thing I want to do is

disappoint him.

"Something wrong?" I ask.
"The upper floors think it's ballsy of you, approving airfare from Tennessee for an entry-level job candidate."

"Why would they even notice a tiny expense like that?"

"They're flagging all travel for extra review," Malcolm says. "You got yourself noticed."

"Crap," I say.

"I'd put it stronger," Malcolm says. "All you had to do was stay off the radar until we were making serious money, and I probably could've buried it in the budget if you failed."

Now, it sounds like Malcolm might bury me in the unemployment line before I have a chance to even try. That'd be the safest thing for him to do. At this point, there's no official connection between us, but if he covers for me on the travel expenses and the project fails, it'll be on him.

"This will work," I say. "You saw the code Shelley wrote." I don't need to remind him that Shelley is exactly what he told me to look for. Someone like me, a b-school graduate from the backwoods with overlooked gifts. Coming up the way Malcolm did, he understands the power of talent with something to prove. He's my one shot at the major leagues, and if he doesn't fire me, I'll be Shelley's.

But, Malcolm doesn't need me. He's got other unconventional hires peppered throughout the company. They're quietly climbing the floors. When the big chair empties and Malcolm is ready to make his move, they'll be right where he needs them.

Me? I serve a different purpose. As a white guy, I can take a big risk. If we succeed, I get promoted, and Malcolm shows the board he's got serious CEO potential.

He sighs. "This just became the most important hire you'll ever make."



Down in reception, I recognize Shelley from our Skype interview. Mmm mmm mm mm mmm. That webcam told barely half the truth. This girl makes an off-the-rack skirt suit look totally off-the-hook. But, it's not her looks that really get me. She's got my kind of confidence. She watches the comings and goings in reception like it's all happening at her direction.

I went looking for a coder and found a woman I'd be lucky to marry. What? Did you think I was just a



heartless suit?

But, business comes first. If she's the woman I think she is, she'll agree with that.

The barest twist in the corner of her smile let's me know she's really nervous, but I doubt anyone else would see it. It takes one to know one.

"Shelly Blakely, I presume," I say, bending slightly at the waist as I take her hand.

She joins the game with a smile. "Well, I'm sure as hell not Dr. Livingston." Isn't it great when you meet someone who gets your particular kind of goofiness?

That's when I notice a strange smell in the lobby. I usher her toward the elevator hoping she hasn't caught wind of it yet, but when the doors close, the stench is even worse.

"Sorry," I say. "I'll have someone take care of that."

"Did you go a little heavy on the cologne?" she says. I like the way she teases me without making me feel bad, but Givenchy and hand soap is not what I'm smelling. It's like a skunk eating stinkbugs in a men's locker room.

"Not the cologne," I say. "Can't you smell that odor?"

She nods agreeable but with an expression that says she's not sure what I'm talking about. I don't see how. It's bad enough to make me gag. And, it's just as strong when we get off at my floor and go to the conference room for her interview. Somehow, the odor doesn't bother Shelley. She asks where she can freshen up before we start.

As soon as she leaves, the smell fades. Shit.

But, I just don't see how it can be Shelley. She's well-groomed with a bright, healthy smile. Besides, this isn't a normal human odor.

Beyond the conference room windows, a guy is standing in his cubicle. As Shelley comes back from the bathroom, he makes a sour face as her smell hits him. His eyes follow after her with an expression that asks, "How in the world?"

But, Shelley still seems completely oblivious. There's a baby powder smell about her now that cloaks the other a little. At least my eyes aren't watering anymore.

We pick up where we left off the Skype interview. She's figured out how she can develop the technology we need. I'm so excited I almost forget the smell until Malcolm bounds into the room. His world-embracing smile shrinks into a clinch. He thanks Shelley for

coming and motions for me to follow him outside, closing the door behind us.

"Christ almighty," Malcolm says. "Is that smell coming from her?"

"She can work remotely," I say. "You won't believe the amazing stuff we're coming up with in there."

Malcolm shakes his head. "That won't fly." He wants an in-house developer with enough loyalty not to sell our breakthroughs to the competition.

"But, what about hiring people with something to prove..."

He cuts me off. "Don't quote me to me," he says. "There's a limit." He practically flees toward the stairwell hoping for better air.

The conference room isn't soundproof. Shelley heard everything. She gathers her things. Her face is blank as she opens the door, but I know the corners of her eyes are burning with tears.

"I'm so sorry," I tell her.

"I know," she says. "I was just hoping..."

I imagine her housebound existence out in rural Tennessee. She was hoping I'd like her enough not to be bothered by the odor or maybe that I'd be the one person in the world who would like the way she smells. Isn't there at least one person for everybody?

I could be her front man. I'd quit my job. We'd set up a consulting firm. She'd develop the technology, and I'd get us past the corporate gatekeepers and into some fat contracts.

Shelley stands close, not reaching for me or pulling away. In the movie version of my life, I'd take her in my arms, but things smell bad for a reason, right? Odors signal invisible wrongs like spoiled food and disease.

Damned if I know what's wrong with Shelley though. She turns away and walks unbowed to the elevator. The poise I'd taken for confidence was really the pride that helped her endure the taunting voices crying "Smelly Shelley" across the schoolyard.

I don't call after her. I don't trust my voice enough to say goodbye. As I watch the elevator close on my last glimpse of Shelley Blakely, I try to keep her smell vivid in my nose. I need to remember it long enough to find a way to hate her, so I don't have to hate myself.

*I would rather be attacked than unnoticed.
For the worst thing you can do to an author
is to be silent as to his works.*

-Samuel Johnson



*J.Ed. Marston, born in small town Alabama and a graduate of Spring Hill College in Mobile, has worked as a public defense paralegal, a small town newspaper reporter, the manager of a non-profit serving homeless people, and currently leads communications for the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce. He is the founding editor of **Trend Magazine** and played a role in starting a local alternative weekly for which he was a regular contributor. Marston's novel, **Kites All Quite Tall**, which was co-authored with Tad Bartlett, made the short-list for the finalist in the Faulkner-Wisdom Novel competition and his poem, **The Limit Perfected Fish**, was a finalist in this year's poetry competition. He was also a member of the Inaugural Oxford American Summit for Ambitious Writers. Marston claims dual citizenship as a resident of Chattanooga and a satellite member of the **Peauxdunque Chapter of the Words & Music Writers Alliance of New Orleans**.*



Lesson for a Bookstore

Some years ago Oxford University Press released an edition of **James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson** with Boswell's **Tour of the Hebrides** chronologically inserted. **The Tour**, published several years before **The Life**, is a journal of Johnson and Boswell's travels in the Scottish islands. Since I had been reading and collecting books by and about both men for a long time, and since **The Tour** was not readily available, I ordered the Oxford edition from a local bookstore. Later, while paying for my copy, the store owner said to me, "Samuel Johnson... I bet you don't know his cat's name." I paused, smiled, and answered, "Hodge. Dr. Johnson's cat was named Hodge."

The bookstore owner's deflated pride has been a lesson I've not forgotten in the 25 years at Faulkner House: Don't flaunt knowledge; share it. Customers, I always assume, know as much as I do, and if they are avid collectors, they likely know more. So I listen and learn.

Happy reading to you.



I LOVE THIS TOWN

An Excerpt From

THE RIGHT THING

By Amy Conner

WE HAD A RAT PROBLEM. No matter how often I called Crescent City Pest Control, they always said the same thing: they couldn't help us. The Norway rats infesting my miniscule back yard were coming from the semi-abandoned house behind the fence, lured by a massive, sprawling debris-field of Popeye's fried chicken bones and greasy to-go boxes, half-full containers of mashed potatoes and moldy red beans. It was the evidence of impromptu picnics and al fresco get-togethers the neighborhood drug lord and his gang enjoyed there before they'd decamp and go a-dealing. This left it up to me, the homeowner next door, to venture inside the ramshackle, falling-down house and hoe out their mess if I didn't want endless rat parties in the backyard.

Needless to say, that wasn't going to happen. Instead, we got a dog, a Boxer that proved to have no interest in rats whatsoever. My husband and I soon discovered to our dismay that Steve the dog was more interested in escaping from our back yard and rambling around town on mysterious missions of his own. Maybe he was as revolted by the rodent infestation as we were, maybe he wanted to make some new friends. At any rate, while the rats lolled around on the grass of the backyard in their smoking jackets, dealing hands of bridge and drinking mai-tais,

Steve was AWOL. Even though he was a failure as an exterminator, I found I did miss his company when he was gone, for in every other respect he was a pretty good dog. Consequently, I'd have to go on the hunt for Steve. Sometimes I located him right away, but not always. Sometimes it would be days before he found his way home.

So when once again I'd come home from work only to discover Steve had done a bunk, I'd head out into the pock-marked, semi-dangerous streets armed with a staple gun and a bunch of Xeroxed flyers advertising a reward for his return. I had my regular telephone poles, the ones covered with that steel armor of staples from a billion other flyers, and there I'd grimly post our predicament.

It didn't take long before the neighborhood urchins began showing up at my gate with news. The dog had been spotted eighteen blocks away on St. Charles Avenue, chasing a streetcar. He was under a house near the Cohn Street cemetery and wouldn't come out unless someone was willing to crawl under there to get him. It could be that Steve was in the Langenstein's parking lot, panhandling the scandalized Uptown society doyens for spare change. For the lowly sum of twenty dollars, the urchins would be happy to collect him and bring my dog right to my front door. At first I was grateful for the help, until it finally dawned on me that this was a ransom operation. Still, for a while I paid up anyway to insure that Steve could come home.

Meanwhile, the rats partied on.

The day dawned when this method of dealing with the problem came to an end, however. Instead of forking over the usual twenty dollars, I grabbed the neck of the head ransomer's Ninja Turtle sweatshirt and yanked him into my outraged orbit. His startled, nine year-old eyes blinked in panic, his little jaw falling open like a broken egg.

"Where the hell is my dog?" I snarled.

Ten minutes later, I was banging loudly on a paint-peeling front door two blocks over on Cherokee Street. When nobody answered, I tried the handle and found the door unlocked. Still fueled by outrage



and that suicidal urban fury of the “enough is enough” persuasion, I righteously stomped into the front room of the shotgun house, straight into the middle of a group of stoned miscreants who were cutting up a huge Hefty bag of fragrant pot. I froze. In a round of thunderous clicks, every last gang-banger cocked and leveled a handgun at me. Steve, on the other hand, was contentedly hanging out at the feet of the neighborhood dealer, who was in the act of feeding him chicken-skin from one of several family-sized boxes of Popeye’s.

“This your dog?” the dealer asked, dropping his Glock on the table in disgust. “He already be eatin’ 20 dollars of my chicken. Ain’t you ever gone feed his ass?”

The ransom-scam came to an end when we built a higher fence around the backyard and Steve roamed no more. In the spirit of supporting the local economy and encouraging meaningful, youthful enterprise, though, I paid the urchins a bounty of a dollar apiece for rat carcasses and in time the rodent party moved



*Amy Carolyn Conner, born in Cheyenne, WY, grew in Jackson, MS, and completed her BA in philosophy and ethics with honors at Newcomb College of Tulane University after an interval at The Yorkshire Riding Center in Harrogate, England, acquiring horse-training skills. She married Zachary Casey, a native New Orleanian, and settled in New Orleans for a few months before Casey moved the family to Singapore, a professional relocation. They had two children, Fionn and Rue Casey before they divorce. Her work history includes (but is not limited to) jobs as runway model, private investigator, horse trainer/riding instructor, oriental rug and antique sales woman, legal secretary, executive assistant, and t-shirt designer. From 1986 to 2006, she was part-owner with Casey of the world’s largest alligator farming concern and during that time worked in the skin business with Hermes in Paris, Gucci in Milan and other high-end designers of premium luxury strap goods. During this period, Ms. Conner often traveled in Europe to promote the business and fell in love with Paris and the French people. During their marriage, Ms. Conner has lived in New Orleans and Covington, a New Orleans suburb for most of her adult life, except for a brief period in Jackson in the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina. She began writing in earnest at age 50, realizing “I could not be a horse-trainer forever.” **The Right Thing**, published in spring, 2014, is her second novel.*

About Amy Conner's New Book

The Right Thing is a story about friendship and what we owe the people we love and how to navigate compromise and principle. **The Right Thing** is also a midnight road trip to the New Orleans’ Fairgrounds Race Track, a dog-napping, a one-night stand, and an evening spent in the trailer of a transsexual. It’s a southern country lane with potholes, twists, and turns on the way to an inevitable yet satisfying ending. For every woman who loved **Thelma and Louise** and Jane Austen and Harper Lee, **The Right Thing** is a literary romp you won’t want to miss.



SOUTH, AMERICA

By Rod Davis

Editor's Note:

Reviewers are comparing author Rod Davis to the late, great Mickey Spillane since his new novel, *South, America* was released. In this new story, maverick journalist and Big Easy transplant Jack Prine finds himself drawn into a web of violence and deceit after finding the body of a well-dressed black man with a bashed-in skull in a gutter in the Faubourg Marigny, downriver from the French Quarter of New Orleans. The victim's beautiful sister, Elle Meridian, draws Jack into a desperate flight across the Deep South and back to New Orleans to discover why her brother was killed—and why she faces death herself. In this passage they are in the Mississippi Delta, seeking shelter after a shoot-out with hoods in the Natchez Trace. Jack realizes they still are being followed, but by a new threat: a mob enforcer known as Big Red, who corners Jack atop an observation tower in a state park overlooking the River at Rosedale, LA. After bracing Jack to find out what he may know about a mysterious painting belonging to Elle's corrupt white half-brother, Trey, Red senses something in play that's more complicated than recovering stolen property. Jack tries to shake off the big man's punches but Red, impressed with Jack's toughness if not his sass, needs more answers.

Excerpt

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU, anyway?"

"My name's Prine. Jack. I live in New Orleans, I'm a writer. Sort of. I met a pretty girl. People started chasing us. I'm just making this up as we go . . ."

The anger passed from Red's face. It was replaced by something akin to bemusement.

"You don't have any idea who I am, do you?"

"Other than one of Trey's guys, no."

He shook his head. "Writer, huh? Sort of? Hmm. Well, Shakespeare, a rose ain't a rose out here and I ain't workin' for that rich boy scum. So don't call me that again."

I nodded with what I hoped was conviction.

"I work for some other people. This Barnett prick owes them a lot of money. He has a piece of art worth a few million that'll pay it off. He was gonna give it to us but somehow hasn't been able to." He wiped his forehead again. "Turns out you're the reason, at least so he tells my boss."

"That he doesn't have the painting?"

"That's his story. And then there's that business back there on the Natchez Trace. What kind of guy are

you?"

"What business?" This time it was in the stomach leg-kick. Big guy was agile. I collapsed onto my knees. I don't know how long it was before I could breathe steadily. "You might be an okay guy for all I know but that's not my job to pass that kind of judgment. You follow? Stand up."

I did, slowly. I coughed up some blood. My ribs were on fire.

"You get that painting for me, you and that woman. It'll save me some extra work and you a lot of pain."

"I'm telling you I don't know."

"It's the only shot you got, Shakespeare."

Against the railing again, I was leaning. Or was that how my German grandmother used to talk? "How much time?"

He thought for a moment. "I'd say 72 hours. That'll be Thursday. No, wait, I got something in Houston. You get a break. We'll say Saturday."

"I don't even know where to start."



“Seems to me you already are started. So let’s say Saturday. Noon.”

“High noon?”

It was a light swat this time, but I got the point. I spat out some blood. “How would I get in touch?”

“That’s the easy part. The hard part is showing up with something.”

“If I can’t find it?”

He shrugged. “I just gave you two extra days.”

“And if I do? Then our business with you is all done. Elle, too.”

“I could give a shit after that.”

“You’d let us walk away.”

“You can walk to China for all I care once I get delivery.”

I thought on that.

“What about Trey?”

“I wouldn’t worry about him.”

His eyes told me he was telling the truth.

“Take this.” He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote a number on it and gave it to me. “Don’t lose it. Call when you have something.”

“‘Big Red?’ That’s who I ask for?”

“Ain’t nobody else gonna have that number.”

“No.”

“So we’ll have proper introductions later. Have some tea and cookies and all that good shit.”

“What if I just give it to Trey? He always seems to be

able to find me anyway. You can get it from him.”

The big man’s eyes narrowed. “Under no fucking circumstances. You gonna bring that up again?”

My head needed to be less foggy. It needed not to be hit again. “Trey who?”

“I’m going to leave now. You probably ought to get busy.”

“You’re not giving me much time.”

“Can’t help you, hoss. Saturday’s a hard date. Noon.”

“Why not just throw in the weekend?”

“Weekends are for fishin’, the boss ain’t got anything for me to do. And you know what happens if I do have to work the whole weekend? Having to find you and all that shit ‘cause you’re late, when I ought to be down in the Gulf?”

“I have an idea.”

“Nothing personal. But that’s the way it would have to be.”

He started to back away, then stopped.

“Only thing is, back there the other day when you were doing all that fancy work with the shotgun on the Trace. You remember that, no?”

“I remember.”

“Those were Barnett’s boys. At least one of ‘em was, the brother. The other, Reggie, he’s with us. Works with Barnett off and on, but mostly he’s one of our boys. You can’t just shoot him. We can’t let you. It was pretty impressive, though. They’re pros. You was in the military, maybe?”

“Army.”

“Over in Iraq?”

“Korea, couple of other places. I was out before all that.”

“Me, too. ‘Nam, though. Right at the end. And a little after.”

He pulled up the right sleeve on his shirt to show me



a black horsehead tattoo. First Cav. We exchanged a weird look of recognition that all vets know means something and doesn't.

"They won't let you get away with it, though. Shooting up the help."

"I thought you wanted me to find that painting."

"Yeah, because that's the real business. But you know, there's penalties in this game when you break the rules. You broke some. You sit in the box."

This time it was a right fist, hard to the chest, and another to the stomach. I dropped like a sack of cats. It was easier just to lie back on the wooden floor rather than go to all the effort to actually sit up.

He stood above me. I think he was smiling.

"Thing is, nobody likes that little bastard Reggie, that you shot up. Most of us wish you'd blown his head off instead of just making him limp around for a while, whining about how you ambushed him and Delmore, who by the way got a pretty good concussion. We like Delmore, though. Good thing you didn't shoot him, too."

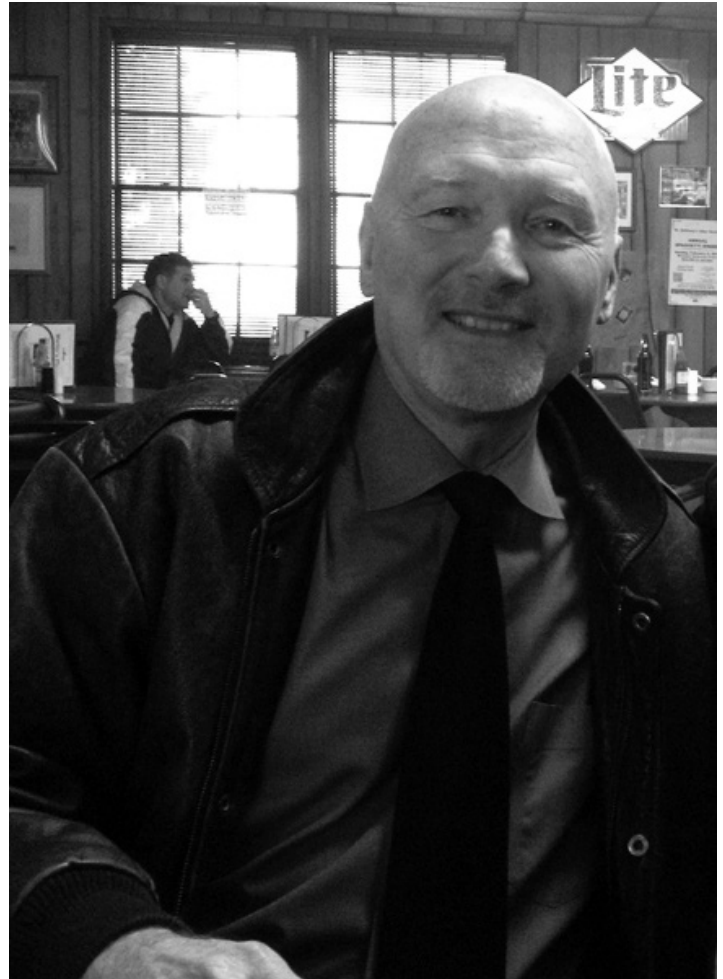
"I thought they were going to kill us."

"Hell, you were probably right. That's how stupid Reggie is. But I'm not."

I coughed and raised to one elbow.

"So that's the fine for Reggie."
He walked to the stairwell and started down. From a few flights below, I heard him call out, "Good luck. I'm counting on you."

I lay back, watching the sun brighten the morning and



drive away the mist and clouds. I realized there were no mosquitoes up here. That was good. It was all good, wasn't that the deal? And then the night came, and stars, and sleep.

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Rod Davis, award-winning author of Corina's Way is being compared James M. Cain and Mickey Spillane with his new Southern noir novel South, America. The

Recommended Reading: Set in New Orleans

Tom Cooper, **The Marauders**

In his debut novel, local author Tom Cooper delves into the heart of the Bayou in the aftermath of the BP oil spill. Set alternately in New Orleans and in the Barataria, this story follows Lindquist, a one-armed oxycontin-addicted shrimper searching for Jean LaFitte's treasure in the thick and swampy backwoods of Louisiana. Along the way, he becomes involved with a cast of characters converging on the Bayou from New Orleans to New York in a time of national emergency, when Louisianans are left to fend for themselves in the wake of an environmental crisis. All the fantastical elements of Louisiana lore come to life in this story, from killer alligators to voodoo curses to pirate's treasure. And this is the crux of the tale: Louisiana is a magical place, a place that cannot be defeated, even in the face of years of tragedy.



REVIEW:

M.O. WALSH'S

MY SUNSHINE AWAY

By Jade Hurter

M.O. Walsh's debut novel, 2015's **My Sunshine Away**, which was the winner of the 2013(?) William Faulkner-William Wisdom Prize for Novel in Progress, has been praised by Southern literary royalty the likes of Kathryn Stockett and Anne Rice. Walsh's prose moves the story along at a pace that finds the perfect compromise between meditative and page-turner. Set in Baton Rouge in the early 90's, the book is narrated by an unnamed man recalling his childhood, beginning with the year his neighbor, the 15-year-old Lindy Simpson, was raped on their usually quiet Southern street. The rape remains unsolved, and the narrator confesses to us early on that he is a suspect. This is, in many ways, a deeply unsettling story: we are immersed in the consciousness of a narrator who may or may not be a rapist, and whose lovesick actions toward Lindy are often unconscionable.

My Sunshine Away seems to plunge us into a normal childhood in the South, on Piney Creek Road, where neighborhood kids spent their days "tearing around in go-karts, coloring chalk figures on [their] driveways, or chasing snakes down into storm gutters." But a dark current runs beneath the narrative. This is a street shaken to its core by the sexual assault of a teenage girl, Lindy Simpson. The insularity of the story is emphasized by the fact that the rape takes place right outside Lindy's house, across the street from the narrator's own home. Piney Creek is quietly, constantly under siege from the kinds of tragedies that are inevitable in any suburban community—unrequited young love, divorce—as well as the kinds of tragedies that make the reader question what is normal in human nature. Lindy's rape is just the publicly tangible manifestation of a world in which adult men take pictures of their teenage neighbors and drug their children, where the narrator spies on Lindy from an oak tree and draws her head onto pornographic images.

The darkness of the novel is tempered by

the fact that it is also a kind of love story. Walsh has a brilliant ability to crystallize what it means to be young and in love without veering into the cliché. Speaking of Lindy, our narrator says, "There's this girl. And when I look at her, I don't know what to do." And on technology: "There were no cell phones. No private text messages. It was simply one on one conversation and, if it was any good at all, you had to whisper." This nostalgic, evocative power is found on every page. Even if you didn't grow up in the South, you will find remnants of your own high school experiences in the Spanish moss and mosquitoes of Piney Creek Road. And you will find yourself nostalgic for summer in Baton Rouge, even if you have never been, when confronted with descriptions like this one:

And so the soul of this place lives in the parties that grow here, not just Mardi Gras, no, but rather the kind that start with a simple phone call to a neighbor, a friend. And after the heat is discussed and your troubles shared you say man it'd be nice to see you, your kids, your smile. And from this grows a spread several tables long, covered in newspaper, with long rows of crawfish spilled steaming from aluminum pots...

One can't help but feel that South Louisiana is more than a backdrop to this story: it is almost a living character, loved by the narrator with the same passion he feels for Lindy.

This story is as much about Lindy as it is about the narrator. Lindy is objectified by almost everyone she encounters, reminding the reader of what it is like to grow up as a young girl in a world that becomes increasingly unsafe the more she begins to look like a woman. Lindy is never, however, objectified by the author. She is a real girl, experiencing a trauma that is not understood by the narrator, but that is deeply understood by the author. Walsh never gives us the narrator's name, reminding us that the real protagonist



is, in a way, Lindy. However, the namelessness of the narrator also fits him into the tradition of the “every man,” and this is what makes the book truly chilling. Does every man really enact such violence on the women around him? The narrator concludes, in the final pages of the book, with what we have wanted him to recognize all along: “That’s why I am so lucky to have Julie around now, and to have had my mother and Rachel around for so long, to make me realize that life is not always about me and the unloading of my conscience. The story of Lindy’s rape, for instance. It is about Lindy. And that is all.” As he grows from a boy into a man, the narrator realizes that there is a world of women around him, women with secrets, women whose parallel existence in the world is shockingly different from his own. He realizes, for instance, that Lindy was probably not the only girl to be raped that year in Baton Rouge. That women bear scars that they don’t tell men about.

It is this nuanced understanding of what it means to be a man that makes **My Sunshine Away** so special. It is unsettling to read what may present itself as a mystery about a rape, but the solution to the mystery is, appropriately, unsatisfying in a way that a true crime novel’s ending never is. There is nothing glamorous, nothing outrageous about rape. We aren’t reading to find out who did it. Men commit these atrocities against women every day. This isn’t a mystery so much as it is the story of a man who comes to recognize his own complicity in a culture that is dangerous to women. It is a story about becoming a better man, and recognizing that some narratives will always remain secret.



As he grows from a boy into a man, the narrator realizes that there is a world of women around him, women with secrets, women whose parallel existence in the world is shockingly different from his own.

M.O. Walsh, who won the Faulkner Society’s Novel-in-Progress award two years ago with the work **Whiteflies**, since has completed and published this novel, now called **My Sunshine Away**, to Amy Einhorn Books/Putnam. Currently, M. O. is running the Writers Workshop (MFA) program at the University of New Orleans. His fiction and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Oxford American*, *Epoch* and *American Short Fiction*, among others, and been anthologized in **Best New American Voices**, **Best of the Net**, **Louisiana in Words**, and **Bar Stories**. His first book, the short story collection **The Prospect of Magic**, won the Tartt’s First Fiction Prize, was a Finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award in General Fiction, and was an Editor’s Pick for Best Book of 2010 by *Oxford American*. He is Fiction Editor for *Bayou Magazine* at the University of New Orleans. He has a wife named Sarah, a daughter named Magnolia, a dog named Gus, and is happy.



PHOTOGRAPHY



*This photograph of a Classical Revival villa is located in the Getsemani neighborhood of Cartagena, Colombia, and was taken in 2010 by Richard Sexton and appears in his new book, **Creole World: Photographs of New Orleans and the Latin Caribbean Sphere.***

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THE NORTHERNMOST CITY OF THE CARIBBEAN NEW ORLEANS AND THE CREOLE WORLD

By Rosemary James

SOME 51 YEARS AGO I VISITED New Orleans for the first time and immediately felt at home in the Vieux Carre, that most distinctive section of the city immediately adjacent to the Mississippi River, the place selected for their settlement by French explorers because of the relatively high ground. In the years after Iberville and Bienville and their entourages claimed the area for their own, ownership switched to the Spanish, who, like the French, left their stamp on the look of the place.

When I first came in the Fall of 1963, it had not been over-hoteled, over-condominiumized, over-festivalized, and it immediately struck a chord with me because it had the look and feel of *Casco Viejo* in Panama, the Latin American country where I had spent my childhood. Then, the Vieux Carre and adjoining historic areas still retained most of their Creole flavor.

Even now, those sights in the Vieux Carre, Tremé, Faubourg Marigny, and the Bywater which tug at my heart strings are those which have survived in spite of the pursuit by careless politicians of the almighty tourist dollar...the stucco-over brick-Creole cottages, some still with their hand-made tiled roofs, the cypress cottages with fanciful millwork, the smaller townhouses with hand-wrought ironwork, balconies and narrow streets, the smell of strong black coffee, and cooking smells of sugar and spices. Although much has been sacrificed in this half century, New Orleans remains, without doubt the northernmost city in the Caribbean.

Two years ago, my husband accompanied me on a sentimental journey to revisit the places of my childhood in Panama. Like the French Quarter in the 50s, Panama's *Casco Viejo* had become something of a slum until a decade or so ago when it was declared an International Heritage site and Panamanians began reclaiming it with an intensive program of renovations. They still have a long way to go and they will have

to be very careful that they do not succumb to over-commercialization of this incredible treasure trove of architecturally and historically significant buildings. But the similarities between the heritage of the our primary historic sites and theirs remain immediately obvious in the scale and types of construction, the overtures to heat and humidity, the narrow streets, balconies, and the sound of music everywhere, exotic food and floral odors mingling.

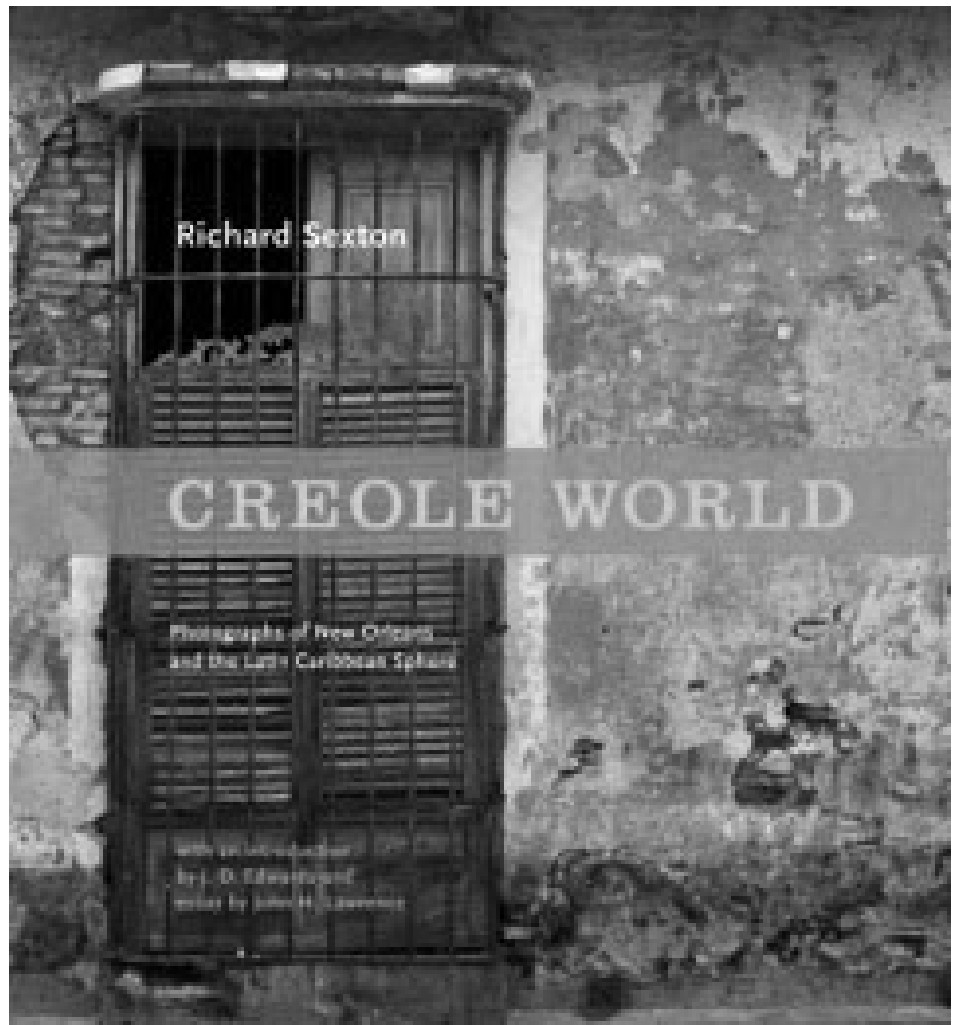
After sightseeing in Panama, we flew to Cartegena and spent a week there. again, the similarities between New Orleans and one of Colombia's most beautiful cities strike immediate chords. Cartegena, the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere, and Panama City, which like New Orleans has a history with Pirates, each has an old city and a new city and in each case new city has nothing remarkable to offer. Both are just jumbled up contemporary ghettos for the wealthier residents with buildings of remarkably lackluster design and ornamentation, while the old cities are better planned with better street layouts and higher quality construction and the resulting contrast is one of moving from the sublime to the ridiculously ugly. I cannot help but compare it to the poor quality, new construction going up in various parts of the CBD-Warehouse District of New Orleans, which can only be described as hideous, a black eye for a city that struts about proclaiming its respect for tradition. And, if the developers get their way with City Hall, then we expect to see some of the same heart-breaking intrusions into the City's supposedly protected historic districts.

In the past, I have visited other Caribbean cities, including Havana, before Fidel took over and it became off-limits to U. S. citizens, and Veracruz and Port au Prince, and I know viscerally that the ties which bind the peoples of the Caribbean extend to the Caribbean's northernmost city, New Orleans.

Long story short, I highly recommend to our readers that they visit the cities of the Caribbean and see for themselves the fact that, while New Orleans may be legally a city of the United States, it was, always has been, and should be preserved as a city of the Creole world. If you cannot take such trips right now, you need only buy a copy of Richard Sexton's new book, **Creole World: Photographs of New Orleans and the Latin Caribbean Sphere**. Published in April of 2014 by the Historic New Orleans Foundation, the book is solid evidence, first, that New Orleans is a Caribbean city and, second, that Caribbean architecture is among the most aesthetically appealing in the world.

Sexton's volume of some 200 voluptuous images shot in Cuba, Panama, Colombia, and Haiti, compiled by artists on travels to these countries over a period of 38 years, includes essays by Creole-architecture scholar Jay D. Edwards and photography historian John H. Lawrence. The book is available for \$49.95, a lot less than the cost of a trip to one of these countries, at the Historic New Orleans Collection and from Faulkner House Books, which has signed copies.

Sexton, who appeared at *Words & Music, 2014* in a round table discussion with other art photographers, is of the opinion that New Orleans is "a city that belongs to the U.S. only by the accidents of politics and history. As a young man, I fell head over heels in love with all of the things that make New Orleans feel like a foreign city on U. S. soil."



Creole World, he emphasizes, is not about prissy preservation or interior decoration; it his attempt to demonstrate how important it is to make fresh uses of the our architectural heritage from past; to study the things of the past that work and keep them even if they don't follow the rules of academia.

"I don't just celebrate the past. I'm looking to see how the past can help us get to the future. And these Creole cities, like the ancient Greek and Roman cities provided impetus for the Renaissance, are full of ideas for keeping our cities of today colorful, alive, vibrant."

A photograph is always invisible, it is not it that we see.

- Roland Barthes



Richard Sexton, a native of Atlanta, GA and a resident of San Francisco, CA during the early years of his career, moved to New Orleans in 1991 and, since establishing his New Orleans photo studio, he has become one of the leading art photographers in the city. Prior to his arrival in New Orleans, he had already contracted with Chronicle Books to create a book centering on an ambitious photo essay interpreting a city that many famous artists and writers had left their mark on well before him. Randolph Delehanty agreed to collaborate on the project, writing an introduction and extended captions to Sexton's photographs. Neither author had any substantial experience or expertise regarding New Orleans prior to this undertaking. The book, *New Orleans: Elegance and Decadence*, published in 1993, met with universal acclaim. *Parallel Utopias*, his most thematically ambitious project, followed. Using two

planned postwar communities—Sea Ranch in northern California and Seaside in Florida—as positive examples, he developed an overarching critique of the American postwar built environment. Next came, *Vestiges of Grandeur: The Plantations of Louisiana's River Road*, published in the fall of 1999 as a companion to *Elegance and Decadence*. Subsequent books have included *Gardens of New Orleans: Exquisite Excess* with Lake Douglas, *Rosemary Beach*, and *The Highway of Temptation Redemption: A Gothic Travelogue in Two Dimensions*, *Terra Incognita: America's Third Coast*, *New Roads and Old Rivers: Louisiana's Historic Pointe Coupee Parish*, and his latest, a Spring, 2014 release from the Historic New Orleans Collection, *Creole World: Photographs of New Orleans and the Latin Caribbean Sphere*.



WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ART OF DAVID SPIELMAN

By Rosemary James

Dr. John/ Mac Ravennack has his own unique vocabulary. Recently, on a cooking show where he was judging hot sauces, his remarks and comments were subtitled in more traditional English at the bottom of the screen. His words and music have influenced and continue to influence the musical fiber of New Orleans.

—David Spielman, Photographer and author of **When Not Performing.**

DAVID SPIELMAN IS AN OLD-FASHIONED PHOTOGRAPHER. He actually shoots his photographs on film and the subjects dear to his heart, his most personal projects, are people, including great American writers and musicians, and intriguing landscapes. And with these projects he seeks “to render images which truthfully represent situations without letting my own biases get in the way. My approach is to understand things and situations with my eyes and my camera. It’s my desire to become the observer, not the intruder.”

Spielman often quotes the famous French photographic artist Henri Cartier-Bresson said, “A portrait is like a courtesy visit of 15 or 20 minutes. You can’t disturb people for any longer than that.” Spielman agrees. “If you hang around longer than that the subject tires and loses interest. The point is to capture the spirit of the portrait’s object rather than create a still life with that figure in it.”

He shoots on film most often because he believes that there should be a permanent record of these faces and places. “My concern continues to be that digital files may or may not be migrated forward in years to come. As the technology continues to grow and evolve, it will be more and more difficult and expensive to bring the sheer volume of all these images along.” Thus, in the end he fears that we will be losing an important window into our visual history. “Film negatives, on the other hand, have withstood the test of time.”

His first book, **Southern Writers**, features 72 portraits of some of the South’s best known, most admired authors.

Among the images in the book, for instance, is that of Mississippian **Eudora Welty**, author of numerous short stories and novels set in the American South.



Eudora Welty, photographed by Spielman at the front door of her home in Jackson, MS.

Her novel **The Optimist’s Daughter** won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. For serious writers, however, the book to treasure is her memoir, **One Writer’s Beginnings**, a roadmap to the creative life. Welty was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among numerous awards including the Order of the South. My husband and I were privileged to be present when she was presented France’s Order of the Légion d’Honneur



at a ceremony in the State Capitol at Jackson, MS. She was escorted by another native Mississippian, her literary colleague, Richard Ford. She was the first living author to have her works published by the Library of America. For the most part, she wrote at home and that is where Spielman photographed her. Her home in Jackson is a National Literary Landmark and is open to the public as a house museum.

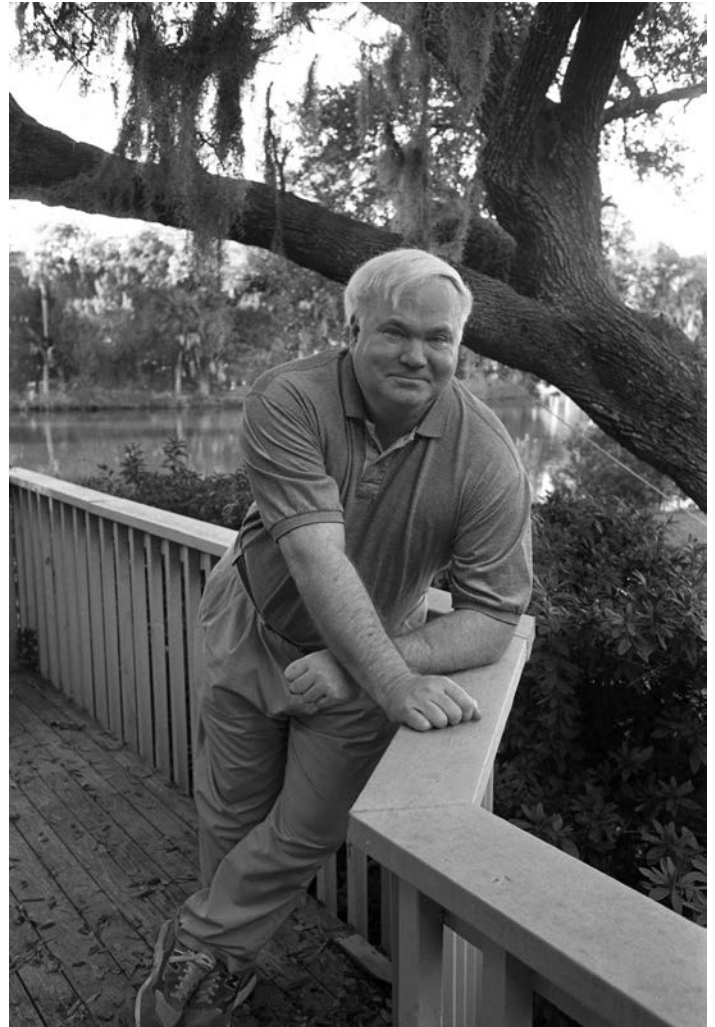
“What you have to remember about Miss Eudora, that grand dame of Southern Writers, is that she was herself an extremely gifted photographer, a fact which did not fail to intimidate me,” Spielman said. “At one point in our session, I asked her why she quit taking pictures. With a shy smile and some embarrassment she allowed as how she had lost her camera. I said, then, ‘Don’t you know that any camera store or manufacturer would happily have given you new equipment?’ In her quiet, ladylike Southern style, she replied. ‘I didn’t want to be a bother.’”

Pat Conroy was at the Citadel with my brother, Russell, and, some years after, wrote his controversial novel, **The Lords of Discipline**, which revealed the ordeals of cadets there in their era. Only after his book came out did my family understand what Russell had endured. Although we were aware that Russell marched around the Quad a lot, stiff upper lip, he had never discussed the abuses that were heaped on cadets. Conroy, a South Carolina native who still lives there on a barrier island south of Charleston, wrote numerous other books—novels, like **The Prince of Tides**, memoirs, and magazine articles as well—and remains one of the state’s favorite native sons. Much of his work is set in the Lowcountry and evokes the marsh and tidal river landscapes. The setting selected by Spielman for his portrait is just such a landscape. Of special interest to writers is this revelation about how Conroy works:

“He told me how he writes in long hand, standing up at a writing, faxing photocopies of his handwritten words at the end of each day to his publisher in New York.

A United States Poet Laureate, Atlanta-born James Dickey, was adopted and taken to heart by South Carolinians when he taught at the University of South Carolina. Carolinians loved Dickey in spite of his bigger than life record of carousing...or, perhaps, *because* of his legendary escapades, many of which were related to me by my late, dear friend Marion Draine, who was for many years in charge of the Lowcountry Region of the South Carolina Arts Commission and frequently shepherded Dickey around the state for arts events. I was along for the ride on one occasion and confess that Dickey astounded me with the amount of alcohol he could consume and the level of humor he could bring to the business of insulting people, leaving them totally unaware that they might have had reason to take offense.

There are 69 other images in Spielman’s book. These just happen to be among my personal favorites because

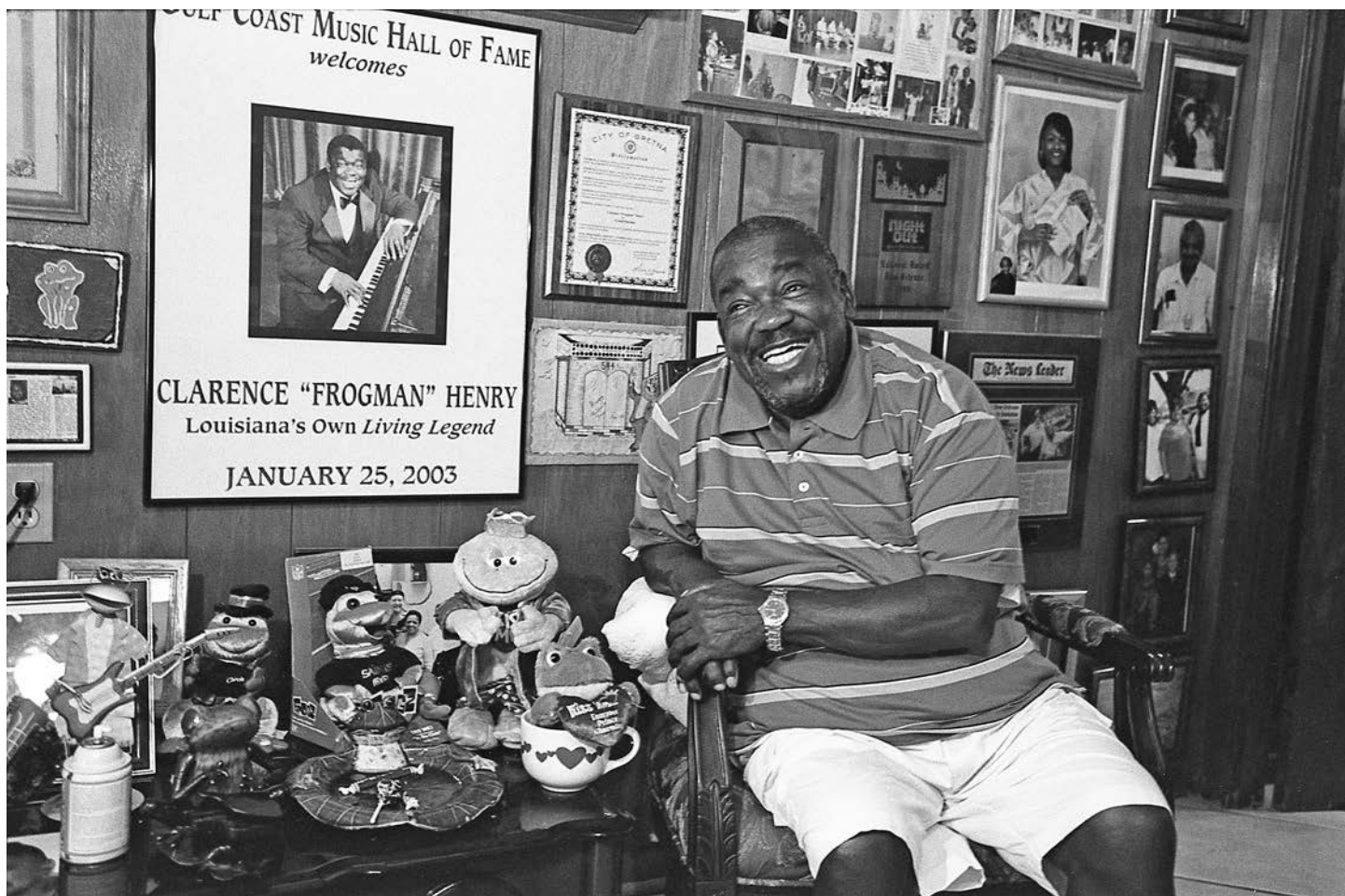


Pat Conroy photographed by Spielman at his home on Fripp Island, SC. “Not only is he one of our best Southern Writers, Pat is an incredible oral story teller. When giving interviews or talks Pat can and will have everyone laughing at some point.”

of personal memories they have resurrected. Many of the images were shot in the writer’s workspaces and by doing that Spielman offers us a glimpse into their private lives and the creative process of their own work.

“The portraits deliberately are not over-produced but are natural allowing the viewer to see the subject in a real, a genuine setting. All of these images were taken within a 210-day period. This also was by design so that the viewer is afforded the opportunity to see these writers in the same time frame, clearly showing the age differential at that era.”

Spielman promised each of them that their session “would be swift and *painless*. In many cases it was the first time meeting them, so very quickly I had to introduce myself, figure out a way to set them at ease, and find the obvious place to shoot the portrait.” He didn’t alter or “style” the scene by cleaning or rearranging it. Most of the portraits were shot with



Clarence Frogman Henry. Spielman captured his powerful smile and shot him against a backdrop of the dozen and dozens of "frog art" pieces from his adoring fans. Frogman's home is a museum of his career.

available light. Working quickly and without drama he got them to relax and he has provided wonderful insights into their character and creative process. His, quite simply, are not your typical dust jacket portraits.

His most recent book, **When Not Performing**, features his portraits of famous musicians at ease, away from stages and audiences. As with **Southern Writers**, Spielman promised each musician that the photo session would be quick and easy. The musicians, however, proved to be a bit tricky.

"Most of them, of course, are born performers and getting them to quiet down for a personal picture was no easy task." The concept was to photograph them in a place of their choosing:

"That special place where they might have found their muse, the place where they first understood that they were going to be playing music for the rest of their lives, or where they retreat to think or to compose and arrange. In some cases it turned out to be that place where a music teacher or another kind of mentor unlocked their musical identity. For others it was at home cooking or repairing their instruments."

It didn't matter to Spielman, as long as were at ease.

Although the locations were quite varied, in most cases the place selected by the individual musician was

a personal safe spot, where that performer felt at home, able to drop the on-stage persona, and be comfortable just hanging out.

"Several of the subjects were surprised when after just a few minutes, the task was completed. Many had been in photo sessions that took hours and hours, so they weren't convinced that I had captured them visually, until I showed them the finished portrait."

The subjects of the book range from from a 102-year-old "trad" jazz horn player to a very young bounce singer. It would be hard, in fact, to find a more diverse group of musicians, including such nationally celebrated figures as Cyril Neville, Fats Domino, Terence Blanchard, Uncle Lionel Batiste, Donald Harrison Jr., Dr. John, Kermit Ruffin, Jeremy Davenport. And Spielman selected his subjects with the diversity which makes New Orleans so unique in mind. He wanted to present a selection that would demonstrate the huge talent pool of musicians in and from New Orleans.

Among my favorite images are his portraits of **Doctor John** and **Clarence "Frogman" Henry**, again because of my own memories of listening and dancing to their music. Although their musical styles are quite different, both epitomize the New Orleans sound



for me, as do other great New Orleans musicians like Allen Toussaint, the Nevilles, and the late, great Professor Longhair.

David collected lots of interesting facts about his subjects, talking to them to put them at ease while shooting their photographs. “Sharing stories about New Orleans music and its history, I was delighted to discover that Frogman Henry was the opening act for the Beatles on their first tour of the United States.”

“This city of ours gives birth to and nourishes a more eclectic group of talents in every genre of the arts than any other city in the world can boast,” Spielman states without fear of contradiction. “The arts are our greatest export! Architecture, painting, sculpting, writing, photography, cooking and, of course, music are what we are known for. Even conversations are elevated to an art form; we pride ourselves on our oral story telling skills. Everything in New Orleans is character driven to the point that we are continually re-inventing ourselves when we get bored with the old selves. We love, cherish, and embrace our eccentricities!

“And it’s my job to get it all on film.”

In between these two books, Spielman produced **Katrinaville Chronicles**, his story of life during and after the Hurricane that changed the Gulf South forever. During the storm and immediately after, Spielman stayed in a Convent in uptown New Orleans, the Sisters. He realized that once the Convent lost water pressure and electrical power, New Orleans was no longer the place for Nuns. After getting them out of the city, Spielman remained at the Convent to help protect it. All alone there, he felt compelled to write a daily e-mail in which he expressed his ups and downs about the events taking place all around him. With a very small generator and his landline telephone working he could transmit his thoughts and observations to friends, family and clients. At the time, not thinking that his notes were worth saving, he just recorded what he saw and felt, photographing all the while. These e-mails and notes and photographs are the basis for the resulting book.

Today, he is working on a sequel about New Orleans life in the decade since Katrina.

Taking his direction from photographic masters like Walker Evans, Gordon Parks, Dorothy Lange, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau and John Clarence Laughlin, Spielman looks for that singular image which instantly conveys a story.

“Our minds store singular images,” Spielman theorizes. “Photography, still photography, is a great educator. It puts faces on hunger, famine, war and grief, happiness and wonder. Our brains don’t truly remember complete video clips. Singular images tell our stories: the planes hitting the World Trade Center, D-Day of WWII, Jack Ruby shooting Lee Oswald, Princess Diana’s car crash, the list goes on and on. The images are hard-wired into the memory sections of our brains.”

Spielman worries that just as too many of the images

now being produced are being shot and edited digitally and could be lost in the nether regions of that voodoo world known as cyberspace, the same thing could happen with literature being produced today.

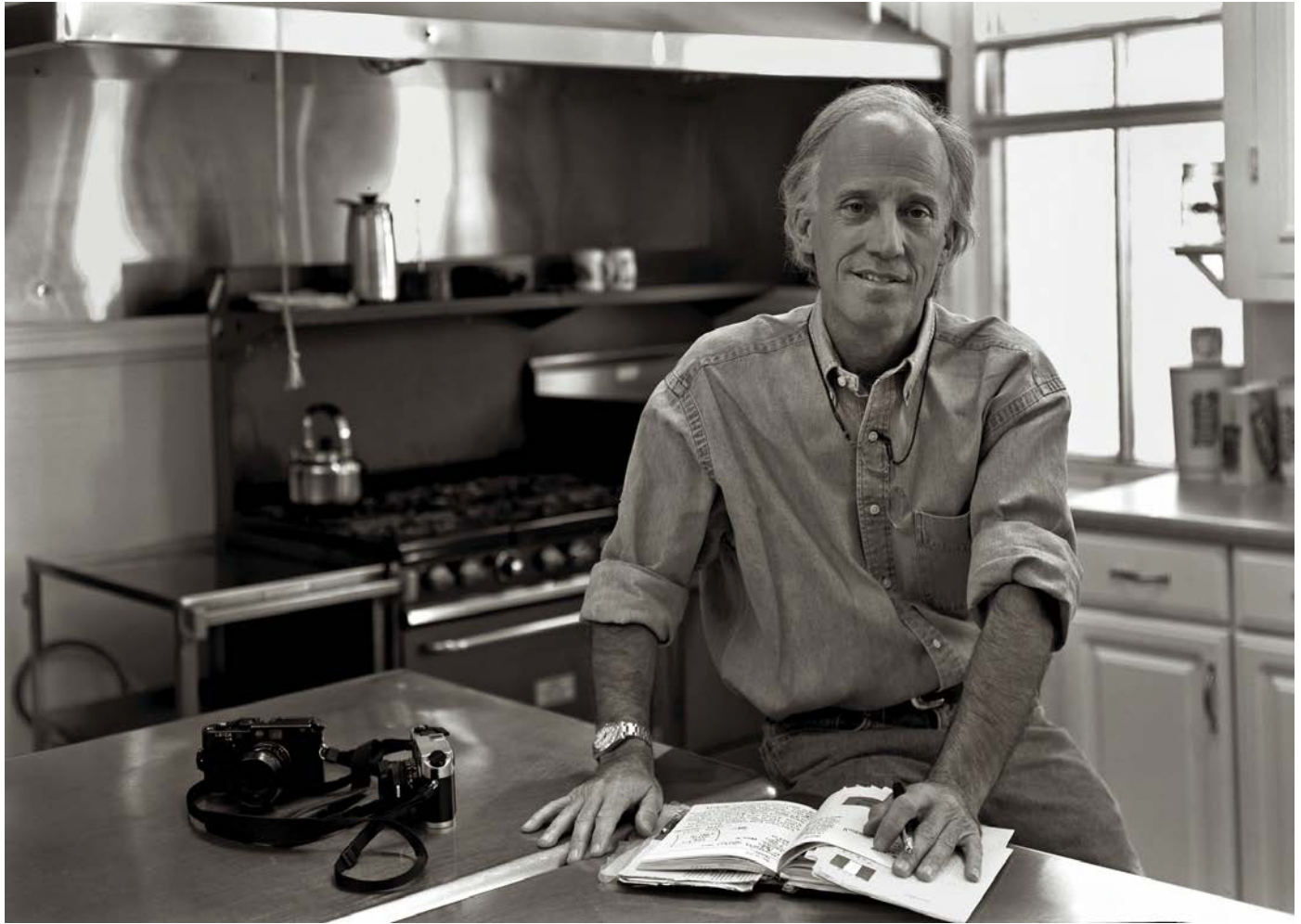
“Many writers today,” Spielman notes, “produce their work on computers, electronically editing and deleting passages and characters and, now, in the absence of handwritten notes and multiple drafts of typescripts, we don’t see, the evolution of their work.”

Unless they are printing out their various drafts and keeping a file of them, even the writer cannot see the transformations between drafts.

A good example of what Spielman is talking about is provided by the Faulkner Society’s namesake. We are able to see the how the work of Nobel laureate William Faulkner evolved because there are numerous documents, handwritten or typed on his old portable typewriter and even his notes hand-written on the wall of his writing space at Rowan Oak. Scholars like the late Dr. Noel Polk spent years putting together



Dr. John/Mac Ravennack. Spielman’s portrait of him was taken on the front porch of a friend in the Garden District. The magic of Mac is that he is just as comfortable in the Garden District as the Seventh Ward.



David Spielman, Self-Portrait at Home

the manuscripts for Faulkner’s master works, the manuscripts as he intended them, before various publishing house editors tinkered with them. Polk was able to do this because of the paper trail.

The same is true for many more of the world’s great writers, who are no longer with us. Libraries and museums often have the first, second drafts, and, then, other drafts of manuscripts showing the mark outs and possible additions scratched into the margins.

“We are able to see first hand how an important author developed his or her word images.” In Spielman’s opinion, this development path is an important lesson in the study of a profession and an insight into the thinking of those people who inspire and entertain us, men and women the likes of Toni Morrison, Shirley Ann Grau, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemmingway.

“It is much the same for film and the photographer. Seeing a photographer’s work produced over the years is a window into the creative mind and a visual text book for future artists.”

Spielman was born in Tulsa, OK, and was graduated from Westminster College in Fulton, MO. He spent his senior year studying art and art history in Europe.

Upon graduation, he moved to New Orleans and began his career as a freelance photographer. Working independently from the beginning, he has traveled the world: assignments and personal work have taken him to six of the seven continents, and 49 of the fifty states. And he is planning travel in the future to fill in the blanks!

His corporate clients include both Fortune 500 companies and smaller, local and international concerns. In addition to his personal projects, he has carried out commercial, educational, industrial, and editorial assignments, which have afforded him opportunities not only to travel to some of the world’s most beautiful and exotic locales but to also to shoot images of global leaders in business and politics and numerous celebrities.

After 40 years New Orleans is still home. His gallery and darkroom are located in the middle of the Garden District in a century-old skating rink. And he’s not planning to move.

“This culture is too rich with potential subjects for photographs for my personal projects for me to ever consider leaving.”

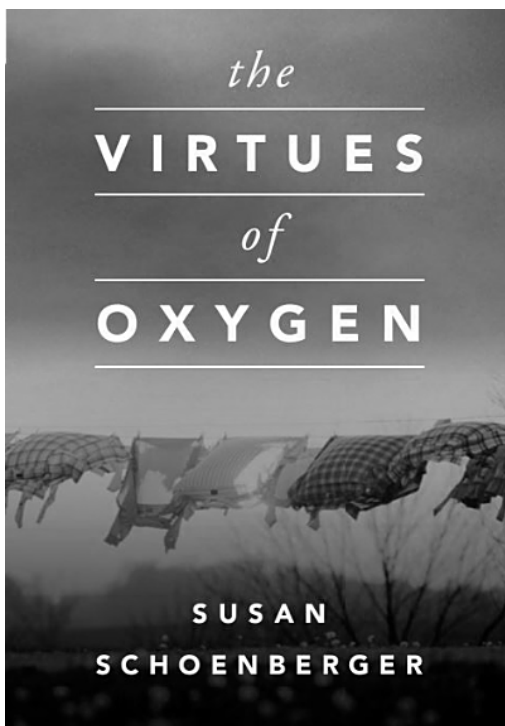
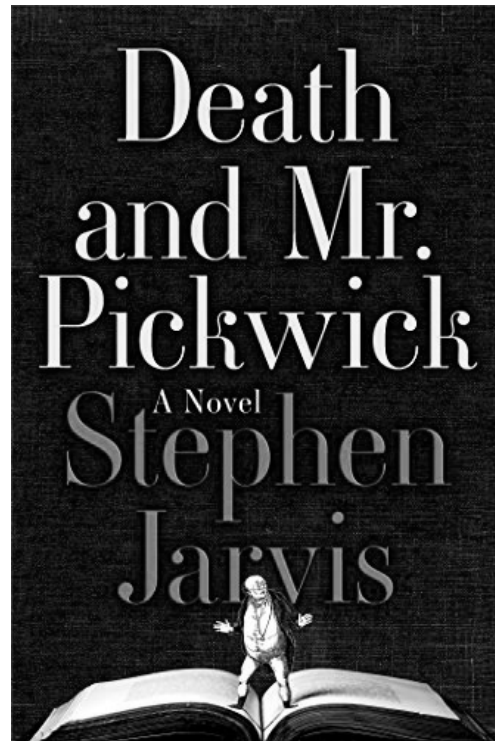


☞ BRIEFLY NOTED ☜

Stephen Jarvis. **Death and Mr. Pickwick.** 2015

In this expansive debut novel, Stephen Jarvis masterfully recreates the 19th-century literary world, telling the story of the creation of perhaps the greatest literary phenomenon of all time, Charles Dickens' **The Pickwick Papers**. This book was published serially as a monthly periodical, which was created and illustrated by the artist Robert Seymour. Though Dickens shot to international fame with these stories (quite a feat in the 19th century,) Jarvis takes the attitude that Seymour was more responsible for the book than Dickens himself, and was robbed of his share in the fame by the ambitious young author.

In **Death and Mr. Pickwick**, Jarvis writes that before Dickens, the image was superior to the word in the minds of the public. **The Pickwick Papers** changed that, and had the nation talking about literature from the lowest to the highest classes. This is an impressive and engrossing tale of the creation of what was perhaps the most important literary work of all time, a work that paved the way for a culture of voracious readers around the world.



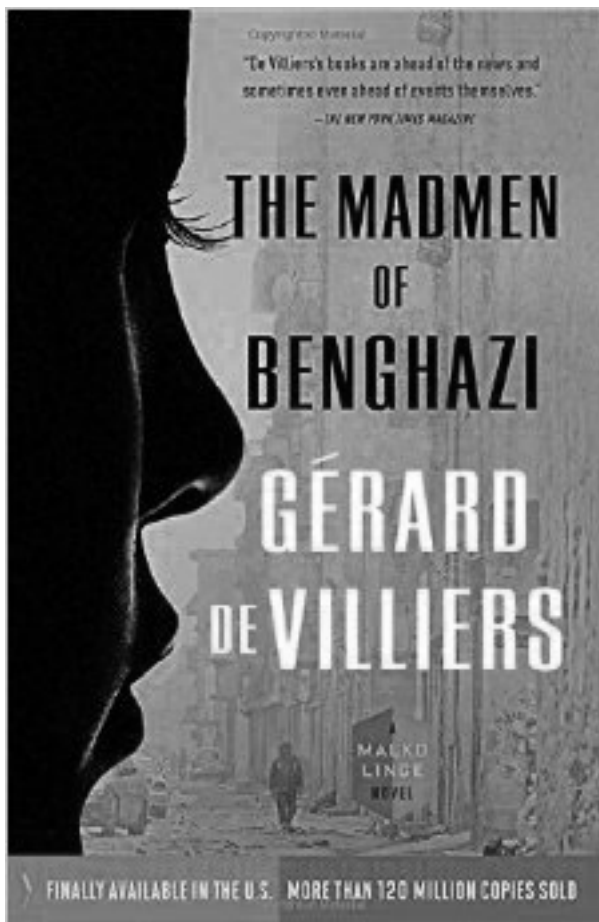
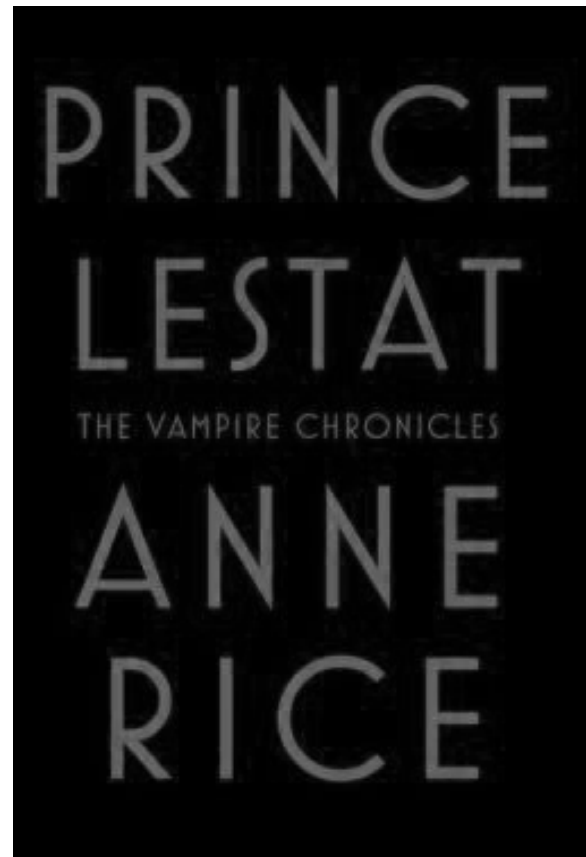
Susan Schoenberger. **The Virtues of Oxygen.** 2014.

In her newest book, **The Virtues of Oxygen**, former Faulkner-Wisdom Gold Medal winner Susan Schoenberger tells the heart-rending story of two women living in a community hit by the Great Recession of 2008. Holly grew up wealthy in the same town where she now lives as a widowed mother of two, struggling to make a living as an editor of the town's dying newspaper. Vivian is confined to an iron lung from childhood polio, and requires constant supervision, but has nonetheless managed to live her life to the fullest. Though Holly volunteers as an aid for Vivian, their bond goes much beyond that. Schoenberger writes, "They shared a peculiar mix of sentimentality and cynicism, as well as a mutual love for avocados." Schoenberger is a master at crystallizing the mix of deep connection and mundane preference that define true friendship. Her exploration of the bond between Vivian and Holly, as well as their tight-knit community, is nothing short of mesmerizing.



Anne Rice. **Prince LeStat**. 2014.

New Orleans literary royalty Anne Rice has returned to her **Vampire Chronicles** series with a new book, **Prince LeStat**. This is a well-timed reentrance into the vampire scene for Rice, whose **Interview with a Vampire** could be called the **Twilight** of its time, if **Twilight** was dark, nuanced, adult literature. LeStat, the perennial, bad-boy favorite of Rice's vampires, is the main character of this book, and he is everything that the Edward Cullen-era vampire has ceased to be. In this story, vampires are confronted with a new digital age, and find anonymity ever more difficult to maintain. LeStat finds himself in the unlikely position of savior, and must rescue vampire-kind from a strange and deadly force called The Voice. This is the perfect book for those who already love the **Vampire Chronicles**, as Rice interweaves storylines from the previous eleven novels in the series. Rice is responsible for some of the most compelling characterizations of vampires, as well as the most darkly romantic descriptions of Old New Orleans, that have ever been written. It is a treat to once again revisit the world of the **Vampire Chronicles**.



Gérard de Villiers. **The Madmen of Benghazi**. Translation, William Rodarmor, 2014.

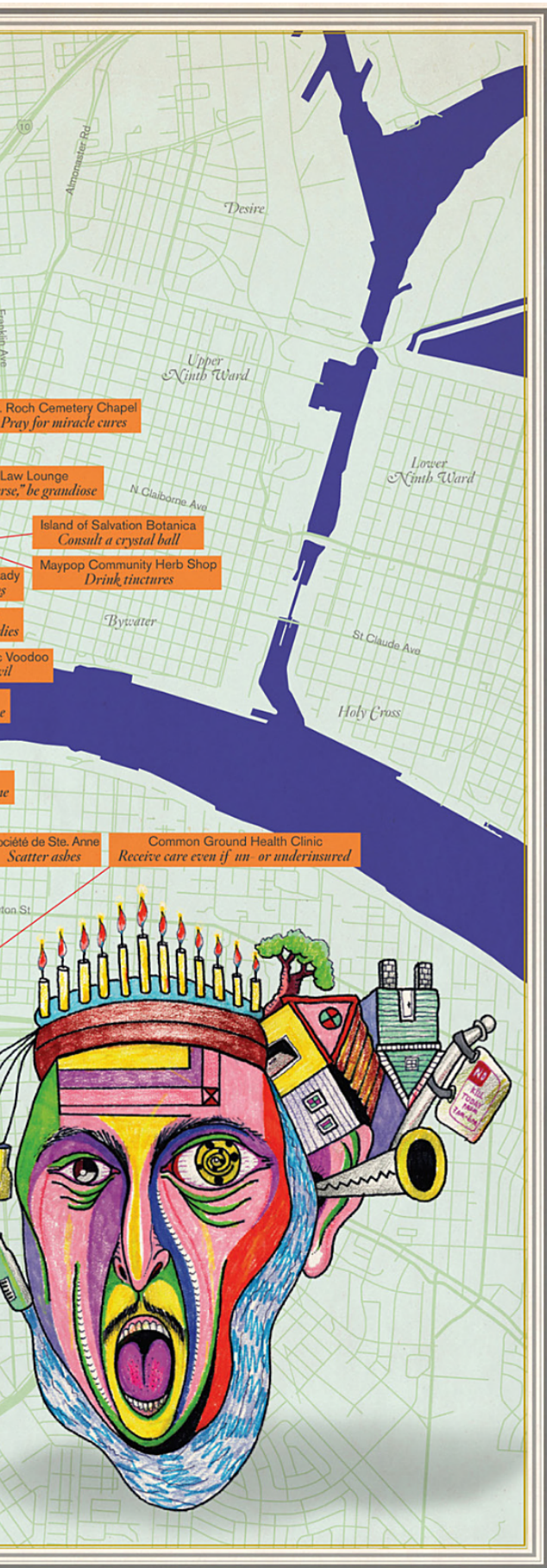
Last year saw the publication in English of the great Gérard de Villiers' final book, **The Madmen of Benghazi**. Villiers, informed by a lifetime of travel and reporting, is a master of the espionage novel, and this book takes the reader deep into the Arab Spring in the Middle East. The protagonist is the Austrian CIA operative Malko Linge, who has often been compared to James Bond. His mission is to protect a Western-born Libyan prince in his bid for the throne, as Islamist extremists attempt assassination by any means necessary, heedless of collateral damage. Along the way, he seduces the beautiful Cynthia Mulligan in order to get close to the prince. A heady mix of sex, violence, and contemporary politics makes this book impossible to put down.



Fuju and Cuckoo

TAKING CARE OF CRAZY





NEW ORLEANS, MON AMOUR



“America has only three cities: New York, San Francisco, and New Orleans. Everywhere else is Cleveland.”

-Tennessee Williams



HOLDING IT TOGETHER, FALLING APART

by Rebecca Snedeker

*Note: This essay appears in the book **Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas**. Map Number 20 from **Unfathomable City**, which accompanies the essay in the book, is from the concept of author Rebecca Snedeker executed by cartographer Shizue Seigel, designer Lia Tjandra, and artwork by Luis Cruz Azaceta.*

DIRT MIXED WITH THE MEAT of Japanese plums I plucked from the tree in our backyard. Grass, from the nearby cemetery, crushed with pink crepe myrtle blossoms and rainwater. A bit of Mom’s pearly black soap dissolved in saltwater. I don’t remember how, as a child, I came to believe that these potions would have some effect, but I do remember the comfort of mixing and offering them up. The small white clamshells in our driveway held just the right dose for a doll or a dog. My mother, in the grip of mania, was in her own world, and she let me roam and do my thing, too. I read stories about Florence Nightingale and Marie Laveau and pretended to be a nurse on the shores of the Black Sea, a Hoodoo priestess on Lake Pontchartrain.

I was raised in an Episcopal church and school, but my spirituality, my understanding of the world and how it works, is distinctly New Orleanian, which also means it is African. The African idea of gris-gris, or fetish—the old idea that an object has a soul or anima—is normal here. I collected acorns and magnolia pods, bits of the outdoors that carry the key to a tree, and grouped them with special objects, like the porcelain figurines that my grandmother had passed on to me. Although I didn’t call them altars at the time, that’s what they were.

In the human quest to take care of ourselves, we’ve developed many concoctions. Gaseous, liquid, or solid, they are home remedies, pharmaceutical drugs, street drugs, balms, lotions, salves, and salts. They come via apothecaries, pharmacies, clinics, hospitals, bars, street corners, places of worship. And then there are “internal pharmacies”—our amazing bodies, releasing endorphins and quickening our heartbeats as we laugh,

make love, or enjoy a view, releasing adrenalin when something is going wrong.

We see, smell, touch, hear, and taste in this hunger for care. Here in New Orleans, everything that goes into the mixed-up potion pot of healing effort—religion, faith, chemistry, pharmacy, science, vistas, fragrance, touch, and loving care—gets ground up with ongoing violence, addiction, and numbness by the pestle of the city.

In seventh-grade chemistry class, I encountered the periodic table of elements and found lithium, Li, which my mother had been prescribed but which she didn’t always take. At the time, she was frustrated by how it tempered her spirit. It’s not always easy to see the difference between the concoctions that are ultimately helpful for us and those that do harm. Distinguishing between them can be like drawing a line in silt.



Our corner drugstores are stocked with sanctioned remedies; most of us know little about their makeup or histories. Aisles of shelves hold over-the-counter treatments and beauty products, sugar in myriad forms, tobacco and liquor. At the back of the store is the actual pharmacist dispensing prescription medicines, including antibiotics that kill helpful bacteria in our bodies. Today, many pharmaceutical drugs are made from patented recipes owned by powerful drug companies. The companies push the trademarked drugs to doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and even students of those trades. Meanwhile, millions of dollars get poured into discovering the next new “miracle” medicine. Sometimes that miracle has always been in our kitchen or backyard. At the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum in the French Quarter—once the home and apothecary of Louis Dufilho Jr., “America’s first licensed pharmacist”—a modest exhibit explains, “Voodoo healers recommended molded bread in the treatment of syphilis years before the discovery of



penicillin.”

Dufilho and other Creole apothecarists and pharmacists experimented with many substances, including bitters, each with its own tone, and digestifs, to aid in digestion. Today at Cure, a high-end Uptown bar, “mixologists” craft personalized drinks from more than 900 bottles behind the bar. Proprietor Neal Bodenheimer explains that many of the liquors now famous in cocktails were early Creole pharmaceutical recipes, some with secret ingredients. “Bitters are a high-proof infusion of bittering agents, plus herbs, peels, fruit, spices, and whatever else you want to put in. Chocolate, spicy peppers—it can be anything you want, but you have to have a good bitters base. Chincona. Ginseng root. For all spirits, all the things we consume, it’s about hitting the right place on the continuum of preservation and rot.”

Cure was inspired by “the historical period when cocktails grew out of medicines and home remedies.” Does a line between medicine and home remedy even exist? Today, more and more people are actively participating in their own medical healthcare and diagnoses via online research and “alternative medicine.” Old forms of healing are resurfacing and gaining steam. Are these practices actually healing? At a bare minimum they may act as placebos, conferring benefit for the simple reason that that’s what people expect them to do so. Recently I heard Krista Tippett, host of the radio show **On Being**, talking about her guest, “Esther Sternberg says all of us can create surroundings and even portable sensations to manage stress and tap our brains own internal pharmacies.” When asked about placebos, Dr. Sternberg responded, “The placebo effect is the brain’s own healing process. People have an expectation that just taking a pill or having an injection or whatever the intervention is—they have an expectation that that will heal, and, in fact, it does.”

In New Orleans, many of us agree that what may seem useless to some can make a difference. With the slogan “Karma is 360 degrees,” the King and Queen Emporium International on Bayou Road has been “Providing Gracious and Royal Service” since the early 1990s. Sula Janet Evans, an initiated Akan priestess and director of the Ny’Zyia Doula Collective, and Andaiye Alimayu, an artist and chemist, sing while they make shea butters, embalming blessings as they stir. When I rub their lemongrass glaze in my frizzy hair, I hear their voices and hum along. At Maypop Community Herb Shop in the Bywater, one of four owners mixes tinctures in smaller doses. I walked in recently and heard a young woman ask for something for anxiety, a common ailment of our times. There’s no pretense of healing at Hové Parfumeur on Chartres Street, but my mom’s great-aunt Olive used to work there, and when I dip into the store to smell sweet olive and jasmine, I feel closer to her and this is good. On Mardi Gras day after Katrina, I dressed up as a magnolia tree, for all the magnolias that had died in

the saltwater. I carried a vial of Hové oil around my neck and doused friends with fragrance behind their ears. We are still reaching for vials and jars that will help us feel better, feel like a flower.

Scientists like Dr. Sternberg are gaining a deeper understanding of the chemistry of many things that have been known to work all along. As she explains, “Frankincense and these kinds of molecules do have beneficial or boosting effects on the immune system. There is lore that can be studied now in a rigorous scientific way, so we can understand how it works.” No doubt, the healthier our immune system, the better suited we are to take on the challenges that come our way. Our surroundings also affect the way we feel, and oils, icons, and candles can be used to create an environment that feels good. The F&F Botanica and Candle Shop on North Broad is stuffed to the gills with such things. Felix Figueroa, who was born in Puerto Rico, and his son-in-law Jonathan Scott, have sold “spiritual products” for 30 years, supplying not just practitioners and locals but also the voodoo shops in the French Quarter that give visitors some of the juju they came here to get.

Another thing tourists usually want is to booze, and lots of it. Drinking is deeply embedded in our *joie de vivre*, relationships, and economy; it’s also harmful to our bodies in terms of wear and tear. People come together and fall apart at the more than 250 bars that operate in the city. We drink to celebrate and relax with friends; we drink to forget or fill the heartbreak hole that alcohol also deepens. Twelve-step meetings provide a place for people to absorb the possibilities in the air instead of the bottle or the needle. But addiction remains widely tolerated in New Orleans.

“What is your rudder for normal?” My friend Dr. Catherine Jones posed this question recently when we were talking about addiction and other kinds of crazy in New Orleans. “It’s very different from what normal would be considered in other parts of the country. I have a neighbor who mows the lawn in his boxers every day. Crazy guy. He’d be under the bridge anywhere else! But plenty of people know him. His neighbors like him. No one cares that he’s out in his underwear.”

Is this a place where the mentally ill can flourish? We’re a city that holds extreme madness and poverty, plenty of illness, and the prospect of disappearing any day. But this tolerance doesn’t always serve our health and survival. When is tolerance a form of caretaking, and when is it lazily permitting ill health? The words “caretaking” and “tolerance” imply sickness, but what’s really wrong with mowing your lawn in your boxers? How do you decide when to help someone, and whose idea of help is it?

New Orleans somehow holds people when they need to be messy—when cuckoo goes beyond half-naked yardwork. And the years you are messy here may end up saving your spirit. Spreading your wings wide may help you know when it’s time to clip them with



a pill. But sometimes it may not. We're entertained by rapturous musicians, many of whom struggle over how their creativity is linked to altered states. If they're not feeling well and we ignore it, is this tolerance? Or is it greed for the gift they have that helps us temporarily climb out of our own boxes?

Charity Hospital's "Third Floor," the infamous psychiatric ward where many musicians have been

an estimated 50 percent of our neighbors, but mental health needs exceed services available. Today, a \$1.2 billion medical research center is being built just a few blocks away from the overburdened clinic in the Lord and Taylor building. The focus will be on "economic development, medical education, and research," not healthcare for the needy.

I once went to the Third Floor to visit a friend who was catatonic. She was deeply depressed, but had managed to call a cab and get downtown to Charity. On the check-in forms she'd listed two phone numbers, and one was mine. My friend looked like a dying bird, with sunken eyes and twigs for arms. She was rocking and staring across the room and couldn't see or hear me. Thankfully there was a place where she could go and be safe, on a dime. Her other friend, the second phone number, also lived with depression but he had been stable for many years. Together, we tried to support



*Rebecca Snedeker at the microphone with her co-author, Rebecca Solnit, at reading and signing event for their new book, **Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas**.*

treated, has been shut down since Katrina, when the hospital generators flooded and the doctors and nurses worked by lamplight like Florence Nightingale. Since 1736, Charity had provided care for the poor at no cost. (The hospital was rebuilt several times over the years. The sixth and final building, which opened in 1939, was built in a U shape with duplicate clinics on some floors; colored patients were treated on one side, white patients on the other.) The entire hospital was closed in 2005, as were other mental health inpatient and outpatient services in the city, worsening a collective mental health crisis. Some turned to Southeast Louisiana Hospital, this region's largest remaining public mental health facility. But in July 2012, citing Governor Jindal's state budget cuts, the Louisiana Department of Health and Human Resources ordered that facility closed, too. It's no exaggeration to say that people are dying because of these changes. Remaining support for patients who need indigent care now comes from the smaller, state-run University Hospital, and an even smaller clinic in a former Lord and Taylor department store. (You can still see a "Ladies Lounge" sign above what is now an examination room.) The state is mandated to provide healthcare for those who can't afford health insurance,

her the best we could. Later, in the wake of Katrina, he took his life.

What are we doing—on personally, on an individual level, and together, on a policy level—to help and not help? Are we doing enough? The permissiveness of the city makes answering this question more complicated.

What if we could all just completely clean up our act, be lifted from the mud for good? Wouldn't that be the best cure of all? In New Orleans, we are wary of such sterilization; we don't trust it. The late post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman argued in a beautiful essay, "On Culture and Chronic Disorder", that our souls need some backwardness. He later posited that New Orleans's chronic backwardness is something our country needs—not to romanticize our problems, but to acknowledge that they're related to the depths of our souls. He understood that "Justice, Beauty, and Destiny," a Trinity he believed in, are battling it out with their opposites "ugliness, wrong, and lost ways," in our post-Katrina landscape—a tension that is soul-enriching.

We don't want to be stripped of our fecundity. That is not our image of health, nor is it realistic. But how much mold and decay is the right amount to conserve, for ourselves and for our city? We're all like Dufilho,



tinkering with our balance of preservation and rot, adding a few drops of this and a few of that. Boiling it down to ferment again; trying another concoction. We're all working with an essence—an acorn, as Hillman would put it—and layering flavors from there. The potions we take and the objects and spaces we tend, in public and in private, are part of this mix.

I no longer fancy myself as Florence Nightingale or Marie Laveau. I'm just one woman among almost 200,000 in the city, learning how to take care of herself and the people around her, trying to hold it together, trying not to fall apart, with doses of sparkle and refills of tender pleasures along the way. Sometimes when I feel low I go to the river. I think about how deep it goes and what it would be like to swim around at the bottom. When I was 12 my friend's mother jumped from the Mississippi River bridge and never came back up. She'd been a ballerina; I imagine her now as a mermaid. My mother's life was saved by her rudder, lithium, once she decided to stop drinking and stick to her meds. Now she's a grandmother and a Reiki master. There are always others along the riverbanks, getting a view, doing their own thing, too. 🌿

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*Rebecca Snedeker is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and writer whose work supports human rights and creative expression in her native New Orleans. Most recently, she collaborated with Rebecca Solnit and a host of contributing cartographers, writers, visual artists, and researchers to create **Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas** (University of California Press), a brilliant reinvention of the traditional atlas, one that provides a vivid, complex look at the multi-faceted nature of New Orleans, a city replete with contradictions. The book has 22 imaginative maps each accompanied by essays which assemble a chorus of vibrant voices, including geographers, scholars of sugar and bananas, the city's remarkable musicians, prison activists, environmentalists, Arab and Native voices, and local experts, as well as the co-authors' own compelling contributions. Snedeker has produced several feature documentaries which are set in New Orleans, including **By Invitation Only** (PBS), **Witness: Katrina** (National Geographic Channel), and **Land of Opportunity** (ARTE). She is the recipient of a residency from A Studio in the Woods and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Photo of Rebecca here is by Jonathan Treviesca*





THE ART OF LYING

TO GET AT THE TRUTH

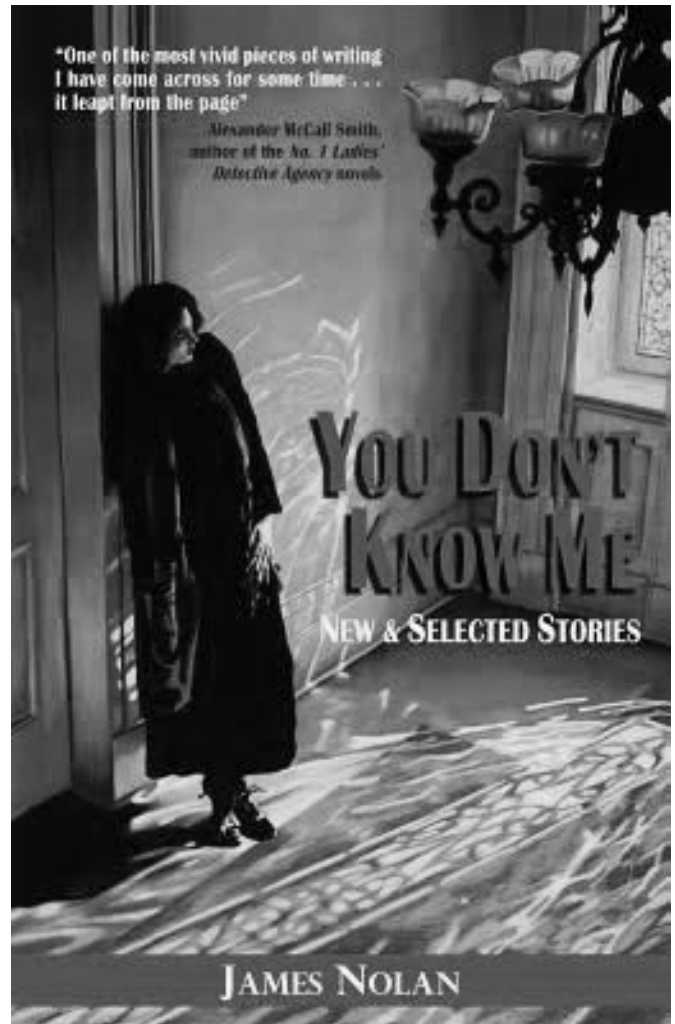
By James Nolan

(Editor's note: this story behind the stories of **You Don't Know Me**, the highly entertaining new short fiction collection by James Nolan, is not only a great introduction to the collection but great advice for the developing writer. It's the same advice you hear from many established authors, the advice that Sherwood Anderson gave a young William Faulkner while sitting on a park bench in Jackson Square. Write what you know. In this case, the advice has a twist that only a very imaginative New Orleans writer would give it.)

UNLIKE A JOURNALIST or memoirist, a fiction writer tells the truth by artfully lying. The only aspect of the stories in my new collection that is true—down to every nuance of architecture, climate, culture, and mentality—is the New Orleans setting, which is what inspires the improvised characters and plots. Somebody once asked García Márquez about his “fabulist” fiction, and he took exception, claiming that just as his regionalist ancestor Faulkner had done with Mississippi, he was “documenting Caribbean reality.” Like García Márquez’s Colombia, New Orleans is the only singular element in this book that I couldn’t make up. The rest of the fabricated details ferment for months or even years in my imagination: artificial toads hopping around in authentic gardens.

These stories I love to dream up are usually set off by some ordinary experience, or at least one that seems normal to me, a fifth-generation New Orleanian. A few years ago I was sitting in my French Quarter courtyard listening to classical music on National Public Radio when my landlady’s housekeeper emerged from the laundry room, set down her basket of dried clothes, cocked an ear, and told me the pianist on the radio was her nephew. His name was André Watts. Had I ever heard of him? Evidently this uniformed black lady I saw every day was a famous European pianist’s aunt. Then she explained how her musician brother had been stationed in Germany after the war, where he married a local woman and they had a son called André. She’d only met her nephew once, on a concert tour that took him to New Orleans.

At the time, after an absence of many years, I was struggling to reconnect with my own family roots here, especially with the memories of a thorny relationship with my father. So eventually the biracial pianist Émile Jackson was born in my imagination, a character who



inherited my war-vet Irish father, my symphony-loving French Creole mother, along with my own globe-trotting anomie and longing to belong. The piano was Émile’s, but, unfortunately, the heart-attack my own. Everything else in *Hard Freeze*, which I wrote during a recent January cold front, is made up, although any day you can meet people just like these characters in New Orleans, on the bus or at Antoine’s.

I save the specifics of own life for a book-length memoir I’m working on (and publishing chapter-by-chapter in *Boulevard* magazine), and seldom write “selfie” fiction, either directly about myself or the people I’m close to. That would take all the fun out of lying. What I mischievously call lying, of course, is the art of improvising on a theme, much as a jazz musician does. The set theme may be, as in *Hard Freeze*, my



own emotional conflicts, but the individual notes I play in these stories are improvisations springing from a fevered imagination. Improvisation, in fact, is the passport to the imagination, the only country in which I've ever claimed full citizenship. Everywhere else is just a crash pad.

If I were to write fiction directly from my own life, I'd be playing sheet music, protecting my precious little self, afraid to reveal the vulnerabilities and flaws essential to strong characterization. This a common weakness among many beginning fiction writers—playing note-by-note from the sheet music of their own lives—and it often results in characters and plots as static and lifeless as piano practice pieces. The spark that makes a story jump alive is when you mess with reality, standing it on its fool head, riffing on it sideward and backward, dressing up the characters you know only too well in other people's clothes. The fiction writer needs to radically *otherize* any semblance of self that strays into his story, or the stiff sheet music of autobiography will take over.

In some aspects, the 20 stories in my first collection, **Perpetual Care**, center around mother-son conflicts, and many of the ten new stories in **You Don't Know Me** focus on unresolved father-son relationships. Yet the seed of the title story in **Perpetual Care** was planted in a most peculiar fashion. Although the story has nothing to do with my father, to ground myself after his funeral I went to Mexico, a country in which death is an integral part of life, much as it is in New Orleans. In those days I was living in San Francisco, a city of eternal youth without a single cemetery. On the beach in Puerto Escondido, somebody passed me a joint, and after a toke (okay, maybe two), what popped into my mind was a transistor radio blasting jazz from inside of my father's buried coffin. I wondered who had put it there, and why. The carnivalesque plot of the story sprang to life only after I moved home, during my first Jazz Fest in years. I should point out that my mother's family tomb in St. Louis Cemetery Number Three abuts on the Fair Grounds, where the festival takes place, a crypt that one day will be my eternal ringside seat at the Gospel Tent.

How could I ever make up that?

Or how could García Márquez ever make up the Caribbean coast of Colombia or Faulkner northern Mississippi? In García Márquez's story *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, a tattered old angel with molting wings falls from above, crashing into a *campesino* family's chicken coop. This geriatric angel, of course, speaks only Latin, and so after the local priest ascertains that he is indeed one of the heavenly hosts, the family starts charging admission for their neighbors to see him, creating a circus-like atmosphere. Faulkner's story *A Rose for Emily* is narrated by the "we" of Jefferson's town folk, who gossip in whispers about the eccentric spinster Miss Emily and the suitor who courts her until one day he disappears. After Miss Emily's death, the neighbors

finally gain entrance to her mansion, where they stumble upon the unimaginable truth about her love life. The real protagonists in both stories are, of course, the wild worlds of Colombia's Caribbean coast and small-town northern Mississippi, and the lies both authors tell are improvisations on the reality of these places, conjuring up their magical insularity in a way no autobiographical documentary ever could. At the times these stories were written, as a matter of fact, García Márquez was working as a journalist in Bogotá, and earlier Faulkner had a job at the Oxford post office.

Who would want to read about that?

I wrote and read enough grimly factual journalism about Hurricane Katrina until finally giving free rein to the improvisations of my imagination not only in my novel **Higher Ground** but in the two post-Katrina stories that bracket this new story collection. The first, a gallows-humor grotesque called *Reconcile*, came from piecing together wacky anecdotes told to me over drinks one evening by a woman I'd met for only five minutes. The final one, titled *What Floats*, was provoked by a newspaper article about a boy in the Midwest who stayed locked inside the house with his mother's body for ten days after she died. In that disturbing period after the storm, I wrote the story to answer the persistent question: "What's it like to be in New Orleans now?"

My New Orleans, much like García Márquez's Macondo or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, is a larger-than-life mythic universe, freely reinvented in a way that remains more faithful to its reality than the half-baked clichés invoked to sell this city to mass tourism, regrettably our only industry now. Tourists on Caribbean cruises or Mississippi gambling junkets may suffer similar high-gloss illusions about those places, which we local writers are always at pains to correct. That our fictive improvisations are the truth, and the shopworn brochure images are lies, is the paradoxical edge that keeps us honest and engaged with our surroundings.

You see, our stories become an ongoing love letter to someone you may not know. In the end, like the father-conflicted Émile Jackson, my New Orleans characters aren't the postcard figurines you'd expect. They might, in fact, turn out to be people as real and human as you are. 🌸

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Orleans. A fifth-generation native of the Crescent City, he lives in the French Quarter.

What Others Are Saying

The neighborhoods and nightlife of New Orleans provide vivid details in these stories of a city unlike any other. Though Hurricane Katrina provides a line of demarcation in this collection, native son Nolan (**Higher Ground**, 2011) knows that folks have been leaving the city and lamenting the disappearance of its past (or else wallowing in it) since well before the climactic disaster. “A great place to be from. And a great place to come back to, once in awhile,” explains the protagonist of **La Vie En Rose Construction Co.**, one of the older stories and perhaps the best here. He continues: “The creative possibilities here seemed endless. And so did the destructive.” The destructive dominates the creative in these stories, though they are slapstick as often as tragic (and sometimes both in a way specific to the city). Though the subtitle isn’t as specific as it could be, the book has two sections:

The first offers ten new stories, followed by ten taken from **Perpetual Care** (2008). Black or white, gay or straight, male or female, young or (often) old, the characters exist in what the author sees as a world unto itself, one that those who leave can never really escape and those who return have trouble recognizing as home. In **Hard Freeze**, a virtuoso pianist with a French mother and an African-American father returns to the city to make peace with his late father and discovers deep roots he never knew he had.

Here in New Orleans, with its French history and African bloodlines, where he had long dreamed he would melt in like chocolate, he felt particularly foreign,” though he later realizes how much of the city is within him. There are stories of sexual predators and innocent prey, of rich fathers and the sons who have disappointed them, of elderly residents who have seen their city disappear and who often become lost in memories. The author plainly knows and loves his city well and deserves a readership beyond his regional renown.

—Kirkus Reviews

James Nolan, author of the new short fiction collection, **You Don't Know Me**, on the balcony of his New Orleans French Quarter residence. Photo by Doug Parker: Times-Picayune/Landov.

James Nolan's novel **Higher Ground** was awarded a Faulkner-Wisdom Gold Medal and the 2012 Independent Publishers Gold Medal in Southern Fiction. **Perpetual Care** won the 2009 Next-Generation Indie Book Award for Best Short Story Collection. His poetry collections include the recent **Drunk on Salt**, as well as **Why I Live in the Forest** and **What Moves Is Not the Wind**, and he has published four books of poetry in translation, criticism, and essays. A regular contributor to **Boulevard**, his recent work has appeared in such publications as the **Southern Review**, **Shenandoah**, **Utne**, and the **Washington Post** and the anthologies **New Orleans Noir** and **The Gastronomica Reader**. The recipient of NEA, Javits, and two Fulbright fellowships, he has taught at universities in San Francisco, Barcelona, Madrid, Beijing, and New



HARD FREEZE

By James Nolan

BY THE TIME the famous pianist arrived in New Orleans, everything was already dead. Walking through the courtyard, Émile Jackson turned up the collar of his wool overcoat as he followed behind the ebullient Mrs. McNamara from the Save Our Symphony Committee. She never stopped talking, even as they sidestepped the gummy leaves of tropical plants collapsed onto the flagstones in ochre piles. Overhead, an icy wind whipped through the frayed fronds of banana trees, the trunks gone soft and purple with the piercing cold. Jangling a ring of keys, the white lady with the dyed red hair was babbling about her “vacation slave quarter,” a phrase she used with no trace of irony, considering to whom it was addressed. Émile doubted she even saw who he was.

“This courtyard was such a jungle,” Mrs. McNamara said, fumbling with the keys at the French doors, “but after the past four nights of 23 degrees, just look.”

As at a grave, Émile stood with bowed head over the fish pond coated with a slick of ice. Refracted through the surface, a golden fishtail flashed, and he wondered what life might linger below, frozen in slow motion. A beard of icicles sprouted from the fountain spout, each crystal reflecting the grey light. This wasn't how he remembered the city. He had been here once before at his mother's request, in June five years earlier, but only for the few hours it took to slip in and out of his father's funeral. The humid heat had wilted his starched white shirt in a matter of minutes, and nobody in Papa's dark-hued family seemed to recognize the light-complexioned stranger perched alone in the last pew of the clapboard Baptist church. Yet shortly after his heart attack in November, when Émile had received Mrs. McNamara's invitation to headline a benefit concert in New Orleans, something stirred inside, as if he'd been given one more chance. Now, as he searched for his father's face along the courtyard wall stubbled with brown ferns, he wondered why he had come.

“Sad for you to see it this way,” Mrs. McNamara said. “*Quel dommage*. It was so lush.”

“I'm sure the lushes will return this spring,” he said, green eyes twinkling, “like the swallows to Capistrano.” Mrs. McNamara's breath was probably flammable, and after one whiff at the baggage carousel, he'd felt relieved that she wouldn't be driving them to the French Quarter herself.

“You're so. . . .”

“French?” Three times in the limo between here and the airport she'd told Émile that he seemed “so French.”

“Now we know your mother was French, and you were raised over there,” she said, throwing open the apartment doors, “but didn't I read somewhere on the Internet that your father was from here?”

“The Seventh Ward, as he called it. But he was a military man and lived everywhere, long before my mother and me, and long after us.”

“So you must have family—”

“We were never encouraged to stay in touch.”



Once inside, Émile ducked under a grandiose chandelier and plopped into an overstuffed armchair while Mrs. McNamara scurried about, flinging open doors, flicking on lamps, and fiddling with the thermostat. Spot lit in one corner was a Steinway baby grand, as he had requested. A wall of French doors opened onto the courtyard, and Émile closed his eyes at the desolate vision of drooping foliage.

The stem of a glass flute was pressed into his hand. He opened his eyes, blinking. “Champagne?” Mrs. McNamara said, holding an unopened bottle of *Veuve Clicquot*. He massaged the bridge of his nose. “Since the coronary three months ago, I don't drink.” “I lost my husband to that,” she said, pointing to her heart. “Here, let me rest this pillow behind your neck.” As he stood, the pillow slid to the floor. “This is my first journey in a while, and I'm tired.”

Everywhere he had ever been in the world—his mother's house in Nevers, the forlorn Army bases where his father brought him during several interminable summers, his ex-wife's flat in the Marais, his apartment on the Upper East Side—a piano stood in front of a window. While swallows swooped by in spring, summer drizzle fell, falling leaves drifted past, and snow flurried, he lost himself in the chords of Liszt and Chopin as his temples greyed and muscles sagged. And even here in New Orleans—the only place ever called home by that gruff man with a green duffel bag in one hand and a pint of gin in the other—was another piano.

Years ago, after his divorce, Émile realized that he had little talent for whatever part of living came in between the various rooms, each with its own piano. Herself a pianist, Maman always told him, quoting



her favorite poet, Verlaine: *De la musique avant toutes les choses*. Music before everything. He had kept his eye on the prize, and for years it was all he could see. Except that now, after collapsing on stage during the Cincinnati concert in November, that vision was beginning to blur. The rest of the autumn tour had been cancelled, and the spring bookings the agent made were tentative, contingent upon further test results. Until a few weeks ago, it seemed that his concert career might be over. But then, out of the blue, he'd received Mrs. McNamara's call. Maman would have indulged his illness, hired a nurse and sent him to her family's farm house in Dordogne to recuperate. But even from the grave, Papa wouldn't let him quit. New Orleans, of all places in the world.

"I'll leave the champagne here," Mrs. McNamara said, "in case you feel naughty later, and will be by tomorrow at six to bring you to the patron party before the concert. The tux is hanging in the closet, the thermostat set to Miami Beach, and the fridge chock full of goodies from Whole Foods. Monsieur Jackson, we are so honored to have you here, and so touched you've agreed to do our benefit. I know you're booked three years in advance to play before the crowned heads of Europe, so this . . ."

She stood a foot taller than Émile, and while he looked up like an obedient child at the lipsticked mouth working the pasty face, his chiseled features remained impassive, wide nostrils flaring like a thoroughbred's. His square head, topped with a nimbus of tight curls dusted with grey, was set like a marble bust on the delicate frame of a compact body. As the last rays of daylight filtered through the marquissette curtains, his latté complexion turned ashen. No matter how he felt, he had to go through with this—how did Papa put it?—"come rain or come shine." "Au revoir," Mrs. McNamara chirped, stumbling backward out of the door. "Bienvenue à la Nouvelle Orléans."

It never failed, Émile thought, sliding the dead bolt behind her. Like the double-faced Roman god Janus, he was always on the wrong side of every door. To the Europeans, he was *un noir Américain*, and even though his mother raised him to be 100 per cent French, he didn't look the part. One glance at him, and the French expected someone rollicking or angry, Louis Armstrong or James Baldwin, somebody who would thump the piano and set the house to rocking. But it wasn't him. And here, even among Americans of his father's race, as open a tribe as you could find anywhere, there was still an invisible wall. They saw him as the hothouse product of some unidentifiably foreign clime, and shouted at him as if across a wide canyon so he could understand their language, one he spoke perfectly. Or, feeling threatened, they saw him as an uppity so-and-so who needed to be taught a lesson, as if he were a Pullman porter lording it over the ordinary folk. Here in New Orleans, with its

French history and African blood lines, where he had long dreamed he would melt in like chocolate, he felt particularly foreign.

He sat at the piano bench and stretched his tapered fingers into the rolling first chords of Beethoven's **Moonlight Sonata**, trying to perfect the tricky half-pedaling technique that the piece called for. Outside, a full January moon rose over the ghostly garden in the courtyard, casting shadows as long and dark as memory. Not that they had ever talked much, but he wished that he could tell his father about this "vacation slave quarter" in New Orleans. That would have made the old man cackle. But the last time Émile had spoken with him, a mere three weeks before the heart attack that sent him in a flag-draped coffin to the family tomb in St. Louis Cemetery, he wasn't laughing. His papa had only whispered "we so proud of you" and then hung up. And Émile had returned to practicing—on yet another piano facing another window—the echo of a dial tone pulsing in his ear.



Still groggy with sleep, Émile stood in Mrs. McNamara's kitchen, baffled by an American device called a Mr. Coffee, wondering what the blinking red light meant. Outside a roar was building, as if a motorcycle was revving up in the courtyard, the same infernal noise that had awakened him earlier. Émile gathered the terrycloth robe around his neck, grabbed a mug of the coffee that had mysteriously filled the pot after the red light stopped blinking, and opened the door, bracing for an arctic blast. Although the light was still dishwater grey, the air was warmer. The garden had been scalped. A desiccated prune of a man, wrinkled and molasses-colored, was chasing leaves into a heap with a leaf blower. He glanced up at Émile with rheumy eyes, and as if he didn't like what he saw, examined the shriveled elephant-ear stalks at his feet.

"Good morning," Émile shouted over the noise.

"How do." The man clicked off the machine. "They didn't tell me nobody was back here. That white lady never come except at Carnival time. Usually this whole place empty," he said, gesturing toward the locked doors and windows at the back of the Creole townhouse, now a warren of expensive condos.

Émile stepped across the worn flagstones in his slippers, observing the stubs of beheaded plants sticking up everywhere like broken teeth. "It's too bad the frost killed these plants."

"They not dead. This spring they all be sprouting and blooming, wait and see. Anything what got a root come back." "Root" came out like rut, and the old man looked at the ground as he spoke. "You from away?" he asked, brow furrowed.

Émile squinted, trying to understand the man's



English. "I live in New York City."

"Thought you talked funny. My cousin Tyrone went up there once and say he near about froze to death." With creaky movements, the gardener bent to scoop a handful of debris into a trash bag. "Y'all used to that weather. Got to come down here just to warm up," he said with a grunt.

"How long will you be working?" Émile glanced at his Rolex. "I have to rehearse for my concert."

"What you play?"

"The piano." Émile pointed at the elephantine shape in the window

"Me, I play the trumpet. Nothing fancy, just second lines and barbeques. Most everyone down here play something or other."

"That's what my father played, the trumpet." Before Papa enlisted, he'd recorded an LP, one with a frayed blue cover that said **Basin Street Stompers**. As a boy, Émile had worn the record grooves smooth on his mother's phonograph, although she slammed the living room door shut whenever he played it.

"What club you gigging at?" the gardener asked.

"I'll be soloing with the New Orleans Philharmonic."

"Don't know nothing about that. Must be Uptown. I'm from the Seventh Ward."

"So was my father," Émile said, moving closer. "He spent most of his life traveling with the military. But he did come home to die, as he always said he would."

"So y'all from here." A smile widened the old man's face as he reached over to pump Émile's hand. "My name is Ducote, Cyril Ducote. Who your people?"

"I'm Émile. My father was Linton Jackson."

"I know some Jacksons live over by the Picou Bakery on Bayou Road way back when. Had a big old gal taught school, and a horn-playing son my age shipped out. Smart move, if you ask me. Or the brother'd still be here," he said, kicking the leaves at his feet, "mopping up like me. That's what I tell my knucklehead grandson, out dealing drugs and shooting people every night of the week. I say, 'You wanna kill people? Well, the gov'ment got a job for you. Make you more money than on that street corner.' Where you say you come up?"

"I was born in Nevers, France, where my mother raised me."

"Whoo whee," Cyril Ducote said, slapping his thigh. "France! 'Didn't he ramble, didn't he roam?' like the song say. Come to visit your daddy's folks?"

"Not exactly. Are you still in touch with that Jackson family?" Émile asked, excited. The Picou Bakery rang a bell. "Papa always talked about the jelly donuts at that bakery."

"Place be long gone. But a few Jacksons still stop by the old barber shop."

"I looked in the phone book, and there were four pages of Jacksons. If you see any of that family you know, please tell them I'm Linton's son and to come

hear my concert tonight at the Orpheum Theater.

After they can call for me backstage."

"I'll run it by Loretha," the old man said with a wink. "You know, wanna get the word out, only three ways: telephone, telegraph, or tell a woman."

A chill wind picked up, and Émile's coffee turned cold. "I have to rehearse now."

"Mind if I listen while I finish up out here?"

"It would be a great honor, sir."

When Émile slipped inside, he left the door cracked open despite the cold, not wanting to break his connection with the gardener. This was as close as he had gotten to his American family since his father's funeral, when he left without speaking a word. Papa had always fumed about "those people down there," saying they were narrow-minded and willfully ignorant. As a captain in the United States Army, Linton Jackson had considered himself a man of the world—"good as any white man, better." He treated his son like a recruit, demanding order, discipline, and respect, and during the boy's infrequent summer visits to his father in officer's housing, those few hours that Émile wasn't practicing the piano were spent shining his father's boots to a high gloss. A chart hung on the kitchen door, listing his chores and practice sessions by the hour and day, and he had to check them off as they were completed. When, with great relief, Émile flew back to France, his father shook his hand at the airport, as if he had completed an assignment. Émile half expected a grade, and was never quite sure if he had passed, either as a son or a pianist.

As a boy, practicing on the rented upright in his father's living room, Émile could always hear his father listening, even if the old man's face was hidden behind a newspaper, slurping a gin and tonic. And if the truth be known, every time he played a concert anywhere in the world, he could still feel his father listening. But as he stood to acknowledge with a bow the standing ovations he had come to expect, he didn't hear the applause, no matter how thunderous.

Because it was never Papa's.

His father's face remained behind the newspaper, critical, disapproving, and Émile's playing was dismissed with an irritated wave of the hand, as if to say enough of that noise. Time to hit the sack.

Now as the pianist's fingers relaxed into the first chords of Beethoven, he could hear the gardener listening. When Émile lifted his eyes from the sheet music and out onto the patio, he spotted Cyril Ducote. Elbows propped on his knees, the old man was seated hunched over on a white cast-iron bench, head bowed and eyes closed, as if lost in prayer.



At the patron party in a drafty ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel, across the street from the Orpheum Theater, Émile ate three Godiva chocolates, washed



down by a glass of Perrier. He could never eat before a concert, although he would be ravenous after, and had requested that his sponsors leave him the usual ham sandwich in the dressing room. As Mrs. McNamara led him by the elbow from group to group of symphony supporters, the mind-numbing chatter calmed his nerves. So this was Papa's mythic New Orleans, another accident of history like Émile himself, not really America yet not quite Europe, a self-contained island that reminded him more of Martinique than of either Dallas or Paris. The only uncomfortable moments came when tipsy people tried out their Louisiana French on him and he couldn't understand the pronunciation, instances that proved even more taxing than when he'd tried to make sense of the gardener's English this morning. These had been perfect occasions to stop a circulating waiter and reach for a chocolate. Leaving, he pocketed a fourth chocolate to eat just before the performance.

He was now in the backstage dressing room, listening on a staticky speaker to the local orchestra saw through an uninspired performance of the **Eroica** symphony, savoring the fourth chocolate. Maman kept an empty chocolate box tucked behind the hat boxes in her musty bedroom armoire, and every once in a while the young Émile would take it down to run his fingers over the quilted rose cover and to smell the story inside. As she told it, this was the box of Belgian chocolates that a dark, handsome American soldier had given her as she scavenged for food in the ruins of a public market the day after the war ended.

"It was the first time I'd eaten in days," she said, "and you can imagine, chocolates!"

Whatever happened later between Émile's moody father and austere mother, she claimed it was the best present she'd ever received. She never spoke ill of her ex-husband, not even of the disastrous months she spent on the segregated army base in Oklahoma the year before Émile was born. For a long time in Nevers, before his father began to sporadically send for him in the summers, the ratty copy of the **Basin Street Stompers** and that empty chocolate box were all he knew of the Negro American in the black-and-white photograph framed on the sideboard in the dining room. He was wearing a wide tie and striped, double-breasted suit, resting a trumpet on his shoulder, and looked like just about the happiest guy in the world. He paid for everything, of course, but never visited. Émile always assumed that was because life was so wonderful for him everywhere other than in boring old France. Or at least he thought so until he got to know his father's temper tantrums and inability to get along with anybody.

Émile could play anything by Chopin or Liszt blindfolded. Maman had seen to that. But he always considered Beethoven devilishly tricky, almost as much as he found his father to be, which was perhaps why he

chose for this concert the **Sonata in C-Sharp Minor, Opus 27, Number 2**, the one written during the year the composer was diagnosed as deaf. He'd worked all morning on the triplet figuration of the right hand and the half-pedaling required by the *Adagio*, a haunting pianissimo that took absolute mastery to sound both soft and strong at the same time. He was also anxious about the tempo of the rapid arpeggios in the third movement, which could have used one more run through. But now it was too late. As tepid applause crackled through the speaker, he stood and brushed the chocolate crumbs from his fingers.

Knuckles rapped on the door.

"Monsieur Jackson?" The door cracked open, and the stiff red peaks of Mrs. McNamara's coiffure appeared. "Nous allons?"

"Yes, of course." Émile took a deep breath. "Lead the way."

"Your adoring audience awaits you."

Émile smiled stiffly. Although Mrs. McNamara didn't know it, tonight he had a special audience. The St. Louis Cemetery where his father was buried was only a few blocks away.

As soon as he was seated at the piano bench under the arc light, he spotted them, the only dark faces visible within the first three rows. The two old ladies were staring straight at him, smiles of recognition lining their faces. Among the highlighted blond hairdos, waxed eyebrows, and porcelain skin sparkling with jewelry, they stood out. The older one, a ragdoll of a woman with all of the sawdust shaken out, wore Coke-bottle glasses and a shabby blue coat, frost-white hair pulled tightly back into a bun. The younger one had a rouged, corpulent face, elaborate lacquered curls, and a corsage of artificial violets pinned to her ample bosom. Émile cocked an eyebrow at them before he nodded at the page turner. He raised his fingers above the piano, hushing the tittering auditorium as the first notes slid from the keyboard like a spool of plaintive moonlight spilling across stilled midnight water.

Although he never glanced up again at the two old ladies during the performance, he could hear his father listening, especially when he blew the pacing on the final arpeggio. Émile winced, detecting an impatient rattle from the newspaper masking Papa's face. Yet later, when he stood with head bowed to the standing ovation, he could hear a sound coming clearly from the direction of the old ladies, one he hadn't heard in a long time.

It was applause. Not quite his father's, but almost.



Even before the two old women entered the dressing room, Émile could smell the mothballs. The odor became even more pungent as they stood in the doorway, waving at him over the beefy shoulder of a



security guard with an apologetic air.

"Mr. Jackson, these two ladies says they knows you," he said, baring the doorway with a licorice-colored hand resting on the door knob.

"I told you," protested the hefty one in a rich contralto. The corsage of artificial violets jiggled as she tugged at the lapels of a black silk jacket, trying to close it over her mountainous breasts. "This is my brother Linton's boy, Émile."

"Are you Papa's family?" Émile gulped, put down the ham sandwich, and leapt to his feet. The floorboards of the old theater creaked under the acrylic carpeting.

"I been telling everybody at church my grandson coming to town," the older woman said, "and when Loretha Ducote ring me this afternoon to say you looking for us, I knew we had to come. Of course, had to hock the house to get tickets, but I been hearing about this young man for the past 50 years. Everybody this side of Canal Street know I'm Émile Jackson's grandma. And if they don't know who he is, I sure enough tell 'em."

"Should be proud of that." With a bashful smile, the security guard ushered the ladies in and shut the door.

Hands clasped together, the two women stood there, visibly percolating with joy.

"Please sit down," Émile said, drawing up two chairs.

The large lady, who made Émile think of the daintily toe-dancing hippos in **Fantasia**, was shifting from one foot to the other. She sank onto a chair with apparent relief, loosening the strap of a stiletto heel.

"That sonata you played—"

"Oh hush up, you." Émile's grandmother hobbled over in orthopedic oxfords and threw her bony arms around him, smothering him with the scent of Vicks Vap-o-Rub and mothballs. "You look just like Linnie," she said, staring into his face with a wide display of dentures. "Don't know why he never brought you round before. That son of mine sure could be peculiar."

"If I'd have known how to contact you," Émile stuttered. "Papa never—"

"Linton didn't talk about anything else except how proud he was of you. Isn't that right, Mama?" The younger woman reached her stubby hand over to shake Émile's.

"I'm his youngest sister, your Aunt Didi, a retired school teacher. Beethoven is my favorite composer, and I've never heard the **Moonlight Sonata** done with such exquisite—"

"Okay, Didi, we know you smart," the grandmother said, wagging her finger. "Just like Émile here know he a good piano player. Look, he eating a ham po'boy, just like Linnie used to do after he play his horn at the clubs. Let the man tell us how he is." She looked up at her grandson, as if expecting a full report.

"Well. . . ." Émile started to say they'd just put a stent in his heart and that he felt afraid and alone, but he didn't. He glanced at the half loaf of French bread stuffed with ham, lettuce, tomato, and pickles.

"This sandwich doesn't look so poor to me." Speechless, he wiped his watering eyes. "I've been dreaming of this day for so long."

"How your mama over in France?" the grandmother asked. "What her name, Giselle?"

"She died last year."

"And your wife? I read somewhere you were married, more than I can say about this unclaimed jewel." Didi fluttered her fingers in mock melodrama. "How many kids?"

"Françoise and I divorced a while back." Émile looked down at his empty hands. "No children. After my own, I never wanted to preside over somebody else's unhappy childhood. I wouldn't have been a much better father than Papa was."

In the ensuing silence, each member of the Jackson family studied a different corner of the dressing room.

"That man sure had his ways," the grandmother finally said, shaking her head. "After he come home, we had a time with him. All that gin drinking and hollering didn't help none. Nothing ever be good enough for Linnie Jackson. He was too proud. But always was a lot down here to hurt his pride."

"He was a good man who felt bad about himself." Didi caught Émile's eye, then turned her face. "Like he didn't measure up to some inner standard. Before he passed, he told me that his only success in life was you. Late at night, he'd sit alone in the dark listening to your records and get all choked up, the only time I ever saw my brother cry."

"I remember during the few summer months I spent with him," Émile said, studying Papa's high cheek bones in his grandmother's face and blinking at the recognition, "he'd put me on the phone to somebody called Big Momma in New Orleans when he phoned on Sunday afternoons. That was you." At the funeral, he'd caught a glimpse of a weeping old lady he was sure was her. He had agonized over what to say, but his feet wouldn't carry him toward her. If his father hadn't wanted him to meet his family, he figured there were reasons, although the old man had been wrong about almost everything else.

"You had the cutest accent," the grandmother said. "*Oui, Mémère. Non, Mémère.* Sound like those French people out in the country. When you coming over to dinner, my little French boy? Forget about that old ham po'boy." She dismissed the sandwich with a wave.

"You ain't never tasted my chicken."

"I'm flying to New York tomorrow morning."

"You'll have to come back real soon," Didi said.

"You're related to half this city. You belong to us."

"Nobody has ever told me that before." In France he'd never really believed it, and now it would take some getting used to.

"What time is it, Didi? We don't want to miss that ten o'clock Esplanade bus. After that they come so irregular. TV say it gonna rain, and it so cold outside, I had to dig my good wool coat out the cedar chest."

As they stood to leave, Émile fished in his wallet for



a business card, which he handed to his aunt, wrapped in two bills. "Here's where you can reach me. And please, on a night like this, take a taxi."

"This should be enough." Pursing her lips, Didi handed him back one of the two twenties. "I see somebody raised you right, although I doubt it was my brother."

"Didi, the present," the grandmother hissed, fumbling with the buttons on her blue wool coat.

"We have something for you," Didi said. "We weren't sure they would let us back here to see you, so we wrote our address and phone number inside this." She took a small box wrapped in Christmas paper from her enormous shoulder bag and handed it to him.

After Émile escorted the ladies along the corridor to the stage door, hugging several times along the way, he returned to his dressing room, flushed and exhausted, his heart racing. He carefully unwrapped the Scotch-taped package, peeling back the wrinkled Santa Clauses.

It was a box of chocolates.

Inside was a note scrawled on lined tablet paper, signed "Gloria & Didi Jackson," followed by an address and phone number. The mismatched top layer of chocolates looked as if they had been put together from other boxes of candies, and several had crusted white with age.

He threw back his head and beamed. It was the best present he'd ever received.



When Émile emerged, Mrs. McNamara was standing at the stage door under a sturdy black umbrella.

"I apologize for the weather," she said, extending the umbrella over his head. "But a limo is waiting. As I mentioned, we have dinner reservations at Antoine's for ten o'clock. My husband and I used to go there after every concert. Tonight it'll be you and I and a few members of the symphony board."

"That ham sandwich was quite filling." Émile tucked the box of chocolates into his overcoat pocket. "How do you call it, a 'poor boy'?"

"Hardly fare for someone of your stature. Wait until you taste Antoine's pompano en papillote. C'est merveilleux."

"Mrs. McNamara, if you don't mind, I'll just walk back to the apartment. As you know, I'm still recuperating, and there are medications I need to take now." Émile touched his chest. He doubted that he could get through a whole besotted evening of being French with Mrs. McNamara. He longed for the musty smell of his war-bride mother's armoire, the mothball scent of his grandmother's coat. What had his father been so ashamed of all along? Those smells were where the music came from.

"But in this downpour?" Mrs. McNamara looked stricken. "We'll give you a ride."

"I never feel as if I've been somewhere until I've

walked the streets myself. Madame, s'il vous plait, may I borrow your parapluie?"

She handed him the umbrella, turning up the collar of his coat. "It's just that . . ."

Above their heads rain drops drummed on the umbrella.

"I'd so hoped . . ." She seemed on the verge of tears, then her face crinkled with a flirtatious smile. "I heard you had a visitor backstage. You must have a lady in every port."

"It was my grandmother."

"Your grandmother!" She looked flustered. "Why in the world didn't you tell us? We could have arranged for a limo, a box seat, another reservation at Antoine's."

"She's very old." Émile smiled at the thought of his grandmother and Aunt Didi riding in the limo with Mrs. McNamara to Antoine's. Papa would have liked that. "Besides, we just met."

"Just met?" Mrs. McNamara folded her arms. "Your own grandmother?"

Émile felt old himself as his shoes squeaked across the slick cement of a deserted Canal Street. Entering the dimly-lit French Quarter, all he could make out under the rim of the umbrella were puddles lining the slippery bricks on Dauphine Street as rain lashed down around him. He felt a slight tightness in his chest, although nothing like the two-ton elephant that had been sitting there before the heart attack. When the orderlies wheeled him in for the angioplasty, he was petrified by the possibility that he would never give another concert. The cardiologist warned he might require bypass surgery. His agent was alarmed by the news that he might retire from the stage, in which case Émile knew he wouldn't live much longer. He had even drawn up a will. So tonight's concert was a triumph of sorts. Tomorrow, as soon as he got back to New York, he would ask the agent to confirm his spring bookings. In spite of the rough ending to the sonata this evening, he would tackle more of a Beethoven repertoire. He had already started to practice **La Pathétique**, which, together with tonight's piece, might work well for the Denver date in April.

And he would get to know his father's family, perhaps during another concert stop in New Orleans this fall. Under the rim of the soggy umbrella, he took in the worn wooden stoops of the Creole cottages along Dauphine Street. Maybe his grandmother and Aunt Didi lived in just such a house. He imagined Papa sitting on steps like these to practice the trumpet, driven outside by the bustling ladies of the house into the warm, thick folds of a summer evening. Émile longed to sit on these steps to take in the dank, loamy smell of the city, but his shoes were already soaked and an icy wind whipped the overcoat around his knees.

When he reached St. Louis Street, he knew from the map he'd studied that St. Louis Cemetery Number Two was a few blocks to the left, and Mrs. McNamara's "vacation slave quarter" was two blocks to



through the shadows of the dormant garden, past the thawing fish pond, and made it inside just as another downpour burst across the French doors. With a smile, he took the box of chocolates out of his pocket and studied the note. His first impulse was to call his grandmother, to ask her and Aunt Didi if they had made it home safe and dry. And he wanted to hear them ask if he were all right. But he glanced at the kitchen clock, kicked off his shoes, and changed his socks. Once dry and comfortable, he popped open Mrs. McNamara's bottle of champagne and set a bubbling flute on top of the baby grand, a tear of foam spilling over the lip.

His problem, Émile knew, was the build up of arpeggios in the third movement of Beethoven's sonata. While a torrent of rain lashed against the windowpanes next to him, he flipped through the sheet music until he found the right page. Then he touched his fingers to the keyboard, and as the gusty chords matched the force of the thunderstorm over the city, he could feel Papa's presence outside, nodding in approval. 🌸

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The Sanctuary

A narrow Greek Revival building at 624 Pirate's Alley is where Nobel laureate William Faulkner wrote his first novel, **Soldiers' Pay**, and managed to have a rip roaring good time with pals like Sherwood Anderson and William Spratling finding his narrative voice. The building is now the home of Faulkner House Books, America's most charming independent book store. The book shop, of course, carries both reading and collecting copies of Mr. Faulkner's work. It is, in fact, however, a sanctuary for the work of all great writers—past, present, and yet to come—and for writers themselves, those who live in New Orleans and for our visiting authors.

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REVISITING THE 60S

By *Laura Lane McNeal*

SET IN THE 1960's and early 70's, **Dollbaby** strives to capture the essence of New Orleans, a city with a *gumbo culture* whose traditions and customs through the centuries have become so intertwined that they cross all ethnic and social barriers, a culture that is so ingrained that no one ever thought anything could possibly change it.

Then, in 2005, 80 percent of New Orleans was destroyed by the flooding caused by federal hurricane levee failures in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and, at least for a time, there seemed a possibility that the city wouldn't be rebuilt. As a life-long resident with a family history that goes back generations, I felt my heritage was suddenly and irrevocably yanked away.

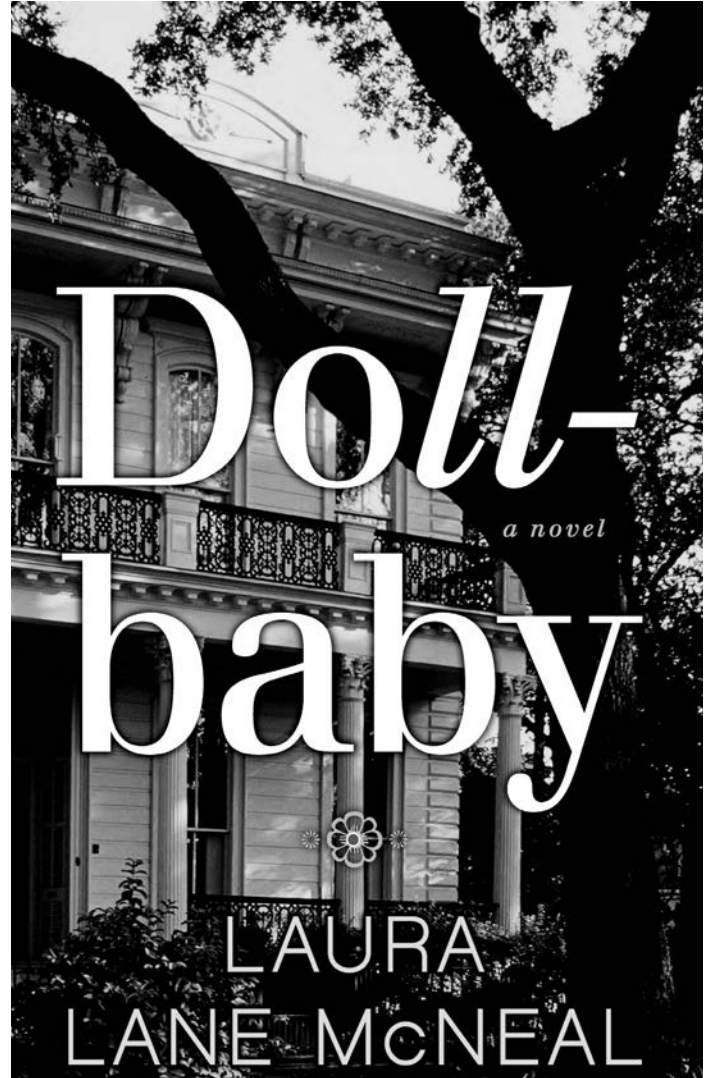
A sense of urgency instilled itself within me to tell the story of New Orleans, so that at the very least, it would keep its place in history. Call it a love song to the city, a tribute, if you will. I didn't try to hide the thorns, but instead attempted to paint a true picture of a world many possibly never knew existed, but in the end, I hope, are glad to discover.

Dollbaby begins in July of 1964 when, after the sudden tragic death of her father, 11-year-old Ibbey Bell is deposited at her estranged grandmother's house in Uptown New Orleans.

Her grandmother Fannie, who lives in a run-down Victorian mansion and has a tendency to visit the local asylum on a regular basis, is like no one she's ever met. Ibbey is swept under the care of Fannie's cook Queenie and Queenie's daughter Dollbaby, who initiate her into the ways of the South, both its grandest traditions and its darkest secrets.

Set in the civil-rights era, the novel attempts to show the unrest that had captured the nation. The summer of 1964 later became known as Freedom Summer. Several Freedom Riders, who had made their way down to Mississippi in an attempt to help African Americans register to vote, have gone missing and are feared dead. Civil unrest is at its peak—black churches are being burned as the Ku Klux Klan makes every attempt to stop the Civil Rights Act from being passed.

We see Ibbey trying to understand these changes, as well as witnessing the differing points of view that



three generations of black women (Queenie, Dollbaby, and Dollbaby's daughter Birdelia) have on what civil rights means not only to them, but to all who surround them.

In the end, what these women discover is that family can be found where they least expect it.

The excerpt from **Dollbaby** which follows on the next page is the first chapter of the novel, when Ibbey first arrives at her grandmother's house. 🌸



DOLLBABY



CHAPTER ONE

THERE ARE TIMES you wish you could change things, take things back, pretend they never existed. This was one of those times, Ibbby Bell was thinking as she stared bug-eyed out the car window. Amid the double-galleried homes and brightly painted cottages on Prytania Street, there was one that didn't belong.

"Ibby?" Her mother turned down the radio and began drumming her fingers on the steering wheel.

Ibby ignored her, letting her mother's words mingle with the buzz of the air conditioning and the drone of the idling car engine as she craned her neck, trying to get a better look at the house that was stubbornly obscured by the sprawling branches of a giant oak tree and the glare of the midmorning sun. She cupped her hands over her eyes and glanced up to find a weathervane shaped like a racehorse jutting high above the tallest branches of the tree. It was flapping to and fro in the tepid air, unable to quite make the total spin around the rusted stake, giving the poor horse the appearance of being tethered against its will.

I know that feeling, Ibbby thought.

The weathervane was perched atop a long spire attached to a cupola. Ibbby's eyes traveled to the second-floor balcony, then down to the front porch, where a pair of rocking chairs and a porch swing swayed gently beside mahogany doors inlaid with glass. Surrounded on all sides by a low iron fence, the house looked like an animal that had outgrown its cage.

Her mother had described it as a Queen Anne Victorian monstrosity that should have been bulldozed years ago. Ibbby now understood what she meant. The old mansion was suffering from years of neglect. A thick layer of dirt muddied the blue paint, windows were boarded up, and the front yard was so overgrown with wild azaleas and unruly boxwoods that Ibbby could barely make out the brick walkway that led up to the house.

"Liberty, are you listening to me?"

It was the way Vidrine Bell said Ibbby's real name, the way she said *Li-bar-tee* with a clear Southern drawl that she usually went to great lengths to hide, that got her attention.

Vidrine's face was glistening with sweat despite the air conditioning tousling her well-lacquered hair. She patted the side of her mouth with her finger, trying to salvage the orange lipstick that was seeping into the creases and filling the car with the smell of melted wax.

"Damn humidity," Vidrine huffed. "No one should have to live in a place hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk."

The heat, her mother claimed, was one of the reasons she and Ibbby's father had moved away from New Orleans just after they married. Far, far away. To a little town called Olympia, in the state of Washington. Where no one had a Southern accent. Except, on occasion, the Bell family.

"Whatever you do, Liberty Bell, don't forget this." Vidrine patted the double-handled brass urn sitting like a sentinel between them on the front seat as her mouth curled up at the edges. "Be sure and tell your grandmother it's a present from me."

Ibby glanced down at the urn her mother was pushing her way. A week ago that urn didn't exist. Now she was being told to give it to a grandmother she'd never met. Ibbby turned and looked at the house again. She didn't know which was worse, the sneer on her mother's face, or the thought of having to go into that big ugly house to meet her grandmother for the first time.

She eyed her mother, wondering why no one had bothered to mention that she even *had* a grandmother until a few months ago. She'd learned about it by chance, when on a clear day in March, as her father went to pay for ice cream at the school fair, a faded photograph fell from his wallet and floated wearily to the ground. Ibbby picked it up and studied the stone-faced woman in the picture for a moment before her daddy took it from her.

"Who is that?" Ibbby asked.

"Oh, that's your grandmother," he said, hastily stuffing the photo back into his wallet in a way that made it clear that he didn't want to talk about it anymore.

Later that week, while she and Vidrine were doing the dishes, Ibbby got up enough gumption to ask her mother about the woman in the photograph. Vidrine glared at her with those big round eyes that looked like cue balls and threw the dish towel to the ground, slammed her fist on the counter, then launched into a lengthy tirade that made it clear that Frances Hadley Bell, otherwise known as Fannie, was the other reason they'd moved away from New Orleans right after she and Graham Bell were married.

And now here Ibbby was, about to be dropped off at this woman's house without any fanfare, and her mother acting like it was no big deal.

"Why are you leaving me here? Can't I come with



you?” Ibbby pleaded.

Her mother fell back against the seat, exasperated. “Now, Ibbby, we’ve been through this a thousand times. Now that your father has passed away, I need some time away . . . to think.”

“Why won’t you tell me where you’re going?”

“That’s something you just don’t need to know,” Vidrine snapped.

“How long will you be gone?”

Vidrine frowned. “A few days. Maybe a week. It’s hard to tell. Your grandmother was kind enough to offer to keep you until I figure this whole thing out.”

Ibbby’s ears perked up. *Kind* was not one of the words her mother had used to describe Fannie Bell.

In the background, she could hear the radio.

“This is WFIX Radio New Orleans,” the announcer said. “Up next, The Moody Blues . . .”

“Turn that up—that was one of Daddy’s favorite new bands,” Ibbby said, reaching for the dial.

The announcer went on, “. . . playing their new hit single ‘Go Now.’”

Ibbby let out a deep breath. Even The Moody Blues were against her today.

Vidrine turned off the radio and poked Ibbby in the ribs. “She won’t bite. Now go on.”

The brass urn teetered and fell over on the seat. Ibbby straightened it back up, letting her fingers linger on the cool brass handle. She swallowed hard, wondering why her mother was being so secretive. Now that her father was gone, she got the feeling that what her mother *really* wanted was to get away from *her*.

Vidrine leaned over and said in a soft voice, “Now

listen, honey, I know it’s hard to understand why God takes some people from this earth before their time. But he took your daddy in a silly bicycle accident. And now . . . well, we just have to move on somehow.”

Ibbby gave her mother a sideways glance. *God* was a word her mother had never uttered until her father died, and being left with someone she’d never met for an indefinite period of time wasn’t exactly Ibbby’s idea of moving on. But she was just shy of twelve years old, and no one had bothered to ask her opinion on the matter.

She let her hand fall from the urn. This was definitely one of those times.

“Aren’t you at least going to come in with me?” Ibbby asked.

Vidrine crossed her arms.. “Liberty Alice Bell, quit your whining and get on out of this car right now. I’ve got to go.”

“But Mom—”

“Now remember what I told you. Be a good girl. Don’t give your grandmother any trouble. And one more thing.” Her mother leaned in closer and wagged a finger. “Try not to pick up any of those awful expressions like *y’all* or *ain’t*. It’s just not ladylike. Understand me?”

Before Ibbby could answer, Vidrine reached over, opened the door, and pushed her out of the car. 🌸

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Laura Lane McNeal grew up in New Orleans where “people laugh a lot, talk with their hands, love good music, good food, and will make up any excuse for a party.” After receiving two undergraduate degrees from Southern Methodist University (a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Bachelor of Business Administration), she went on to earn an MBA from Tulane University. She spent most of her career in advertising, working for firms in New York and Dallas, before returning to New Orleans where she started her own marketing consulting firm and became a free-lance writer as well as a decorative artist. In 2005, when the devastation of Hurricane Katrina forced her to rebuild her life, Laura seized the opportunity to fulfill her lifetime dream of becoming a writer. She hasn’t stopped since. Laura lives in New Orleans and is married with two sons. **Dollbaby** is her first published novel. She is working on a new novel now. Ms. McNeal has placed in the Faulkner Society’s William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition with earlier pieces fiction and credits the recognition she received with motivating her to keep at it.

Photo of Ms. McNeal is by Carlton Mickle.



A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

By Amy Conner

BY THEIR VERY nature intense romantic relationships are complicated—especially when you’re not even sure why you’re doing this to yourself. Is this really love, or is it perhaps just a neurotic compulsion descended from an obscure head-trauma? Or maybe it’s something else, something... purely physical. Have rampant hormones shanghaied usual good sense, enslaved it and doomed it to breaking rocks while lust is off on a toot, maxing out the credit cards?

Any kind of romantic entanglement has its joys, conundrums and perils, but consider the committed relationship. When the heart’s focused, laser-like, on the soul mate, this can be a devotion in an almost religious sense; sometimes a kind of soaring ecstasy, sometimes what seems like a death-march across the deserts of Outer Mongolia. But implicit within the ordinary, day-to-day-ness of earning a living, figuring out what to cook for dinner tonight, or who’s going to do the damned laundry *again*, one thing is indisputable: a committed relationship requires a tremendous amount of work, most of which isn’t pleasant or even productive. Maybe the reason we call it a “committed relationship” is because there are the days when you wish someone would *please* pack you off to the nut house for a little peace. The conscious labor of it—hour upon hour, day upon day, all the while knowing that the years are passing and the work isn’t getting any easier—has the potential to turn you into a raving psychotic who talks to yourself.

For those of us who are writers in New Orleans, our connection with the town can be compared to being in one of *those* relationships. Our friends who don’t live here shake their heads and try to persuade us to give her up, our families in other cities despair of our ever leaving her and finding someone who’ll actually be good for us. We really ought to ask ourselves the kind of questions the therapist gently leads you to reflect upon when in counseling. Why do we stay in this tangled situation instead of stuffing our belongings in garbage bags and furtively sneaking away in the middle of the night? Is this relationship worth what it’s costing us? And of course there’s this one: who the

hell is this other half of our soul, anyway?

That’s probably *the* question, the one worth the candle.

What about...a Muse?

Yes, New Orleans breathes encouragement over your shoulder; she can flip a tired idea in the air and reveal the insanely lovely obverse because she’s always delighted in the odd take, the dawn-light in the elusive “what if?” But we also know full well that a Muse can be a sloppy creature. She rarely gets out of bed before noon, leaves her underwear on the floor and the dog eats it, and she never puts the cap back on the toothpaste. She forgets to buy milk. Glorious as she is, New Orleans has a hard time holding down a regular job.

Mother?

That’s more of a stretch. It’s not like this town spends any time worrying about what time you rolled in last night or whether you’re taking your medication or not, but at least she feeds you well. Even though it’s not always exactly full of fiber or vitamins, there’s always something in the house to eat, something delicious calling your name from its simmer on the back of the stove. Even her most prosaic meals, the red beans and rice Mondays, are insanely rich with character, dialogue, scene, rhythm and music. When you sit down to eat at New Orleans’s kitchen table, the bottle of love is ready to hand, over there next to the hot sauce. Go ahead—use as much of it as you can stand. Over the years of dinners at her house, New Orleans has altered your palate to the point where the writing flat doesn’t taste right without it.

Lover?

A character from a novel-in-the-works speaks to that.

For some folks it turns out the city’s like a hot girlfriend—sexy, exciting, fun, and laid-back, all at once. She’s also the kind of chick who’s prone to blowing your rent money for you on cocaine, cheap scotch and a wild night on Frenchmen Street. Great gal for a party, but she’s no one to lose your head over because, as Miz Jackie, my favorite check-out lady,



says, “It could end up *bad*, dawlin’.”

The combined tasks of hanging with the chick described above and being able to stagger out of bed the next morning, face the pitiless daylight and get to the page, can be fiercely daunting.

And yet...

We writers commit to New Orleans despite the inherent difficulties in our relationship with her—the endless, hellish summers, the roundly decried politics, the dirt, the crime, the third-world streets and rotting houses, the blithe, insouciant resistance she mounts to joining the rest of a country so profoundly different from her it beggars the imagination. We work at our relationship with this town harder than is reasonable because we’ve learned that only she has the sustenance, in abundance, that writers have to have when crafting our alternate realities. She leaves the back door on the latch so the dream-of-the-day can drop in to give us another five, precious pages.

Hell, New Orleans is waiting in the darkened doorway to sell us the stuff that lets us breathe.

No matter who she really is, though, how could we not love her? Even those who can’t (or won’t) live here will lose a part of their hearts to this irrational, unlikely, and strangely beautiful place. In my novel, **The Right Thing**, Annie Banks, discontented Jackson socialite, anorexic troubled soul, and not even a writer, isn’t immune.

We crossed the state line an hour ago, trading the gentle hills of Mississippi for the flatlands of southeastern Louisiana. The miles fly by now. At a quarter to nine, we’re crossing over the Bonnet Carré Spillway with ten miles to go before we hit the city limits.

New Orleans appears to the southeast as a golden arc on the black horizon, its skyline floating above banked clouds of fog and light, and in spite of my nagging suspicion that this trip is going to turn out to be a *really* bad idea, I can’t help but feel my spirits lift at the sight of the city.

I’ve always loved this town. I love its improbable, tattered buoyancy, its insatiable appetite for all good things and more than a few bad ones. Ever since I was a child, I’ve loved wandering the shadowed, mysterious streets of the French Quarter, loved sitting by the Mississippi River and watching the great ships of the world cleave those terrible, fathomless currents. The challenging grace-note of a solitary jazz-trumpet that’s flung, dare-like, against the evening sky; a long, cold drink in a short, dark bar while the rain courses silver tears down the face of the marble dryad on a hidden courtyard—Oh, Lord, if I was ever going to run away from my life for real, I’d elope with New Orleans. It’d be a sight more effective than hiding underneath the duvet and a whole lot more fun.

It’s another aspect of this committed relationship, one that can take some living with: there will always be people who fall for our town, and it’s up to us, the

writers, to attempt to explain to them why the love of our life got so trashed she just threw up on their shoes. We have not only the privilege of living here, but also the responsibility of letting New Orleans live *within* us, to care for her, always, in our working lives. We must tell her truths as well as her lies, loving her as she’s always loved us: that is, as uncritically and generously as we possibly can. Even when we’re writing about somewhere else, a secret part of every story will always hold her belly-laugh, her second-line tears, her scream of grief.

Her rapture at the unassailable fact that, against all the odds, *we are still here*.



Hell, New Orleans is waiting in the darkened doorway to sell us the stuff that lets us breathe.



I recently wrote a short essay for a little vanity publication, a recognizably New Orleans story that’s (mostly) true. When I was in the midst of reading it at the contributors’ reception, held at some vast, faceless civic center in Jefferson Parish I hadn’t known existed before that night, I looked out at the assembled group of writers and realized that everyone in the room was in the same screwy relationship I’d been in ever since I was seven years-old. Almost to a person, we’d been through it all with New Orleans: the good times and the bad; the dancing and the mourning; the pointless, circular arguments and the transcendent, shattering moments of complete and utter one-ness with her. We’d all made the decision, conscious or not, that we were in this to stay. To one degree or another, we were writers and so had come to a deep, wordless understanding that there was nowhere else for us, not where we could be our authentic selves—come guns, floods or the Gulf of Mexico.

The following story from that night, *I Love This Town*, may very well commemorate the point at which I realized that, long ago, I’d made the choice. I had chosen to remain in the committed relationship I share with New Orleans, knowing we’d work it out together, somehow. 🌸



NAVEL OF THE MOON

By Mary Helen Lagasse

Editor's Note: *Navel of the Moon*, forthcoming in Spring, 2015, is a coming-of-age book rooted in the South and steeped in the ambiance and color of New Orleans as it was in the 60s and before. The story focuses on the girlhood friendship of Vicky and Lonnie, an idyllic relationship that begins when the girls are very young. It is, however, through Vicky's contentious relationship with an eccentric neighbor, "The Cat Lady" Zofia Borack, and her subsequent relationship with Zofia's estranged sister, Valentina Himel, a Holocaust survivor, that Vicky comes into her own. The fates of these relationships bring Vicky to the bittersweet awareness of the illusive nature of friendship and the enduring power of love. The novel is unique in its portrayal of the Irish Channel, a locale heretofore unrecognized in the literary lore of the city. But it is the vividness of the characters that makes this story sing—Vicky's grandmother Mimy; D. D. Dillenkoffer, Vicky's rival in neighborhood exploits and the boy responsible for her sexual awakening; Norma Costanza, a childlike neighbor who stirs in Vicky a deep sense of responsibility; and her best friend since age three, the tragic figure Lonnie Cavanaugh. The title alludes to the relationship of Vicky and her grandmother Mimy with whom the girl spiritually identifies.

Preface

I STOOD ON THE BRINK ready to fly. My toes turned over the edges of the rough-hewn wood—the landing of that long-defunct stairway in our backyard being the favorite of all my getting-away places.

We'd sit there by the hour, Queenie hush-hush breathing at my side, me with my nose buried in a book, my bare legs dangling over the edge of the landing so that I might look into our neighbor's backyard through the dense foliage of hibiscus leaves.

I'd snuggle my toes between the sagging planks of the moldy green fence buoyed by the feeling that it was only Queenie and me in the world and that I'd be satisfied to send eternity afloat on that wooden carpet where I might know the joy of having a tail like Queenie's to wag in celebration of that instant in time.

Sometimes I'd whisper my secrets into the glossy profusion of leaves that reached well above the landing. I'd sit 'til daylight dimmed above that dappled canopy, my thoughts

dispersing like puffs of smoke with the sound of my grandmother's voice calling me to supper.

An Excerpt from Chapter Two

"Lonnie wants to know where you come from, Mimy," I said, as if Lonnie's question needed translating...

"*Del ombligo de la luna*," Mimy said offhandedly.

"What?" I blurted, even before Lonnie could stammer, "W-where'd y-your grandma say she was from she was from?"

I was as equally baffled by Mimy's response because I knew that Mimy had been born in the town of Texcoco near Mexico City, where she met my grandfather, gave birth to my mother, and from where she'd begun her migration North ...to wind up in of all places, the Irish Channel of New Orleans.

Mimy, who spoke in English only when it behooved her to do so, said very precisely, "I - am - from - the - navel - of - the - moon." She looked from Lonnie to me and then tipped her head for us to look at the window behind us, set close to the ceiling. The screen, billowed by the evening breeze, framed the black-on-blue silhouette of our neighbors' rickety old chimney that threatened to tumble brick-by-brick down the steep-pitched roof to land on my grandmother's bedroom floor.

Lonnie drew her eyes from the window. She smiled timidly, twisted her arms to pretzels, then she retreated behind me to conceal her disappointment of that moonless night sky.

El ombligo de la luna? Wow! My childish mind envisaged a big navel orange of a moon that transformed to a diaphanous sphere that glowed with a soft radiance in the far side of the sky... Staring at that patch of moonless sky, I created a physical place for where my grandmother said she was from, and I retained that image, and imagined myself there, secreted within the big navel depression on the surface of the moon; a place where I didn't have to be like anyone else, where I could make up my own mind about things; a place where I would sing a song of belonging, unafraid that anyone would think of my voice as being weak and wavery—a place not to be found on any map of the moon, but more, a place for the undoing of fear.





An Excerpt from Chapter Five: How the Irish Channel got its name

Everyone had a version of how the Channel got its name. The popular notion was that when ships came into port on fogbound nights, Flanagan’s, Bailey’s, Murphy’s—one Irish pub after the other—would keep their lights burning to guide the ships safely along the sinuous course of the river. And, as a result, the grateful seamen called that section of the riverfront “the Irish Channel.”

The poor Irish immigrants that came to America in the 1800’s, the period of the Great Famine, having no means of moving on, were forced to settle in their port of arrival. In New Orleans they settled in the section of the city where Howard Avenue became Howard Street, and the path from Howard Street met Magazine, then Constance, Annunciation, Tchoupitoulas, Front Street, and the river.

In the brightly lit saloons along the riverfront, brawls occurred between roistering sailors and the hot-tempered Irishmen whose brogue led the visitors to call the area “the Irish Channel.” It was then a thriving section of the city. The remnants of fine residences belonging to more affluent families who lived there could be seen in the brick walls, iron grillwork, wide balconies and verandahs of apartment houses scattered here and there among the storefronts, and more modest houses of the Channel.

The story I’m more inclined to believe is the one about McMullen’s Riverfront Bar on Adele Street. McMullen’s was a popular watering hole and a great vantage point from which the patrons could sit at the bar and watch the ships maneuver the river. It’s said that when the ships made their turns at the extra sharp bend fronting Adele Street, the tide rose so high it flooded the whole area, and the patrons sitting on McMullen’s bar stools would have to hoist their feet up to keep their shoes from getting soaked. Hence, there never was a real channel, but the Irish Channel name stuck, and in time came to include the area between the river and Magazine Street, and from St. Joseph Street to Louisiana Avenue. 🌸

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*Mary Helen Lagasse is a classically trained artist and a prize-winning fiction and non-fiction writer. Ms. Lagasse, who has been a member of the Faulkner Society’s Advisory Council, has appeared as a presenter at Words & Music and other Society events. Her first novel, **The Fifth Sun**, was awarded the IPPY Award, for Best Multicultural Fiction, 2005, Premio Atzlan Literary Award, and the Marmol Prize. Her new novel, **Navel of the Moon**, set in the historic Irish Channel of New Orleans is forthcoming in 2015. Traditionally, the Faulkner Society auctions a new painting based on Mr. Faulkner or his work at Juleps in June, the annual fundraiser. Three years ago, Mary Helen contributed an original oil she created, depicting Faulkner’s work space at his Mississippi home, Rowan Oak. Proceeds helped fund writing, literacy, and reading projects that year.*





REVIEW: BILL LOEHFELM'S DOING THE DEVIL'S WORK

By Jade Hurter

Bill Loehfelm's newest novel, **Doing the Devil's Work**, the third in the Maureen Coughlin series, is both thrilling and gritty, a story you will want to devour in one sitting, but which will stay with you for days afterward. Set in post-Katrina New Orleans, the book's sense of place is created with hyper-realist precision. From an Audubon Park mansion to a Central City side street to Coughlin's own home in the Irish Channel, Loehfelm takes the reader on a tour of the city through the eyes of a cop who has recently moved here from Staten Island. Loehfelm includes a murder outside F&M's, an interview at the Rose Nicaud, and a late night drinking at Ms. Mae's, among other local markers. This book never lets you forget its setting, and locals and tourists alike will enjoy this gripping journey through what might be the closest thing to the real contemporary New Orleans that could possibly be portrayed in fiction.

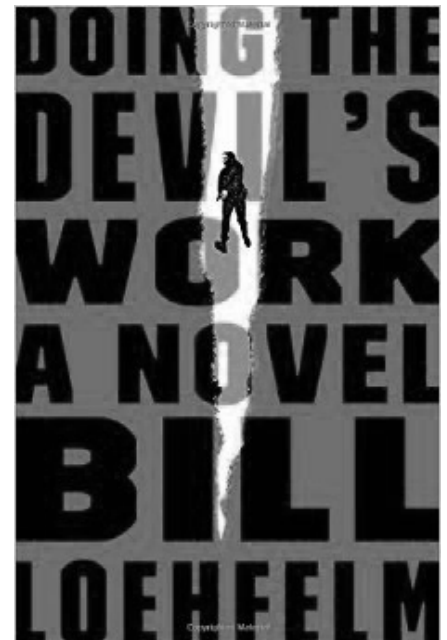
In this installment of the series, Maureen has finished her police training and is finally a real New Orleans cop, but she is far from out of the woods. The department, and the city, is rife with corruption. They are understaffed, publicly disliked, and overworked, and these obstacles, as well as departmental politics and unwanted attention from the federal government after the 2013 consent decree, frustrate any neat solution to the murder mystery that begins with a dead body in an abandoned Central City home. Maureen finds herself torn between her instincts and a department that encourages her to stay out of it. And as an isolated murder quickly spirals into something much bigger, Maureen struggles to toe the line of police department ethics and politics while doing all she can to solve the crime.

Maureen herself is a character worth spending time with. She is both gutsy and empathetic, and her cop instincts are what drive this plot forward. Though she is no saint, Maureen is unphased by the social hierarchies of her newly

adopted city, and her integrity is near unshakeable. As she says to her colleague, "The consent decree is going to change everything. That old-boy network stuff, that who-you-knew-in-high-school shit is going out the window." Her New York attitude reflects the very real changes happening in a city that sometimes feels as if it is being forcibly dragged into the twenty-first century, for better and for worse. And as a female protagonist, Maureen's sharp tongue and tough attitude, not to mention her competence as a police officer, are nothing short of refreshing. Both her flaws and her virtues are realistic. Loehfelm is a master of characterization. He writes dialogue that is quick and witty, and from this dialogue spring dazzlingly realized characters.

From the police department, to the characters, to the city itself, this is a book in three dimensions: sparkingly real, never romanticized, never gratuitous.

Doing the Devil's Work is a highly satisfying read. My only regret is the wait for the sequel.





Bill Loehfelm is the author of five novels. His most recent is **Doing the Devil's Work**, the new Maureen Coughlin adventure, from Sarah Crichton Books/FSG. It's available now in all formats wherever books are sold.

Bill's other novels include **The Devil She Knows** (2011), which featured Maureen's debut, and the second Maureen Coughlin novel, **The Devil in Her Way**, which was Strand Magazine's Novel of the Year for 2013.

Bloodroot (2009), and **Fresh Kills** (2008), winner of the first Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, are set in Staten Island, NYC, where he grew up.

Born in Park Slope, Bill grew up in Brooklyn and on Staten Island. After college in Scranton, PA, where he studied communications and English, he taught high school English on Staten Island. In 1997, he moved to New Orleans, where he has taught high school and college, worked in an antique shop, and done absolutely everything there is to do in the bar and restaurant business (except cook).

He received his MA from the University of New Orleans in 2005. He plays drums in a rock n' roll cover band.

Bill lives in New Orleans' Garden District with his wife, AC Lambeth, a writer and yoga instructor, and their two dogs.



Recommended Reading: Faulkner House Favorites

Station Eleven, 2014 by Emily St. John Mandel,

This is a can't-put-it-down book to lose a day to. Mandel writes of the Georgia Flu, an epidemic that wipes out 99.9 % of the human population, by interweaving narratives of a famous actor, his ex wives, his best friend, his son, a paparazzo, and most importantly, a woman named Kristen, who was a child actor in a production of King Lear in the days before the epidemic struck. Kristen grows up to become a part of the Traveling Symphony, a group of actors and musicians who travel from settlement to settlement performing in the years after the epidemic. Their slogan, "Survival is not enough," is also a theme of the story, which reminds us that even in the face of total destruction, human beings are capable of beautiful—and terrible—things.



MARDI GRAS MADNESS



An excerpt. By Ken Mask

When a thing is simple, it is surely true. True like an orange-red sunset on a calm lake horizon. True like crescent moonlight shining through sparse racing clouds, honest. New Orleans is always true in simple terms. This is my city, and I don't like sharin' it with the faint of soul.

There is little relief from that blade which slices seasons into pieces of pie like blended moments of day, time, occurrence, and place. The Louisiana sun is knife-like piercing, year-round. Interrupted by the occasional rain, which may last for 15 to 30 minutes, there is some relief, but that eye of heaven beams through with dominance-on-off rain-

sun-rain-sun. The combination produces a sauna. Currents of the mighty river turn in every wake as if there is no direction for tides; when moon or sun hits the muddy waters a light brownish-grey hue robs surrounding landscapes of justification. These currents have roared for billions of years. Sounds, smells bounce off the meandering slopes of water like echoes in deep caverns. There is no visible life in those channels-only moving stillness deep, desperate. This land is your land this land is my land, star spangled land of multicolor flavors, dreams and hopes dance in the shadows of laughs, cries of long ago fog and low lying waterways which coat the space like glaciers of flat chocolate milk unforgivingly hard yet giving in the most immediate and primordial manner.

The centuries old place on the curve of the Mississippi conjures up sounds of long ago-pirate yells, gun fire, banjos, fiddles, drums, smells of spiced garlic crawfish, mint laced roasted pork, sights of tingling spiny dull-green Spanish moss dangling from oaks along bayous, Storyville, multicolor Mardi Gras floats, painted faces, plenty of molasses-sweet beverages and good times flowing all hours day, night. Constant. The pulse and the beat of the streets, the texture of the narrow passages can send you into a tailspin even if you're careful. 'Yeah you right'-day or night the place es caliente.

Let's talk about a few things that went on leading up to one Mardi Gras. Let's figure out if the heat of the place and the energy of that heat could have possibly reached not only to nearby locales but to far-off lands. Yeah, talk about friends, family....

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Ken Mask, M. D., is a practicing physician in Lafayette, who wears many hats, including that of former advance man for Wynton Marsalis, philanthropist, and the creator of a highly entertaining series of mysteries set in his native New Orleans. He also has helped his young son create appealing books for children, revolving around a charming character, Griffon the Dragon.





GOOD WORDS FROM ABROAD

Count Bánffy's Remarkable Work **The Transylvania Trilogy**

By Joseph DeSalvo

Volume One: They Were Counted

They Were Counted, the first novel by Count Miklós Bánffy in his monumental work, **The Transylvania Trilogy**, introduces us to a decadent, frivolous, and corrupt society unwittingly bent on its own destruction during the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bánffy's lush depiction of an opulent lost paradise focuses on two upper-class cousins who couldn't be less alike: Count Balint Abády, a liberal politician who compassionately defends his homeland's downtrodden Romanian peasants, and his dissipated cousin László, whose life is a whirl of parties, balls, hunting, and gambling. **They Were Counted** launches a story that brims with intrigues, love affairs, duels, murder, comedy, and tragedy, set against the rugged and ravishing scenery of Transylvania. Along with the other two novels in the trilogy—**They Were Found Wanting** and **They Were Divided**—it combines a Proustian nostalgia for the past, insight into a collapsing empire reminiscent of the work of Joseph Roth, and the drama and epic sweep of Tolstoy. The Trilogy, released recently by Everyman's Library, was translated from the Hungarian by Patrick Thursfield and Katalin Bánffy-Jelen, and is introduced by Hugh Thomas, gives us an explanation of how this European masterpiece has been largely overlooked since it was written because of the tumultuous eras in which Bánffy lived and wrote these novels. The Trilogy is must reading for several reasons, not the least is getting your hands on a new, old fashioned family saga with a central love story. It also provides the kind of insight into the recent history of one of the most important societies in the every fascinating Middle Europa. The author's Bánffy Castle was sacked by Russian soldiers at the end of World War II, and Miklós Bánffy "died impoverished and forgotten in 1950." Now, more than 60 years later, his great novel has been rescued from oblivion, ready to be enjoyed by anyone hungry for brilliant and impassioned storytelling on a grand scale.

Volume Two: They Were Found Wanting

The tale of the two Transylvanian cousins, their loves, and their very different fortunes continues in this second volume of the Transylvanian trilogy. Balint Abady is forced to part from the beautiful and unhappily married Adrienne Uzdy, while Lazlo Gyeroffy is rapidly heading for self-destruction through excessive drinking and his own fecklessness. Politicians, quarreling among themselves and stubbornly ignoring their countrymen's real needs, are still pursuing their vendetta against the Habsburgs ruling Hungary from Vienna. Meanwhile, they fail to notice how the Great Powers—through such events as Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908—are moving ever closer to the conflagration of 1914-1918 that will destroy their world forever. Bánffy compellingly prophesizes the impending collapse with his contrasting portraits of a life of privilege and corruption and the lives and problems of an expatriate Romanian peasant minority, the minority Balint tries to help. Bánffy's work is an unrivalled evocation of a rich and fascinating aristocratic world oblivious of its impending doom, a life brought to destruction by those who were privileged to enjoy it while it lasted.

Volume III: They Were Divided

The final part of Bánffy's trilogy reflects the rapidly disintegrating course of events in Central Europe. In the foreground the lives of Balint, with his ultimately unhappy love for Adrienne, and his fatally flawed cousin, Laszlo Gyeroffy, who dies in poverty and neglect, are told with humour and a bitter-sweet nostalgia for a paradise lost through folly. The sinister and fast moving events in Montenegro, the Balkan wars, the apparent encirclement of Germany and Austria-Hungary by Britain, France and Russia, and finally the assassination of Franz Ferdinand all lead inexorably to the youth of Hungary marching off to their death and the dismemberment of their country.

In this new hardcover release of **The Transylvanian Trilogy**, all three volumes have been printed in a single book.



IN HISTORY



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

*A mirror is light. The tiniest piece of mirror is
always the whole mirror.... No, I have not de-
scribed a mirror; I've been one.*

—Clarice Lispector



AN INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN MOLTHROP

By Rosemary James

*The British have put Napoleon away. His exile allows the world's greatest military to focus on taking back its treasure: the former North American colonies. The redcoats have torched the White House, battled in Baltimore and pillaged Hampton, Virginia. But these are mere diversionary tactics. The main thrust of the campaign is aimed at the prize: New Orleans. Fourteen thousand well-trained and equipped troops are approaching a defenseless city where 60 million pounds of cotton is bottled up in the continent's most important port. The Battle of New Orleans is often discounted by historians as an afterthought. But the victory here was the climactic triumph of the War of 1812, a rallying point for a young, untested country, a solidifier of territory, and a career-launcher for one of the country's most controversial political figures. This is the premise of the Battle of New Orleans, fought 200 years ago and won against all odds by General Andrew Jackson. And it is also the premise of Morgan Molthrop's new book, **Andrew Jackson's Playbook: 15 Strategies for Success**, which compares the revitalization of the "new" New Orleans post-Katrina to the against-all-odds victory of Jackson in *The Battle of New Orleans*. Molthrop has serialized this book on Facebook, using new media to tell a story of our nation's history. Here, **The Double Dealer** interviews Molthrop.*

Double Dealer: What gave you the "strategies" idea for the book?

Morgan Molthrop: I was fascinated by the story and felt it [The Battle of New Orleans] was misunderstood. From this fascination grew an appreciation for the characters that, in my opinion, saved America. They included Jean Lafitte, the notorious pirate, and Andrew Jackson. While Lafitte was a compelling character, it was Jackson that was able to bring a contradictory community together. The Americans were outnumbered 3 to 1. I dissected the story and did some "Monday morning quarterbacking." I think Jackson would have appreciated the Strategies. He certainly used them.

DD: Did you zero in on Andrew Jackson because of the looming anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans?

MM: Sure. The Battle of New Orleans fell out

of the "American Narrative" just as New Orleans has, in some senses, fallen out of that narrative. Westward expansion used to mean expansion to the Mississippi River. The ultimate port was New Orleans. Then railroads came. Steamboats to New Orleans became a part of Mark Twain's America. But even in Twain's time, New Orleans was a sort of "nostalgic" destination. Then, during World War I, Americans sided with the English. Andrew Jackson's astounding victory was an inappropriate subject for history books. Then there was the "Trail of Tears." Jackson became a tricky historical figure. But if you look at the Battle and truly understand history, Jackson saved the United States. New Orleans was vitally important. The Battle should be considered the most important in early American history.

DD: Why did you decide to serialize the book on the internet? There's no immediate financial return. Do you think serializing will make people run out and buy the book? Do you direct people to a specific place to buy the book? What are the technical problems, if any, of doing this?

MM: Facebook is not the best platform for publishing a book. It's clunky to place blocks of copy into the posts. But my intent was to use new technology to do something never done before. I thought that would attract people to the project. To a certain extent it did. Some people appreciate that we're making this available in a serialized format. I am, in some senses, just doing what Dickens did in the 19th century but using new technology to do it. More importantly, I had a lot of photos to work with and that makes the site visually appealing. And yes, I can use the platform to promote speaking engagements and book signings - both of which increase revenue.

DD: Isn't there a possibility that if people read the book on Facebook, they will feel they do not now have to buy the book?

MM: Maybe. But for the most part this is a book of local interest that acts as a souvenir for an important bicentennial. I love a book. I love the feel of a book in my hands. Don't you? Book lovers who like the postings don't find it onerous to pay \$20 for a signed copy of a great story. And I think the story makes



New Orleans people proud to be from here. Its contemporary connections also help bring the story forward - to merge past and present. New Orleanians are naturally resilient people. My book tells you why I think that is.

DD: What kind of response are you getting?

MM: People like the Strategies. Embarrassingly, many locals know nothing about their own history. I have a gift for telling stories and this one is a core New Orleans story. People are beginning to focus on the bicentennial and I am thankful for it. And I'm glad that I got the book out in time to take advantage of that interest. I'm scheduled to speak on JACKSON at almost every important venue or lecture hall in the state. Learning how to sell through bookstores is another "art." I'm pretty good at attracting media attention, so I try to leverage that into sales. Jackson would approve.

DD: My concern about putting your intellectual property up on the internet is that it will prevent the writer from realizing income from the work.

MM: I don't have a lot of expectations for financial gain in writing. Anyone who thinks they can write for a living will be sorely disillusioned. You do it because you have to. Or because, as in this case, you really have a great story to tell and believe in the project. I want more people to be engaged with me and my stories. And most people I know are engaged with Facebook or in some other form of social media. So that's where I meet them. Our engagement has been successful.

DD: What advice do you have for writers trying to build a platform for themselves and their work? Where do they start first?

MM: Oh, I would start with a collaboration with someone who already has a reputation. Then I'd follow one of JACKSON'S PLAYBOOK RULES: Leverage your success. You can't start from zero. You have to have something or someone to give you that push. For me, James Wilson at UL Press was that person. He backed the project and that gave me lots of confidence.

DD: What advice do you give to writers just starting in non-fiction?

MM: Get into the story. Don't bore your audience. It's all about storytelling even if it's non-fiction. *Especially* if it's non-fiction. Too often historians and MFAs feel they have to prove that they "know" about a subject. They distance themselves from their audience. They become effete. So what? You become obscure. These are "fast times" and you're competing against a lot of - um - "noise." Be damned interesting.

DD: Most beginning non-fiction writers want to write about themselves in a memoir. Do you think they'd do better to pick a subject that interests them, research it, and write about it?

MM: Yes and no. We are always writing about ourselves whether we're writing about other people or not. I'm afraid we writers are human and more than a bit self-absorbed. We spend a good deal of time alone, after all. That makes us approach our subjects from our own POV. Our "emotional resumes" play into the story. We can imagine other people's decision-making process and make up all sorts of things that may or may not be true. Historians stick to facts. Those facts are, to me, just the dry bones of the full story. Expect it: there'll be some of me in every character. But really: No one will be interested in Morgan Molthrop's personal story unless the body of work I do about others becomes important. Right?

DD: Why should a writer read your book?

A writer? Well, if he or she reads the first edition maybe to see if they can spot one of the 38 grammatical errors we caught *after* the first printing. First editions. Alas. But seriously, if my books are successful it's because I write in a way that feels comfortable. My style is easy and - perhaps - a bit bold. I write fast and I concentrate on story. I want people to "get into" the story. So if you are a writer who wants to read a great story, my books might be right for you.

I don't have a lot of expectations for financial gain in writing. Anyone who thinks they can write for a living will be sorely disillusioned.



Morgan Molthrop, a New Orleans native, is an entrepreneur, writer and social critic. Molthrop is the leading New Orleans historical “color analyst” and is a frequent lecturer for major corporations. In partnership with Carling Dinkler III, his company provides turnkey guest “experience” solutions for clients visiting New Orleans. He is author of **Artist Spaces** (UL Press 2014) a book of 100 images of live/work artist studios with renowned photographer **Tina Freeman**. He also wrote **Andrew Jackson’s Playbook: 15 Strategies for Success**. This is the first book of its kind to be serialized on Facebook. In 2014 he founded Barataria Communications as the social media, PR and publishing arm of Custom New Orleans.

He was chosen “A Person To Watch in 2013” by *New Orleans Magazine* and featured in *Travel Week* and *The New Orleans Advocate*. He was a travel writer for *Investor Relations Magazine* from 1998 - 2004. Through blogs and social media, Molthrop is a leading voice advocating for a “New” New Orleans. He also speaks and writes about the stigmatization of mental illness & addiction. Molthrop was diagnosed at age 47 with treatable bipolar disorder - a condition he had been self-medicating for decades with alcohol and drugs. He was featured in *POZ Magazine* as pioneering a movement to study the impact of mental illness and drug addiction. In New York City, where he lived for 13 years, he worked on Wall Street as a consult to Disney. He went to NYU Law School & taught the first class in disclosure practice at NYU. In 1999 he became VP of a major telecom. His first job was as an intern at Perez Architects. There he met local artist/urban planner, Bob Tannen and his wife, Jeanne Nathan. Lifelong friends, they encouraged his interest in the arts. Through them, he would meet and befriend Ellen Degeneres, who encouraged him to come out of the closet. “Ellen was my role model,” says Molthrop. “She still is.”



Recommended Reading: Faulkner House Favorites

Lauren Groff, **Fates and Furies**, 2015

Lauren Groff's newest novel, longlisted for the 2015 National Book Award, is an intricate and stunning look into a marriage. Mathilde and Lotto marry at the age of 22, and remain together through the trials of a life, their love always present beneath the surface of things. Midway through the book, tragedy strikes, and a shift in perspective opens the story up to even richer interpretation. This is so much more than a love story: the prose sparkles, the characters are multilayered, and the perspective shifts constantly. Groff tells us something beautiful, sad, and true, through her depiction of a relationship, about what it means to be human.



❖ BRIEFLY NOTED ❖

Andrew Jackson: Hero of New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection

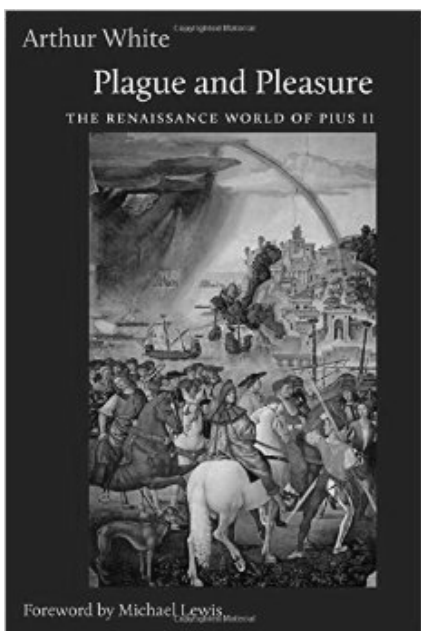
In light of this year's bicentennial celebration of the Battle of New Orleans, THNOC's exhibition, *Andrew Jackson: Hero of New Orleans*, explores Jackson's role in defending the city of New Orleans from being conquered by the British during the War of 1812. Jackson was the "18th-century equivalent of a rockstar," both famous and controversial.

The exhibition showcases early paintings and prints, sculptures, medals, and artifacts that illustrate the evolving public concept of Jackson as a military and political leader. Rare, one-of-a-kind objects—some belonging to Jackson himself—are on loan from The Hermitage, the Library of Congress, and other institutions. Highlights from THNOC's own holdings include a selection of the infamous "coffin broadsides" printed by supporters of John Quincy Adams in the 1828 presidential election, in which Adams attempted to tarnish Jackson's public image with stories of bloody duels and executions. The exhibit will also display the dark side of Jackson, who played a key role in the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of Native Americans from their Southern homelands. Jackson was a man whose legacy in America is touched by great victories and great tragedies, and the continuing controversy



Arthur White. *Plague and Pleasure: The Renaissance World of Pope Pius II*. 2014.

Arthur White's new book, **Plague and Pleasure: The Renaissance World of Pope Pius II**, is a work of thorough scholarship that is nevertheless easily accessible to the average reader. White uses the life and times of Pius II as a lens through which to see the Renaissance world, which, he argues, has more in common with the Medieval world than we often realize. White bridges the gap between the artistic flourishing and the real-life suffering of the time period, arguing that the great art was a result of a need for escapism from the daily realities of plague and war. Pius himself experienced much hardship during his time as Pope, and as a result took his mental refuge in the building of his "Shangri-La" at Pienza and his love of ancient Rome. For Renaissance Italians, great art and culture was more than a pastime: it was an essential coping mechanism. More than just a scholarly history, White actually retraces the footsteps of Pius in this book, vividly reimagining the Italy of the Renaissance.

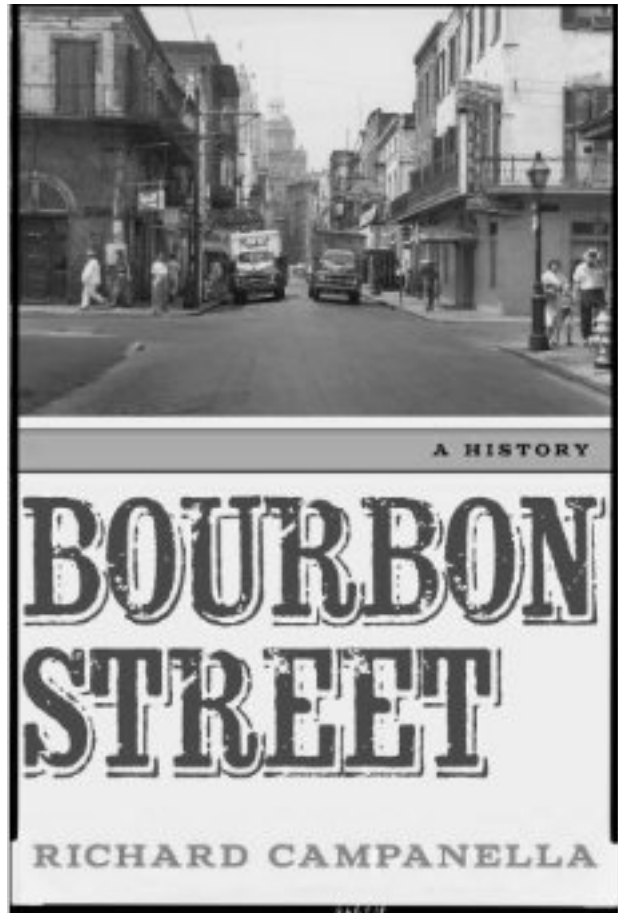




Richard Campanella. **Bourbon Street: A History.** 2014.

Bourbon Street: A History is the latest title from one of New Orleans' most prominent urban geographers, Richard Campanella. The book is a fascinating look at a street often snubbed by New Orleanians who take their "local" status seriously. Campanella argues that the street is, in fact, the heart of the city, and takes readers back to a time when Bourbon really was New Orleans' epicenter. After the introduction of steamboat technology, Americans began moving to New Orleans in vast numbers for work. The richer citizens lived further from the river, while the streets closest to the river were inhabited by working class and free African Americans. Bourbon street was located in the middle, a street where cultures combined, and where bars were frequented by both the wealthy and working-class.

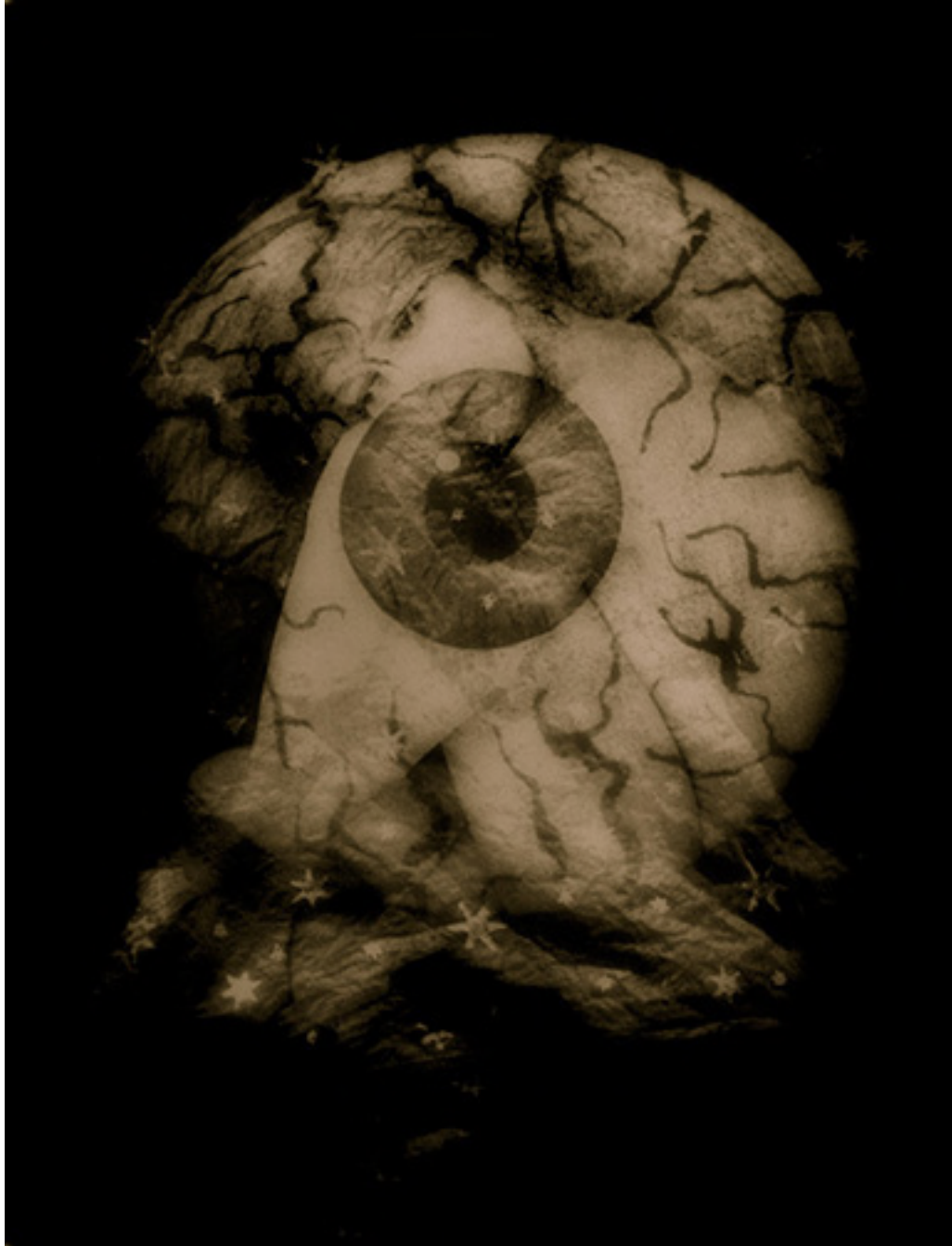
Today, Bourbon represents a different kind of cultural mingling: a mix of tourists from all over the country. But although the street is notorious as a seedy tourist attraction, Campanella writes that locals ought to be grateful for it. One of every twenty jobs in the city is located on Bourbon, and the bars and clubs are by and large locally owned. Tourists spend billions of dollars on Bourbon Street every year, and without those dollars, the city's economy, heavily dependent on tourism, would be damaged. Campanella's own distaste for Bourbon was challenged after Katrina, when Bourbon street was the first to get back to business, providing a place of joy and a respite from grief for those who spent their days working to restore a decimated city. He writes, "I couldn't think of a better model for the city to emulate." This book is a fascinating look at a street both loved and hated, with a history that goes well beyond Big Ass Beers and Jester's daiquiris.



But although the street is notorious as a seedy tourist attraction, Campanella writes that locals ought to be grateful for it.



CRITICISM



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

I'm afraid to write. It's so dangerous. Anyone who's tried, knows. The danger of stirring up hidden things - and the world is not on the surface, it's hidden in its roots submerged in the depths of the sea. In order to write I must place myself in the void. In this void is where I exist intuitively. But it's a terribly dangerous void: it's where I wring out blood. I'm a writer who fears the snare of words: the words I say hide others - Which? maybe I'll say them. Writing is a stone cast down a deep well.

- Clarice Lispector



THE PERENNIAL QUEST FOR NOW

A REVIEW & PROFILE

By Tony Gentry

*There would be nothing more obvious,
More tangible, than the present moment.
And yet it eludes us completely.
All the sadness of life lies in that fact.
—Milan Kundera*

IN THE ICE AGE winter of 1978, this callow youth had discovered punk rock, which to this day I feel in some way saved my life. Eager to share my discovery with an unsuspecting mentor, I brought **Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols**, into the comfortable home of my college thesis advisor Randy Fertel. A native New Orleanian, he had been kind enough in the months of our collaboration to introduce me to Professor Longhair and the Meters, and on this late afternoon the aroma of red beans filled the house. Here was my payback. I will not say he pogoed. The man sat in a scholarly pose at his desk as the excellent stereo speakers of the era erupted in expletive. Two bleating tracks later, he shouted above the din, "It's been done. Have you heard of the Stooges?"

This abrupt judgment came as a punch in the gut, but of course the old man—in his mid-20s then—was right: There is nothing new under the sun. Even the most spontaneous, transgressive nugget you may have uncovered has its precedent. But this sobering truth was only half of my advisor's lesson. Unknowingly, I had touched a nerve of keen interest already far along in his consideration—this idea of spontaneity, driven by a yearning to tear down the old and yawp something else—was by his reckoning worth a closer look. Though not exactly new, the Pistols' feral slap across the bloated face of the era's corporate rock was something to love, and for better reasons. As I have since learned, over more than three decades of watching warily and admiringly as a doctoral thesis grew tentacles that grabbed up not just literature, but music and the visual arts, myth, psychology, and even chaos science, my advisor had something more to say on the subject. And now we have it, a riveting, inspired, transgressive, yet authoritatively reasoned masterpiece, **A Taste for Chaos: The Art of Literary Improvisation**.

Of course, I cannot pretend to impartiality in discussing this work. I have read versions of the book, in bits and pieces, for years, as Fertel found the will to

keep at it, long after most of the Smith-Corona-typed dissertations of his peers sat moldering on forgotten shelves. And we are the better for it, because as we discover, this is not a niggling topic. Importantly, it gets to the gist of the artistic impulse and to the ways cultural clash creates new avenues for expression. On a personal level, too, it speaks to the yearning for and fear of spontaneity that drive so much of what we aspire to in our everyday lives. This is his mission, surely worth the labor of decades. Fertel early on found his *idée fixe*—that innovation in the arts is largely driven by some rarely interrogated engine called the spontaneous. He discovered how pervasive that engine is, not only in the arts, but across our culture, coursing through mythology, religion, science, philosophy, politics, and even advertising. He grasped how this aspiration thrives in the decisions we all make in steering our lives, and he has spent the past 30-plus years—a richly lived time—mapping these routes. This book is a raconteur's tour, a tour-de force, something of a tornado. You are best advised to read it in the gleeful spirit in which it was written, imagining yourself perched in a well-stocked library, with a glass of good whiskey, Fertel pouring.

Spontaneity proves a slippery topic to tackle. As the book's title implies, Fertel sets out "to study rhetorically texts that claim to be the product of no rhetoric and no study." In doing so, he first asks why some artists pursue and claim spontaneity in their work, while others recoil from it, then uncovers a familiar literary dialogue between authors who take pride in craft and tradition and those who claim to have created something new from whole cloth. This is perhaps the most prominent discussion among artists and philosophers of all types over the past century, at least since Ezra Pound cried, "Make it new!" Fertel, however, follows it back, past the Deconstructionists, Modernists, and Romantics, across nations and eras, to Homer's **Odyssey** and the Hermes of Greek myth, uncovering a rich, consistent, and singular motive



driving that conversation. He then connects the dots, providing the sort of focused rereading of hoary classic texts that actually have you wanting to reread or read them (finally, guiltily) for the first time, in light of his argument. He uncovers ways that the improvisatory impulse and its conventions renew themselves in literature, the performing and visual arts, philosophy and science, in order to better serve the changing culture.

One of the marvels of the book is the far-ranging correspondences Fertel so neatly draws across time and campus. He will have none of the professional siloes we so carefully build to protect our sense of expertise, inviting us to an intellectual salon where in just the first chapter we meet Annie Dillard, Stevens, Thoreau, Jung, Mingus, Pollock, Melville, Coleridge, George W. Bush, St. Paul, Milton, Twain, Ginsberg, Pinsky, Wynton Marsalis, Ernst Cassirer, Piet Hein, Derrida, William James, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Marcel Duchamp, T.S. Eliot, and Pater (along with more than a dozen other luminaries), accompanied by nods to Commedia dell'Arte, Japanese zen, and African itutu, all punctuated by an aperçu from the author's father.

What does Fertel ask this distinguished troupe to consider? The one thing they all share, for better or worse, is a deep and abiding appreciation for the lure of improvisation. Fertel asks, "What is this often overlooked theme that we call spontaneity, what technical strategies are used to employ it, how do those strategies work, what do they say? What is the place of improvisation in the history of literature? How does improvisation express itself in other arts? What does it say to us in our own lives?" One of Fertel's brilliant strokes is his refusal to take the improvisers at their word. He writes, "for my purposes, the claim of spontaneity is a cultivated affectation." What he means is that you can't evaluate how spontaneous any text may be, so why judge a text based on that value? Yes, Jack Kerouac famously claimed to have written **On the Road** on a single ream of paper in a speed-infused rush, but does learning that he then spent six years revising the manuscript cancel out his claim of spontaneity? Fertel wants to know why Kerouac touted the initial inspiration and not the years of tinkering that came later. Why, he asks, do artists claim spontaneity at all? This is one of Fertel's important distinctions: If you can't evaluate how spontaneously a book was written, what can you measure? That question unlocks an entirely new way of looking at improvisation in all of the arts and, as Fertel leads us to see in his discussion of Jung, it may also be a new way of examining our own lives: our aspirations, struggles, and glass ceilings.

To get there, Fertel compares the theme of spontaneity across the ages and finds that there is, in fact, a hidden rhetoric, an improvisatory method. This method is put to use as a device of persuasion, with a consistent purpose from Homer to Joyce and beyond, to oppose objectivist, positivist perspectives

on reality, "embracing subjectivity and some version of the irrational" in order to open the doors of perception to a wider view, to "help us see more of the world." One of the "tricks" that improvisers play, one of the reasons, perhaps, that they claim spontaneity, is to get us to throw out our analytic eye, to improvise in our reading of the text, to come at the text innocently, so to speak. Ultimately, improvisers seek to change the reader. At the same time, improvisations target the works that came before. As Fertel writes, "the gesture of spontaneity is almost always transgressive, seeking to break or extend the boundaries of craft and rationality."

Lacking rhetorical guidelines for identifying and critiquing improvisations, Fertel develops his own, summarized in a pair of lists. The first sets out seven claims that improvisers use to assert the artlessness of their work, which is composed: (a) carelessly or effortlessly, (b) as a direct transcription of experience, (c) by chance, (d) as a found object, (e) intimately in an unthreatening situation, (f) in an inconvenient situation, and/or (g) inspired by inebriants or some other external power. The foundation of all of these claims is a performative element, a sense of *happening now*. The second list articulates the form's dominant stylistic conventions, which include: (a) simplicity, (b) free-association, (c) digression, (d) encyclopedic enumeration or cataloguing, (e) fragmentation, imperfection or formlessness, (f) swerving from tradition, and (g) biographical realism. Artists deploy these conventions to disarm the reader, to awaken her/him to new possibilities that may access and express "as much of life as possible." He adds, "An 'improvised text' is usually implicitly or explicitly shadowed by a craftsmanly, more staidly rational kind of text that it seeks to debunk and replace." This insight suggests a productive strategy for examining historical change. By locating an era's improvisations and contrasting them with contemporary, more conventional texts, one can illuminate the cultural and historical clashes of an age. The improviser is not just playing a game of literary one-upmanship, but seeking to shape new knowledge into art. As Fertel writes, improvisation is often concerned with *how* we know the world. It occupies a battlefield where "new ways of knowing confront received ways of knowing."

Much of this book is given over to surprising readings of pivotal texts in light of these themes. Fertel leads us to an understanding of the ways that works as diverse as Erasmus' **In Praise of Folly**, Burton's **Anatomy of Melancholy**, Rabelais' **Gargantua and Pantagruel**, Montaigne's **Essays**, Milton's **Paradise Lost**, Sterne's **Tristram Shandy**, Coleridge's **Kubla Khan**, Wordsworth's **Tintern Abbey**, Clemon's **Huckleberry Finn**, Tennyson's **In Memoriam**, Fitzgerald's **The Great Gatsby**, Joyce's **Ulysses** and Mann's **Doctor Faustus** adopt the themes he has delineated to surprisingly similar ends across the centuries. Fertel devotes close readings to each of



these classic texts, wherein he fits them neatly to the rhetorical guidelines he has devised, contrasts them to contemporary texts written in a more traditional style, and—most interestingly—explores the historical and cultural events surrounding their composition, shedding light on the ways each author sought to bend art to changing times. In this way, he illustrates his point that, “Improvising is not just a style of composition. The claim of spontaneity sets up a conceptual field where large issues often contend.” As an example, he finds the Renaissance writers Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne, despite their stylistic and philosophical differences, united in an effort to leverage improvisation against the dangers of a rationalism turned dogmatic, pointing out the importance of spontaneous inspiration in order to protest religious oppression and the torture of heretics.

Fertel hilariously juxtaposes two improvisations that illustrate the ways that the spontaneous impulse serves changing times. The Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards stands at the pulpit to declaim God’s Word without notes—and Henry Miller famously opens **Triptic of Cancer** with the proclamation, “This is not a book.” Both Edwards’ sermon and Miller’s rant follow Fertel’s improvisational method. The key difference is in their aspiration. One assumes a vulnerability and openness to what may be called “grace,” performing a relationship to God so transgressive that Edwards’ congregation had to brave the Atlantic Ocean to dare it. The other assumes a similar submission to an unconscious creative urge, in the face of the impersonal, mechanistic modern world. Both address the key spiritual questions of their age, challenging a dead end. Like all improvisers, Edwards and Miller enact what Fertel calls the “aesthetic of improvisation,” which “expresses its own complex longing, the longing for unmediated experience, for incarnate freedom.”

Fertel demonstrates how improvisers—despite their conceit of spontaneity—learn from their predecessors and carry on a sort of conversation across the ages about the means and ends of improvisation, further bolstering his claim of an improvisatory tradition. And he reminds us of literary cat fights—Capote vs. Kerouac, for instance—between the upholders of writerly craft and those claiming spontaneity. I particularly enjoyed his resurrection of Poe’s essay on the mechanical, by-the-numbers strategy supposedly employed to compose his poem *The Raven*. Fertel finds that traditionalists, too, walk a razor’s edge of inspiration, despite their claims to the contrary.

There is also a dark side to the improvisational impulse that Fertel is quick to recognize. The real poignancy of this book, I think, derives from his discovery that improvisation succeeds by failing. Improvisers may seek or tout spontaneity, but on further examination their efforts “reveal persistent doubts about what it would mean to have unmediated experience or if, after all, it is even achievable.” He adds:

Improvisations may all fail ultimately in their claim of pure, unmediated spontaneity. But far more interesting than their failure are the internal contradictions between an improvisation’s longing for spontaneity and its recognition of that impossibility, our longing for freedom and the inherent constraints on freedom we inevitably face. These are “the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in [improvisation’s] inner structure.”

Fertel finds this paradox brilliantly expressed in Stevens’ masterpiece, *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*. He reminds us that the poem exalts spontaneity, but only as a mirage that recedes as we approach it. Fertel follows this theme across the ages, delineating the ways that artists as diverse as Diderot and Joyce, for instance, imbedded its sobering message in ostensibly liberating texts. **Huckleberry Finn** is an interesting example. We may think of Huck on his raft as a carefree spirit given over to the flow of the Mississippi, but Clemons casts a cynical eye on this river rat’s curious passivity and his rationalization of Jim’s being sold again into slavery. Is Huck’s eventual decision to “light out for the territories” the hard-won liberation of a man alive to the moment, or a surrender to a drifter’s narrowed choices? Fertel finds that improvisers typically warn against this sort of carefree spirit, arguing instead for the type of hard-won authenticity that Blake ascribes to a Jesus who “was all virtue, and acted upon impulse, not from rules” speaking, as Lawrence had it, “the direct utterance of the instant, whole man.”

Up until this point, Fertel has been working comfortably in his wheelhouse as a literary scholar. Then he unleashes this sentence: “Understanding the aesthetics of improvisation can help us get our minds around two important recent phenomena: chaos or dynamic systems science, and post-modernism.” I came to these pages with only a layman’s grasp of chaos science, which is to say, not knowing much, and since I knew that Fertel is no lab-coated scientist, I expected to find him here overextended and exposed. Nope. In a dazzling chapter that ranges from the Roman philosopher Lucretius to the fractal theorist Benoit Mandelbrot, Fertel demonstrates how scientists often utilize an improvisatory method to the same ends as those pursued by improvisers in the arts. He elucidates the challenges scientists since Bacon have faced in observing and interpreting phenomena, seeking—like the literary improviser—new ways to perceive and express what is. In both cases, he sees the same impulse, to be here now, alert to unmediated experience, and the same recognition that this is ultimately impossible. In their adoption of irrational concepts and openness to patterns without pattern (for instance, Mandelbrot’s effort to “investigate the morphology of the amorphous”), the chaos scientists take this theme about as far as we can now go. Fertel



here underlines this point, and indeed summarizes the theme of his book:

At the heart of both the science and the literature of chaos lie questions about the nature of reason and of freedom. At its heart, the literature of apparent chaos, improvisation, shares with chaos science not only the effort to violate and extend boundaries, but also a concern with the deterministic and the free....

Utilizing the conventions Fertel has listed, the improviser in science or the arts challenges “systematic rationality.” Having done so, (s)he then backtracks, admitting that, after all:

...the immediacy achieved thereby [is] in some way problematic, not necessarily what we hoped for, or not necessarily achievable. Finally, the improviser will “settle” for the gesture of embracing life: we can’t have true immediacy, but if we purify/enlarge/redefine rationality, making it more open to life, we can at least experience life in all its profusion and plenitude. Carpe vitam!

From here we are just a short hop to Deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida, who sometimes seems to aim his notoriously knotty and reflexive prose at the whole corpus of received knowledge, while working within Fertel’s improvisational model, and to the same end, as in this compact manifesto: “And so I believe in improvisation, and I fight for improvisation. But always with the belief that it’s impossible.”

Fertel goes on to examine this paradox as exemplified by the Greek god Hermes, whose myth explores “the tension between our longing for immediacy and its inevitable frustration,” reading the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* as “a species of improvisation, portraying the god as a trickster filled with irreverent vitality and effortless creativity [who embraces] the fortuitous, the unconscious, and life’s nonlinear and amoral profusion, penetrating boundaries of every sort, and embracing life’s totality.” This mythic insight leads naturally to archetypal psychology and to the conflict between Freud and Jung, with Freud—the original genius of psychology—here cast as the reductivist scientist against whom his disciple, the improviser, rebels. For Freud, our unconscious drives can be traced to the repressed traumas of childhood. Jung takes a broader view, imagining a shared Collective Unconscious revealed through myth, archetype, dreams, epiphany and experience.

Though many of Jung’s writings adopt an improvisational style—personal, casual, digressive, and provisional—Fertel identifies the recently published **Red Book** (Jung called it **Liber Novus**—the New Book) as an example of extreme improvisation, and in exploring its cryptic revelations of a soul in despair, unveils the role spontaneous impulse, visionary

experience, and active imagination may play in anyone’s pursuit of an authentic self. He finds that “the reader’s journey in **Liber Novus** is in part the dawning recognition of improvisation’s power” to reveal hidden truths, personal potential, and a path towards fulfillment. Yet, as with the literary improvisers so carefully explicated elsewhere in Fertel’s text, Jung underlines a danger in spontaneity, a dark side of human nature that he named the Shadow. “For Jung,” Fertel writes, “meaning arises *from* the unconscious—through dreams, symbols, synchronicity, etc.—but—it is *made* in consciousness.... It is man’s capacity for consciousness alone [that] makes him man.” For all his attention to the unconscious, Jung ultimately seeks to balance its drives with those of conscious thought.

Fertel finds fascinating correspondences between Jung and Joyce, especially as revealed in **Ulysses**, where stream of consciousness opens doors to synchronicity, epiphany, myth, and liminality in the course of one man’s stroll across Dublin, all expressed in an improvisational style, and to improvisational ends: “For both Jung and Joyce,” Fertel writes, “experiencing the other parts of our being—‘the subterranean forces, those hidden tides,’ the ‘back streets’—opens the cornucopian world to us.”

Having mapped the path of improvisation across the ages into the 20th century, where it came most overtly into its own, Fertel chooses to leave us with one 21st century example, the English novelist Ian McEwan’s day-in-the-life novel **Saturday**. In its intense focus on one person’s interior monologue, the book is more **Mrs. Dalloway** than **Ulysses**. The protagonist of **Saturday**, a happily married London neurosurgeon, has carefully built a career of clockwork routine that may seem the antithesis of the carefree lives we have examined in **Huckleberry Finn** and **On the Road**, for instance. Fertel, however, sees the madness in this method.

The neurosurgeon Perowne may be that person called for across the ages by a cascade of improvising artists. Within the carefully laid brickwork of his routine, he has built a fireplace, where each day he can warm his hands at the flame of the immediate now. The novel details the mundane chores of shopping, cooking, visiting Mum in her nursing home, and driving across town to a squash game. Yet as each item is checked off Perowne’s To Do list, it is punctuated by moments of bracing immediacy, sometimes driven by episodes of music, memory, or fear, but best expressed in a lyrical, yet clinically acute, description of the transporting sense of flow he experiences during brain surgery. Without having set out to do so, Perowne may have attained the fully realized life that all of Fertel’s famous improvisers have aspired to. He has found a way to warm himself at that fire without getting burned.

I know that my essay has failed to convey the encyclopedic range of Fertel’s book, or the many, “yes, of course!” moments it awards the reader. Fertel



writes as more than a literary scholar or historian, and it would be a shame if this rigorous yet playful book fell only into academic hands. As an essayist, Fertel easily and authoritatively scrolls from myth to music to literary précis to psychology (and even to chaos science) with brio and wit. Like the improvisers he celebrates, he dazzles with correspondences, with synchronicities across genres and ages, with a clear-eyed and sober skepticism of hoodoo and a wide-eyed and joyful embrace of imagination, daring, and the yearning for immediacy that his theme employs.

Fertel would not be the professorial trickster that he is without playing a trick on his own book. Not content to merely uncover a “hidden rhetoric” of improvisation, he employs that rhetorical style himself. As he writes, “Like the form itself, I have overstepped many boundaries.” For instance, in the preface, where he lobs this disarming aside: “Be forewarned, you are in the hands of someone who thinks about these things while playing tennis.” Or at key turns in the narrative, when he digresses with autobiographical anecdotes, out of line with kosher academic protocol.

If you are a scholar, this free play may prove maddening. You must accustom yourself to Fertel’s deliberately informal yet florid sentences, which are never content to say a thing simply if it can be more colorfully expressed. If you can let yourself fall into his eruptive cadences and enjoy his mood of ecstatic discovery, these passages add up to an invigorating read. Like the improvisers Randy dissects, he gleefully breaks the rules. And the trick works. For by adopting a discursive, era-leaping, personal essayist’s approach, he deepens, extends, and enlivens his argument, exactly as do his sources. Scholars may fume: the rest of us may rejoice.

You may know Fertel from **The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak**, his rollicking, tender, only-in-New Orleans biography of his ne’er do well father and indomitable mother, the Tulane lab technician who founded a restaurant empire launched at a wood clapboard steak house called Ruth’s Chris. You may be fortunate enough to have taken his provocative course on the *Literature of War* at Tulane or The New School, or to have applauded the work of the Ridenhour Truth-Teller prizes his foundation co-sponsors with The Nation Institute. Maybe you know him as a leader in the schoolhouse garden movement or from his efforts to commemorate the musical history of New Orleans and to train new generations of jazz musicians. (Only a few of us were fortunate enough to draw him as a tutor, long before all of these rich and multifarious pursuits unfurled.) A single thread has woven its way through this tapestry: a decades-long labor over this book. There is a reason why my old advisor could not stop gnawing this bone. As he might say, it’s a meaty one, with a bloody marrow.

I would caution you against skimming, too. Yes, a précis such as this may attempt the gist of the work, but I think you will find that there is a cumulative

effect, much more powerful and invigorating, in giving yourself over to this roving, omnivorous tale. As you follow Fertel’s considered leaps across time and intellectual discipline, the significance of his theme builds. If you let it, this book may awaken you to a new perspective on creativity, building as it does a bridge across eras, driven by the primal human aspiration Fertel identifies and so thoroughly delineates: to be here now. In cracking open dusty old texts that seem fresh in his reading, in wrestling Romantics, Modernists, physicists, psychologists, and jazzmen to ground, in his on-point appreciation of the scientific spirit, Fertel bares a core of human endeavor that has lain all but unnoticed right in front of our eyes all this time. As another of my 1970s pop idols, Elvis Costello, sang, “We’re only living this instant.” And as Fertel sings in page after page of his *omnium gatherum*, that is both our comedy and our tragedy, perhaps the great theme of our lives. Those of us who are not

rocket scientists or philosophers or poets live it too. Have you been born again at a backwoods revival? Fallen in love at first sight? Surprised yourself by suddenly jumping in a river to save a drowning pup? Think of how an instant of spontaneity awakens and changes us. Think of how we measure ourselves and our friends on a scale from careful to carefree. How, for



instance, we cherished the celerity of the late great Robin Williams’ improvisations.

The creators Fertel interrogates here are like the rest of us, imagining a truer life lived closer to the quick. He shows us how this tantalizing aspiration is at the heart of so much that they wrote, and so much of that we do and care about. Yes, it has taken nearly 40 richly lived years to complete this story of the perennial quest for now. But Randy would be the first to appreciate that irony. As he makes so abundantly clear, appreciation of the instant takes time. 🌀

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FLIRTING WITH MNEMOSYNE

A Review by Isaac Dwyer

What We See When We Read. Peter Mendelsund. New York, NY. 2014. 448 Pages. \$16.95. ISBN: 978-0-8041-7163-2. Available from Faulkner House Books.

APOCRYPHA HAS IT that James Joyce once declared from his Zürich abode—presumably saturated with senility and madcap chortles—that his ideal reader was an insomniac who would sit down with a copy of *Ulysses* one evening and rip through the tome without stopping. The motive behind this wish, I imagine, would be the production of a continuous flow of images, of moments in time—the desire would be immersion so thorough that the reader would live Bloomsday themselves. Perhaps it would be like watching a film, the pages flipping by at 26 frames-per-second (the calculated measurement to most accurately convey “real-life” time for our ocular processes). Peter Mendelsund, however, would have it that this is a dream born from memory. He launches his phenomenology **What We See When We Read** with this provocative statement:

There is a story called “Reading.” We all know this story. It is a story of pictures, and of “picturing.” The story of reading is a remembered story. When we read, we are immersed. And the more we are immersed, the less we are able, in the moment, to bring our analytic minds to bear upon the experience in which we are absorbed. Thus, when we discuss the feeling of reading we are really talking about the memory of having read. And this memory of reading is a false memory [...]

If I said to you, ‘Describe Anna Karenina,’ perhaps you’d mention her beauty. If you were reading closely you’d mention her ‘thick lashes,’ her weight, or maybe even her little downy mustache (yes—it’s there). Mathew Arnold remarks upon ‘Anna’s shoulders, and masses of hair, and half-shut eyes...’ But what does Anna Karenina look like? You may feel intimately acquainted with a character (people like to say, of a brilliantly described character, ‘it’s like I know her’), but this doesn’t mean you are actually picturing a person. Nothing so fixed—nothing so choate.

When reading this, some might want to fight back against Mendelsund’s proposal, but I certainly didn’t. Truth be told, I always thought that I was deficient in some way, when I listened to other people describe their experience of reading—that theirs was one full

of detail, where everything was expressive and illustrative; magically crystalline. I would fold inwards, and think—What is wrong with me? Reading is an enjoyable experience, but it is not what I hear others describing. So, I would often pretend that my experience was similar, even more profound, than the experiences others recounted. I had no words to describe my experience of reading, and at last, I have. He provides ample illustrations of his ideas. This section holds unmatched potency for me.

In discussing **What We See When We Read**, I feel that I am doing it a disservice—for, the book is not just a text. It is a carefully crafted and designed experience, propelled by language and imagery. Mendelsund is a book designer, and the associate art director of Alfred A. Knopf. He knows all of the tools involved in crafting the experience of reading a book, and he knows how to effectively utilize them—the text is pasted, smashed, engorged and encompassed by engaging, yet often times minimalist illustrations. Flipping the black, off-white, and gray pages is like watching an antique slide projector—each page clicks by with entrancing precision. The words scattered on the page understand, somehow, how you are going to understand them.

They are crafted, positioned, and lined up with ingenious finesse. The cover is adorned with an illustration of radiant light shining through a keyhole, surrounded in sleek black. The book invites the reader to unlock its secrets, while Mendelsund’s pleasantly inquisitive voice narrates the quest. I cannot write about this book without imagining it. By imagining it, I am remembering a memory of reading it. It is a false memory, perhaps, Mendelsund would say, but it is a potent one. His book has no characters, just a voice and citations from others’ works, yet somehow, in the sea of words, I see something. I see an understanding. Is such a thing even possible?

...it occurs to me that perhaps memory—being the fodder of the imagination, and being intermingled with imagination—feels like imagination; and imagination feels like memory, being constructed of it as well.



Peter Mendelsund

Memory is made of the imaginary; the imaginary made of memory.

And so goes the experience of reading—a series of questions, of smudges, blurs. It is elusive. It is potent. Overwhelming. Shadowy. Some part of it can be, as Mendelsund does, captured within a single passage from Virginia Woolf's **To the Lighthouse**, in a section describing Lily Briscoe “With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face...” painting in a backyard.

There it was, her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something...She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred.

“It was blurred”. So are our memories. So is the recollection of our lives.

What do I see when I read Peter Mendelsund's **What We See When We Read?** I see a stream of dancing grayscale pages holding, igniting beauty too radiant for the eyes to describe. 🌸

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Isaac Dwyer is a juvenile nomad. Flirting and cross-pollinating between the worlds of academia, art, and kind-hearted trouble-making, he hopes one day to bring peace to every latitude and longitude of our slowly-spinning space rock, though the task oftentimes appears daunting. Art-making is his modus operandi, and dabbles dutifully in most mediums. He currently calls Bennington College home (although this too, in time, will change).



✎ SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS ✎



La Mística Ciudad de Dios (1706) by Cristóbal de Villalpando portrays María de Agreda wielding a pen with fellow author (and evangelist) St. John in front of her “mystical city of God.”



JOURNEY TO THE SUN:

JUNIPERO SERRA'S DREAM AND THE FOUNDING OF CALIFORNIA

a book review by The Rev. William F. Maestri

GREGORY ORFALEA, PH.D has written an important book that deserves a wide readership within many communities: Church, academia, and Californians— native and transplant.

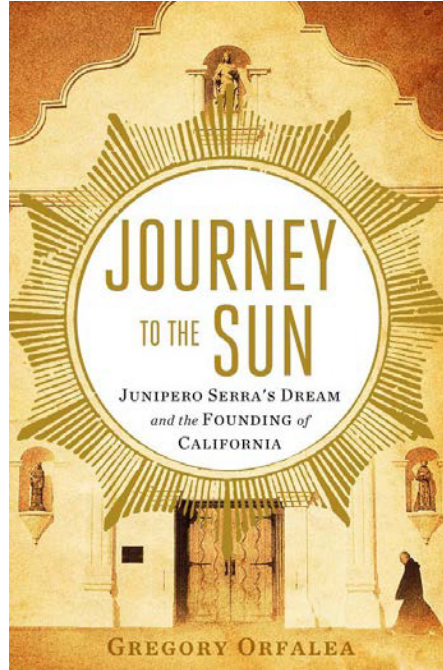
Blessed Junipero Serra, one step removed from sainthood, should be of interest to the faithful. His journey of faith, however, cannot be separated from Serra's earthly pilgrimage. Dr. Orfalea does a commendable job of validating the Catholic-Thomistic notion of "grace building on nature." He brings to life again for us the human, all too human, Serra. We are not dealing here with some holy card icon. As Dr. Orfalea writes in delving into the how and why of Serra's vocation, why the young Serra wound up in the priesthood

... Was it what some have called "an itch that needs to be scratched?" One acclaimed poet thought that when common fishermen "put everything down to walk away" to follow Christ as the 12 Apostles, that was the most miraculous thing of all.

For 15-year-old Miguel Serra, it may have been nothing particularly inspiring. In 18th Century Europe, the calling more likely was poverty itself. The priesthood was a position of esteem and particularly so on Mallorca. A sizeable portion of the people on the island were in religious orders, either as priests, nuns, monks, or tertiaries, or were working closely with them. To be a priest was to elevate oneself up the social and even the political ladder, as no ruler and his lieutenants could not operate without significant consultation with, if not outright blessings from the clergy. Priests may have taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but they never took one against power.

Rather, Dr. Orfalea offers us a real man who faces temptations and fatigue, a man who battles the great temptation to despair in the face of overwhelming odds. It is at such moments, when in the depths of human weakness, that Serra finds the strength, the grace, for just one more step. And those one-more-steps ultimately add up to some 14,000 miles.

The New World bears the indelible footprint of Miguel José Serra and nowhere are the steps of the priest more pronounced than in California. There, he



founded nine missions and those who came in his name founded 12 more. Indeed, he can be called the founder of California, as the missions are today the great cities at the Pacific edge of America.

Academia should find the painstaking research of Dr. Orfalea a thing to admire. When dealing with the great and near great, especially those who float

about in church realms, the historian faces a daunting challenge. That challenge? The need, first, to separate fact from fiction, myth from research and evidence and, second, the need to overcome any exaggerated exaltation to create the image after death of a human life without flaw.

... But priests are not angels; their wings may even be heavier than others' as they take not only their own frailties but those of all humankind in the confessional. Added to the weight of Serra's final acceptance of Holy Orders, the sacrament that consecrates a priest of the Catholic Church, is the fact that the date of Serra's ordination is not clear. Geiger (Maynard Geiger, a previous Serra biographer cited by Orfalea) calls it "an unsolved mystery concerning the most important event of his life." He surmises that while most of his fellows who entered seminary with him received Holy Orders on May 31, 1737, Serra had not yet achieved the minimal age of 24. So it appears he had to wait until at least his birthday in November, and most likely was consecrated without them.

There is another possibility. Recently, uncovered



Spanish documents “put away under lock and key in a closet” and translated for the first time reveal that Serra himself was disciplined by the Inquisition. On January 27, 1738, either in a sermon or one of his last seminary papers, Serra had included ardent assertions of Mary’s Immaculate Conception and graphic descriptions of Christ’s Passion. The Holy Tribunal in the person of Antonio Salas ordered such references stricken or curtailed and the documents themselves turned over, “collected with discretion in the least noisy way.”

Serra was not given faculties to hear confessions until February, 1739. That’s a long time after Geiger’s estimate of a November 1737 solo ordination. And it shows how far Serra would go to buck orthodoxy for what he believed.

*But somewhere between winter 1737 and winter 1739, it happened. Prostrate on the cold sandstone cobbles of Convento San Francisco....
...He was made a priest alone.*

Dr. Orfalea is that rare writer who is able to be true to the facts of the man Serra without falling prey to the other extreme of reductionism. That is, if those in the Church and pew are driven to enlarge Serra beyond all human recognition, those in the academy have the desire to reduce greatness and grace so as to sap all of the wonder of an exemplary human being.

Dr. Orfalea manages, for the most part, to preserve that prudent balance so as to avoid either the erecting of a cult figure or the drive to do biography with a sledge hammer. In walking with Serra on his journey to the sun, Orfalea reminds us that each human life is just that—human. At the same time, he does not allow us to forget, or undervalue, the mystery at work in us.

About European history prior to the discovery of the Indies, Carlos Fuentes shrewdly observed, “You went westward to Spain and there you stopped.” But Serra wasn’t stopping....As Christ went into the desert, he would go into a desert of blue.

He was leaving everything dear to him behind—his family, friends, students, most of his Mallorcan confreres and superiors. All would be dead to him. Where he was going, almost no one but a few companion Mallorcans would know his language. The Atlantic Ocean was, to the Arabs, the Sea of Darkness. And yet, what a challenge! To find out what man is in the rudest circumstances, to form a new community from these basic elements, a community of God! Of course the circumstances were not so rude; the American Indian had culture, and beliefs, and governance. But from Serra’s perspective—that of Christianity—the Indian was something of a spiritual tabula rasa. To a man enflamed with Christ, despairing of his own world, and to some extent, himself, that was intoxicating. Far on the horizon of the West, there was the last strand of innocence....

The mystery at work in us is also present in the mar-

row of California itself. For those native born, as well as the countless who arrive from somewhere else to live on the edge, there is a magnetic force (a grace?) that both holds and draws. There is about California, that place of the angels, a magic that negates our commitment to the scientific method and all things pragmatic. California has been sprinkled with a dream dust that Serra could not shake from his eyes. California’s allure, its siren call, captured him while he still lived on the island of Mallorca. He was enamoured with California even before he set foot in La-La land and his fascination, his attraction would only grow in intensity as Serra matured in his humanity and vocation.

This mystery, this field of energy, has held sway before and beyond Serra and continues to exhibit its power yet today for those seeking fame in a land that manufactures dream, for those starting over whose dream is for revival, rebirth. The California of Serra’s dreams and the California of today’s dreamers bear a kinship, a covenant, in the hope of a new day—a new sun.

Dr. Orfalea holds up to us a Junipero Serra who serves as a kind of “distant mirror” (Barbara Tuckman), a reflection of ourselves through centuries removed. And what do we see? To be certain we see through a glass darkly (St. Paul), yet with the help of Dr. Orfalea there is enough light for self-understanding and a way forward.

The Serra Orfalea discloses is in many ways an “axial figure” (K. Jaspers). Serra is at once a man of his times and yet his life serves as a kind of oracle for situations we moderns continue to confront. The powerful forces of Church and State tugged at Serra the man, the priest, and the citizen. The tension of being faithful to one’s Church and vocation while at the same time struggling to be a loyal citizen of the Spanish Crown was ever present for Serra. Even his missionary ministry and mission carried the tension of two masters—Catholic Church and Spain’s need for conquest driven by economic necessity. In the face of horrific Spanish brutality to native people, Father Serra sought the comfort of the Church with its message of healing, love, and forgiveness. At the same time, Orfalea tells us that Serra represented a Church which engaged in flogging of the less than faithful of its flock. History suggests that Serra himself, while offering the grace of the sacraments on one hand, was known to administer flogging with the other.

Guilt: Serra must have wondered that last night on the rush stool what was worth guilt and what wasn’t, staring up at his books, his holy texts, their covers as torn as men’s backs. It may have crossed his mind that the songs, the raising of the monstrance, the Communion were better instigators to God than the flog. What good was humiliation, stirring the pot of Indian anger? There is a big difference, truly, between Christ acceding to whippings and someone ordering them. Had Serra forgotten the Fifth Commandment?



As Orfalea writes, Serra may have contemplated concurrently the terrible loss of life in the famous Mojave disaster when Indians, sick of the brutality of Spanish rule, attacked in number, burnt missions to the ground, and killed many Spaniards including Serra's brother explorer, the famed Father Francisco Garcés.

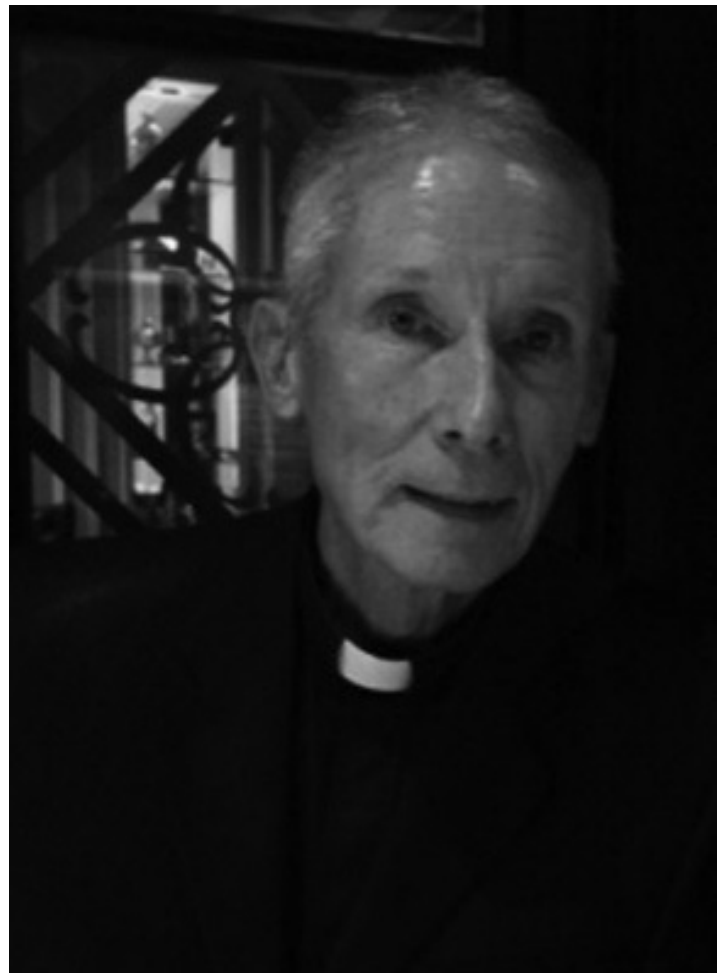
These religious, political, socio-cultural, and moral issues, which pressed in on Serra, are still too much with us in this, the 21st century. The proper role and balance of throne and altar continues to create challenges and heat them to boiling point. The questions of invasion and conquest raise deep moral issues and weigh heavy on one's conscience. The raw issue of respect for cultural uniqueness as well as the need for assimilation continue to cause social eruptions across the globe. The challenges which came together in the life of Serra reach across space and time and find their way onto our computer screens.

Orfalea has written an important and timely book. He knows how to tell a story, which is essential for the biographer and the historian. And it is, unfortunately, a rare blessing for the reader. Mr. Orfalea's Serra deserves a wide readership and discussion. Mr. Orfalea's offer of a "journey to the sun" should not be missed. The light he and his book shine can light the way for us on our own journeys . 🌸

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The Rev. William F. Maestri is a Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Ordained in 1977, the vast majority of his priestly ministry has been, and remains, in the fields of education and media communication. His teaching experience includes various faculty positions in elementary, secondary, university and professional schools. Within the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Father Maestri has served as Superintendent of Catholic Schools as well as Director of Communications. He served in both of these roles in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and during the immediate rebuilding of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

He authored ***The Archdiocese of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina: A Story of Hope in a Time of Destruction***, published five years after the devastating storm. The book details the Church's role in responding to the storm and contains more than 300 photos and several personal stories of those who lived through the challenging days, months, and years to follow. The book explores the inner workings and decision-making processes of the Archdiocese as Catholic leadership struggled with reopening Catholic schools, which served 43,000 students, and churches. Relating to Father Maestri's education and communications ministry are some 40 books and 12 audio-visual programs he has authored. He has been honored twice by the Catholic Press Association for excellence in General Commentary with a First Place Award for "Best



Campaign in the Public Interest/Parental Choice in Education." His weekly columns for *The Clarion-Herald*, a Catholic journal published in New Orleans, covered a broad range of issues and themes, both secular and religious. Of special interest to Father Maestri is the interface of faith with social culture and politics, especially the public role of religion within the public square.

A diocesan priest, Father Maestri is a member of the Clergy serving the Parish of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis King of France. He is director of the recently created outreach mission of the Archdiocese and Cathedral, the Bishop Perry Center, which has a combined ministry of providing spiritual, material, medical, and educational services to the disadvantaged of downtown New Orleans neighborhoods and is concurrently a cultural center for these neighborhoods. The Center recently opened a new public lending library. Father Maestri, who serves Mass regularly at St. Louis Cathedral, St. Mary's Catholic Church, and at the Bishop Perry Center, is popular for his homilies which illuminate the teachings of Christianity with episodes from 21st Century life to bring each message into sharp focus for today's congregations.



GREGORY ORFALEA

in conversation

Isaac Dwyer recently had the pleasure of corresponding with Gregory Orfalea, author, translator, and pedagogue, via email for The Double Dealer. Topics discussed include: Tweets & Sneezes, The Pleasures of Resurrection, Figs, Faith, Failure.

What attracted you to a career in writing non-fiction biography and history?

My ancestors came from Syria and Lebanon, countries with ancient, troubled histories, to this brand new land 100 years ago. History was in our blood. Stories—true ones—regaled my ears as a boy—of starvation in World War I in the Lebanon mountain, of my great-grandfather being bailed out of a Damascus jail by Teddy Roosevelt, of father’s frozen feet at the Battle of the Bulge, of mother’s poem on the Spanish Civil War published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1937. Southern California may have appeared a new place, but to us it had an ancient aroma. The figs and apricots we ate on a porch in Pasadena spoke of history. I was determined to get this interplay of old history and new American life down before the wrecking ball swung too close.

You have a background in original creative work as well, in poetry and its ilk. How do the two processes of creation—poetry and non-fiction writing—relate? What are their respective roles in your writing life?

Frankly, my favorite genre is the short story. I like its compression and its urgency, the sense of entering a whole life with dispatch and falling down the well quickly. I did start out as a poet, so I pay attention to the timbre and feel of language in my prose. Though I never really stopped writing poetry, I did stop sending it out. I’m not entirely sure why. Perhaps it was the spectacle of so many poets crawling over each other trying to get something rather anti-poetic (tenure). I was one of them, sorry to say. The backscratching, etc. The fact that poets don’t read poetry, strangely enough. And they sure don’t read prose. And so few read them in this America. Or maybe it was a sense of my own feeble gifts in that direction. In any case, I took what poetry I could scrounge from my life and the lives of others, and filtered it into prose. You might say I smuggled my poetry away in sacks of prose!

Your latest book, *Journey to the Sun: Junipero Serra’s Dream and the Founding of California* concerns the life of a man who’s been dead for 230 years this August. What special challenges did you face researching and bringing to life someone who lived

before the days of electronic and mass-governmental record-keeping? What would have been different if Junipero Serra had died, in say, 1984?

The chief challenge in researching Serra is the fact that his life is document-poor for his first 36 years—his entire life before leaving Spain—and document rich after he enters California at the age of 55. I traveled to Mexico and Spain five times to defray as much as possible the “document poor” part of this conundrum, even though my editor worried about my travel in rural Mexico. I’m pleased to report I ran into no drug lords, only great archivists and chefs. One of the real finds—of 16 letters of Serra’s and his confreres—had been housed in the old farmhouse of a *campesino* high in the Sierra Gorda mountains for centuries. You cannot get such things by doing a Google search. In Oaxaca, after coming up empty for a week, a tired spool of microfilm on the one tired manually-spindled machine in a dusty Catholic archive turned up the find of finds—a love triangle from 1764! Writers like me live for such moments. We like to hoof it. And again, in this way Google is of no help. As for your “trick” question, if Serra had died in 1984, he would have presented researchers with an Orwellian amount of material photocopied, faxed, and the beginnings of computer print-outs to sift. If he had died this year, such a biography would involve wading through millions of electronic records that would give a biographer a heart attack before he started! Sometimes I think we are burying our lives in minutiae. More is not more. A life does not gain clarity by recounting every sneeze on Twitter.

What unexpected pleasures lie in researching the lives of those long dead?

The pleasures of resurrection. Nothing less. I recommend biography as an antidote to memoir, the current rage. And you realize how much alike we are, and how little we have progressed, really, in the phalanx of centuries. Man is still an animal to his fellows, a brute, as we see in Syria or any inner part of our own cities. And to discover goodness, and heartache, and stupidity, but especially goodness far back in time when pain came as part of every day, is a beautiful thing. And to discover the man underneath



the veneer of “saint,” soothing in a strange way. It has always been a challenge to be human, and to be good. I loved finding Serra in unexpected ways—looking out his childhood window in Mallorca, for example, and discovering that right across the cobbled street was another open window without a screen, as it was 300 years ago. And Junipero must have spotted a childhood friend at that window. How little that is fundamentally true changes! And I let myself go thinking of what the two of them must have called out. Seeing the sun come through the rose window of Convento de San Francisco of Palma, where Serra was a young priest, and saying to myself, “The sun. The sun. The sun is always part of his journey, even to California.” Watching that sun as I did as a child, then a young man, then deep in middle age ride out the waves along the Pacific Coast, and knowing that as a constant across the centuries—seen by Indians, by Serra, and now by me. What a pleasure it was looking at California in its pristine state through the eyes of an 18th century Spanish priest—without traffic, without freeways! But certainly with that sun-on-the-water glory. So, you certainly see what is different, but what startles always is how much still sustains us despite all the junk we’ve piled on the Truth.

Let’s have fun with a hypothetical situation—say that I’m a young, aspiring, diligent writer. I find out that my grandmother, recently deceased, was a key member and orchestrator of the Ordo Templi Orientis, the fraternal mystery society famously reformed by Aleister Crowley in the beginning of the 20th century. I’m very interested in her story, and

want to write and publish a book about her, but have no idea how to begin such a project. Where should I start? How should I pitch this to a publisher? Do you have any books, craft-related or otherwise, that I should read in preparation for this project? If you are interested in biography, read Lauren Hillenbrand’s **Unbroken**, about Louis Zamperini. That will show you how a life can be made into a novel. But if I were researching a biography of a grandmother, I would start with her letters and any journals. Collect impressions about her from family and work your way out of the interior to other contacts. As far as pitching anything, I have no magic formula. You are talking to someone who did not secure a successful agent until five years ago.

How do you deal with rejection and failure (that being, in relation to writing)?

Poorly, as all writers. I once made a triptych of my rejection notices.

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve ever received in regards to writing and editing?

Pull out all the stops. And then: Less is more.

What question do you always wish people would ask you?

What role does your faith play in your writing? 🌸

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Gregory Orfalea, Ph.D. is author of the new biography of Blessed Junipero Serra, *Journey to the Sun*, an authoritative and incisive picture of a man whose story is as essential to the founding of our nation as the stories of Plymouth Rock and Jamestown. Dr. Orfalea was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA, and educated at Georgetown University and the University of Alaska. He is the author or editor of eight books, the most recent of which are **The Man Who Guarded the Bomb** (2010) and **Angeleno Days** (2009).

The recipient of many awards for his writing, Orfalea’s *Angeleno Days* won the 2010 Arab American Book Award and was named a Finalist for the PEN USA Award in Creative Nonfiction. He has taught at the Claremont Colleges, Georgetown University, and Westmont College. Kirkus Reviews has this to say about **Journey to the Sun**: “A California story becomes an American story . . . a doggedly researched and fulsomely argued biography.”



MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA: A BELL FOR A WOMAN FLYING IN BLUE



by Gregory Orfalea

*These petitions of His Spouse were very sweet to the Lord;
they were the scarlet lace, with which she bound and
secured His love.*
—María de Agreda

LET US GRANT Pedro Fages some points that history, for the most part, has not. He served in one of the hottest spots in New Spain—Sonora during the Indian uprisings in 1767—and had to endure orders to decapitate from a feverishly capricious patron, José de Gálvez. He was promoted three times in California by three different commanders, no mean feat even in the worst bureaucracies. Put in charge of the military on the ill-fated, scurvy-ridden San Carlos headed to San Diego, he managed to avoid getting infected. Fages was a good bear hunter, and helped keep Carmel from starving; he was affectionately dubbed “L’Os” (or the Bear), perhaps for his nuzzling qualities. He kept a garden. He married a good woman when he was forty-six; she was twenty-two.

Occasionally he was deferential to Indians, noting their “great covetousness and a certain inclination to traffic and barter,” referring to the Chumash as “the Chinese of California.” He held the door for Anza’s crossing at the Colorado River with his historic wagon train to California. In the midst of their worst troubles, at the end of a letter Junípero Serra managed to throw Fages a kiss. Would you do that to an entirely bad man?

There is, however, another side to these attributes. The three-time promotion could have been due to paucity in personnel in the far reaches of California in the last part of the eighteenth century. To have Gálvez as your patron was a decidedly mixed blessing. While he might have been one of the few healthy aboard the *San Carlos* when it anchored in San Diego, there’s some evidence he kept the oranges for himself. His bear-hunting skills, good as they were, did not singlehandedly keep Serra and the Spaniards alive in Carmel in those lean first years—the Indians did. The Quechans soon reversed the opening Fages cleared in the desert and effectively shut off the Mojave land route from New Spain for close to a century. As far as Serra’s affection, even if it was real it wasn’t long lived.

The Serra-Fages clash was an accident waiting to happen. Although they were both men of rules, Serra was always testing the boundaries that circumscribed his life. Fages was nothing of the sort; one Serra biographer called him “a martinet.” Though he was born in 1734, twenty-one years after the War of the Span-

ish Succession was concluded, as a Catalán his family probably had some bitter memories of Barcelona’s last stand crushed by the Bourbons. A teenager when England was pronounced victor over Spain in the War of Jenkins’ Ear, Fages joined a Spanish army reeling from one defeat after another. He didn’t go to the New World to save souls; he signed up specifically to put down the Sonora native rebellion—a war that Spain, at least for a time, could win. Soon he participated in what today we would call war crimes.

Fages was blunt about the Indians of Southern California. They had “homely features and ungainly figures,” and according to him, they were “dirty, very slovenly, and withal evil-looking, suspicious, treacherous, and have scant friendship for the Spaniards.” This certainly contrasts with Crespí’s observations of the natives, so solicitous they “seem to have known us forever,” and the words of naval commander and explorer Alejandro Malaspina about the Chumash of the central coast, “free of the ambition that torments cultured Europe.” Though Serra normally had more in common with Catalonians than anyone else in Spain (Barcelona was right across the water from his home island), his relationship with Fages was an edgy one. Both were from outer-rung minorities in the Spanish political solar system, and Mallorca was farther out of the Crown’s orbit than Catalonia. The Mallorquin dialect is different though related to Catalán. It’s a time-honored practice for minorities to heap abuses heaped on them on the next smallest in line. Serra sustained a flurry of Fages “complaints”: “Complaints were made because he wanted us to have the door of our [mission] house on the inside of the presidio; complaints concerning the church, the cemetery, the cross of the cemetery; because I buried a dead man a little farther away than he liked; complaints, too, because he wanted to keep the key of our yard so as to lock us in and out when he pleased.”

Clearly, Fages wanted to physically and mentally subordinate the Franciscans not only to his military government, but to his personal will. It’s not a long leap from locking in priests to priests locking in Indian women.

Concrete evidence of soldier molestation of women didn’t come up until a year later when Serra reported it



to his superior, the new guardian at San Fernando, Rafael Verger. Serra noted that among soldiers sent from Carmel to help found a mission at San Luis Obispo were “the most notorious molesters of gentile women.”

Whatever the case with this growing storm between the spiritual and temporal leaders of California, for the moment, Serra’s solution was to get away from any presidio (that is, from both San Diego and Monterey) and found a third mission where the Indians themselves lived and thrived. He read the Crespí diaries—which he would soon send, edited, to Mexico City, after “suggesting he [Crespí] go light on the minutiae, repetitions, and superlatives”—and put his finger on it: the Valley of the Oaks just east of Big Sur’s Santa Lucia Mountains, a glade Crespí had loved.

On the first Portolá expedition, Crespí discovered in the Santa Lucias “a vast heathen population,” naming the spot for Saint Lucy of Salerno, “trusting that with time it will become a very large mission for converting to our holy faith all this throng of gentiles who are contained in all its surroundings, the kindest, most tractable gentiles one can wish for.” They were the Salinans. Coming up from the coast through the only mountain pass near Lucia, Crespí encountered two rivers meandering through arich pine forest (they were probably today’s Nacimiento and San Antonio); soon six hundred Indians “presented us with a great many pine nuts like those in Spain, and good, well-flavored gruels.” Serra noted happily that it was there that Indians returned a lame Spanish mule, now healthy. It had been a hard climb up and across to find this golden valley; Crespí had tagged it La Cañada de Los Robles de Las Llegas de Nuestro Seráfico Padre San Francisco, the White Oak Hollow of the Wounds of St. Francis, Our Angelic Father, as long a title as the valley itself. This was Franciscan code to Serra: a place Christ favored, an origin point, a place of saving wounds. Crespí’s final remarks cinched it: “This spot is one of the most excellent places that have been met with in the entire journey. . . . It is the one and only spot for the best supply of timber, especially white and live oaks. . . . Of stone I suppose there can be no lack, as the place lies still in the mountains.”

On that rock Serra would build his third church. Mission San Antoniode Padua was born, far off the beaten path then and now (it’s still the most rural of all twenty-one missions, twenty-five miles off Route 101), though at the time it was in the thoroughfare of twenty Salinan villages, including the largest, Quinau. St. Anthony is the patron saint of the lost—and, no doubt, rattlers, which slither over the roads today. As far as Serra was concerned, it was a good place to be lost.

On July 8, 1771, even before he finalized the move to Carmel, Serra departed Monterey with a pack train of mules, six leatherjacket soldiers, three sailors, and a handful of Baja Indians to find the Valle de Los Robles that so enamored Crespí. Traveling south with him were two priests from among the new arrivals—

Buenaventura Sitjar and Miguel Pieras, both Mallorcans in their early thirties. Both priests would go on to the longest stretches of service at one mission (San Antonio) in early California history, Pieras for twenty-three years, Sitjar for thirty-six. For a turnaround mission and new model, going inland to warm country, Serra picked right.

Although he complained to the viceroy that he was basically down to one bell to spare, that bell may have been the brass one he got in exchange for a cracked bronze version given the San Antonio’s captain. It certainly was lighter, easier to hoist, and with a sharp ring to it. On July 13, Serra stopped the party near a rushing Mission Creek, sixty-five miles up the Carmel River, under shade of oaks in a glow of rye grass. He took the brass bell out from its burlap mule sack, probably patted the animal’s rump, checked the clapper to see if it was loose, threaded the rope through the bell head, and swooped it over oak limbs. Soon he pulled in the heat.

“Come, come, you gentiles, come to the Holy Church!” Serra sang out, the brass bell clanging in the empty woods.

“Come, oh come, receive the faith of Jesus Christ!” If Serra smiled, Sitjar had to laugh. His companion’s already ruddy face was burned from five days in the wilderness. He looked around: nothing but a hawk’s circling shadow.

“Why exhaust yourself?” appealed Pieras, San Antonio’s pastor-to-be. “This isn’t a church. There’s not a pagan anywhere near who can hear it.” To him, the bell sounded like a ship in distress.

Serra kept pulling, his tonsured head undoubtedly gleaming with sweat. He called out, Venis, venis, mes gentiles.

“What a waste of time.” Pieras turned to fetch water from the creek.

“Father, let my heart overflow,” Serra chastised him. “Just as María de Agreda would want—let this bell be heard all over the world. Or at least by the gentiles who live in these mountains.” He flung his hand out to the Santa Lucias, that wall before the Pacific.

María de Agreda at her writing desk was carved into Palou’s Landa mission high in the Sierra Gorda of Mexico. Her book was Serra’s constant companion all over the New World. Since leaving Loreto in Baja, this was Serra’s third reference to the bilocating nun he believed preceded him to these parts a century earlier (according to her own testimony, five hundred times after 1620, flying with St. Michael, St. Francis, and assorted angels). First, conversion on sight of Franciscans, as Agreda had promised, with the Cochimí chief at Velicatá; then confiding to Gálvez that Agreda had sent a monstrance to New Mexico; and now at the start of Mission San Antonio, invoking Agreda with his fervent brass bell. Yet Serra knew there had been no conversion on sight in San Diego, where his one baptism had grievously flopped, or in Monterey, where all the ministrations of cannon, incense, and Latin



hymns brought no one out of the woods. It's hard to believe what Geiger claims—that as late as 1773, when he visited Mexico, Serra shared with the new viceroy, Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursua, María de Agreda's promise of conversion on sight, unless Serra were bringing it up ironically.

Nevertheless, that brass day in the valley over the mountains from Big Sur brought a surprise: “a single Indian who had been attracted by the ringing of the bell or the strangeness of the people gathered there.” Serra, overjoyed, gestured to him to come out from the shadow of the oaks. Whatever this intrepid soul received, Serra proclaimed at his inaugural sermon for San Antonio the next day, after a cross was hoisted, that “this mission will come to be a settlement of many Christians because we behold here what has not been seen at any mission so far founded.” It was a newcomer's soul, a curious soul he wanted to enflame for Christ, just as he was enflamed that radiating summer day, the ground blond in the sun.

Though Serra only tarried at the new San Antonio mission for two weeks, overseeing the construction of a crude chapel and living quarters for Sitjar and Pieras, he was rejuvenated, greeting the stream of Salinan Indians who seemed to have no fear and couldn't give the Spaniards enough seeds and acorns. He was no longer in Monterey, its dead stop of hunger and outlaw soldiery. At High Mass “He gave full vent to his pent-up emotions.”

In two years there were 158 newly baptized Christians (some of whom Serra christened himself), many living in huts around Mission San Antonio. He was concerned about infant mortality, “a number of babies they have sent on their way to God,” but he also told the viceroy, “You could not wish for anything more touching than the love that these gentiles have for the good Fathers. Throughout the whole day, they cannot bring themselves to leave them.” In Serra's lifetime, San Antonio would have the largest mission population, establishing, through miles of filtering through sand and charcoal, the first irrigation system in California. And its grape vines would last longer than any, the oldest gnarled trunk in the central coast still giving wine (albeit so bitter deer won't eat its fruit).

Certainly the most unusual of the neophytes was a hundred-year old shrunken woman who walked slowly out of the forest, asking, even demanding, baptism. To the astonishment of Father Pieras, when asked her name, she told him: “Agueda.” The old woman smiled. When he asked her to repeat it, she did: “Agueda.” With her lisping version of Agreda, the old Salinan woman told a story that reverberated back three hundred years.

Agueda had heard about the San Antonio mission and, remembering childhood stories of men in such robes, she had come forward for eternal life. The two priests were dumbstruck. If Agueda were telling the truth, her kin's “priest” would have to have arrived in California by the seventeenth century. In

1542, Kumeyaay had told Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo at San Diego “they were afraid because Spaniards were killing many Indians in the region.” Was this Francisco Vásquez de Coronado on his elusive hunt for the Seven Cities of Cibola? But Coronado was close to one thousand miles southeast of the Valle de los Robles, in Arizona, with no record of leaving priests behind. Manila galleons piloted by Pedro de Unamuno and Sebastian Cermeno barely touched the California coast in 1587 and 1594, respectively, the former logging a few foggy days in Morro Bay and the latter's ship destroyed by storms at Drake's Bay. Cermeno met the Miwok briefly before limping south in a dinghy.

What really floored Pieras was Agueda's next assertion that the missionary of her ancestors “did not walk through the land, but flew.” That must have raised Pieras's red eyebrows. When Palou heard the story in 1773 while passing through the Valley of the Oaks, he checked it out with other Indians, and it appears to have been in the common lore of the Salinans. Of course a flying man is not a flying woman. But how did Agueda get a name so close to that of the Blue Nun of the Southwest? Then Palou remembered: María de Agreda, in her 1631 letter to Franciscans grilling her about her astounding claims of bilocation, says that two non-Spanish Franciscan priests were sent directly to the Southwest by St. Francis, and then suffered martyrdom. Again, this is too early for Father Kino (an Italian), but could there have been others who strayed off course?

There were other Indians in California who had similar stories of a flying Blue Nun, among them, the Santa Cruz mission Indians (probably Costanoan), just north of Carmel. And the legend lingered and even expanded to include in one nineteenth-century report, a “padre of the mamas” (with big breasts) who foretold white men coming.

Whether this was man, woman, hermaphrodite, or flying squirrel, the point is that Serra's fixation with María de Agreda was not idiosyncratic among Franciscans, the viceroy, or even the king of Spain deep into the nineteenth century. It helped convince them that their movement into California was divinely ordained, especially in moments when the realpolitik of what they were doing pulled inside them like an iron chain.

If, however, some anonymous priest had wandered long before Serra into the Valley of the Oaks, he may have left a telling mark. One day early in Mission San Antonio's life, Father Sitjar was led by Salinan scouts on a hard hike into the Santa Lucias. At about three thousand feet, they pointed to a cave filled with prehistoric petroglyphs, La Cueva Pintada. On entering, Sitjar marveled at the crude drawings of what looked like a necklace of suns, spiky hands, little stick-figured humans, huge centipedes or waterbugs. But one image was unmistakable and startling: a prayer pole or a Christian cross, perhaps even—because of a small crossbeam above the large one—a papal version. How is this explained? Sitjar certainly didn't carve it, and it



is decidedly more carefully geometrical and even older than the glyphs, some of which are painted over it.

The Salinans explained that this was a site of their native religions' rites, and to prove their devotion to Christianity they would destroy it in front of the father. "No, no," he said, preferring to preserve not just their culture, but this strange, perhaps even miraculous symbol of his, a symbol, he insisted on pointing out, that was now theirs.

For Junípero Serra, Mission San Antonio was a hedge against early corruption and the slow monotony of the whole conquista espiritual. The year 1771 was a critical one for that enterprise; never again would Serra work in such a flurry, as if creation itself would make good in the waking face of evil. That year was the only one in which he founded three missions—San Antonio, San Gabriel, and San Carlos Borromeo (in moving it from Monterey to Carmel, he was for all intents and purposes starting it anew). He also was taking advantage of Fages's five-month absence in search of more food and soldiers to stanch the tide of desertions.

San Antonio was Serra's secret flagship, and he often visited it. An atmosphere of mutual respect and joy can be divined from a few of the items Serra listed in an inventory of San Antonio: a tin cup for shaving, a dozen little guns for celebrations (Salinans were trusted with firearms), twenty-four varas of muslin for ornamental curtains (for Indian living quarters), and twelve scythes (the people were very industrious). In 1773, the first Christian marriage in New California took place at San Antonio, of Juan María Ruiz and Margetta de Cortona (over one thousand of their descendants have been identified today). Sitjar, especially adept in learning Salinan and author of the most comprehensive grammar (four hundred pages) of a California Indian language, had begun to teach the Lord's Prayer in the native tongue. He led the couple and all attendants in saying: "Za tili, mo quixco nepe limaatnil . . . Zo na quisili jom sig zumlayuitec. Amen." (Our Father, who are in heaven . . . deliver us from evil. Amen.) Ultimately, the quarters for married couples at San Antonio, two wings each as long as a football field, would become the largest of any California mission.

The year 1771 was a critical one for that enterprise; never again would Serra work in such a flurry, as if creation itself would make good in the waking face of evil.

Among those likely to have witnessed the first marriage and perhaps met Serra were the Yokuts and Salinan grandparents of Perfecta Encinales (1830–1914), who became famous at Mission San Antonio for weaving vaquero hats and beautifully beaded baskets with animal designs unlike the unadorned work of her ancestors. Perfecta's grandmother Juana Carabajal had married one of the original Spanish soldiers who accompanied Serra from Carmel. Perfecta's relatives still live in the area today; in fact, a large percentage of Salinan Indians live on their aboriginal land today.

Maybe it was the music. Juan Bautista Sancho was the man who discerned that the Indians not only had the native aural gifts to make the most sophisticated music, the complicated, vast changes in their lives badly needed it. Like Serra, Sancho was a Mallorcan with a great, rich voice. He was only a boy when Serra entered California, but he was enthralled by Serra's example, and determined to follow him to the New World. From a family of music impresarios, Sancho brought music unlike anything anyone had ever heard in California—Indian or Spaniard. As Craig Russell put it, unique in the mission chain at the turn of the nineteenth century, "San Antonio could boast of an orchestra." And to convey Christian dogma utterly strange to the Indian—such as the death by nailing of God himself, who had grown from a baby in the womb of a woman who never touched a man—music was Sancho's last, best chance. He copied the score with a "jaunty tune" he learned as a youth in Arta, an oratorio for the Nicene Creed called *Credo Artanense* that might bring to the Salinan ear things that otherwise made no sense. Even more impressive is a piece very likely authored by Sancho himself, the *Mise en Sol* (Mass in G, but also with that homonymic "sun"), a complex, gorgeous oratorio for four voices and orchestra considered on a par with the great Classical era masses of Ignacio de Jerusalem or Haydn. The Mass radiating from the Sun. And Salinans. In G. 🌞

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RECONNECTIONS: DREAMSCAPE MUSINGS OF A DRUID SHAMANIC POET, WRITER, ARTIST, AND EXPRESSIVE ARTS TEACHER

By *Liv Evensen*

THERE WAS A TIME FOR LOVE and connection, there was the time of a tragic accident and blow to the spirit, there was a time for seeming death, there was a time for fear so rampant, it was a time to resurrect. As a poet and painter “on my way home, I know that inspirations from Inner Muses come... and go....

Now... through a long shamanic journey of dream healing, I have experienced otherworldly sights, my biological clock has reversed itself in meeting the true Fountain of Youth, my muse within, a most exquisite dream-stories poet of “all knowing of human plights and true beauty.” Like a Dante I have travelled with “my Virgil” on a pure love journey through thick and thin, “across centuries and national boundaries, over five years dreamscaping from East China (where I believe I lived in the 11th century, and had knowledge of “The five Dynasties” deep in my soul, to approximately Turkey, where my poet muse, fountain of all wisdom, knocked on the doors of human hearts encountered along what was once called *The Silk Road*. One may call my experiences shamanism, sufi-buddhist journeys, Christian Mystic journeys, Indian transfiguration, inspired journeys, healing journeys and many other names. These journeys are the source of inspiration for all of my work. Another source of inspiration is my painting.

A late bloomer, I only entered art school in 2012. I now have my own small artist’s studio, in a cove of tall, healthy, very old trees, by the waterfalls where skies and heaven meet earth on the horizon upon the hill, in Oslo. In Art school, themes synthesized from the dreamscapes of my writings emerged in my paintings. As I learn the figurative techniques, I am developing my own style.

And, I continue to dream with my muses, teach refugee youngsters how to express themselves in word and visual images, write, and, a bit like a William Blake, I paint.

This presentation is of two narrative poems from my journey out of sorrow, illustrated by a few of my paintings, inspired by the inner muse who guided me on my journey. Here is the first tale I have to tell:

*...and she cried...historical roles past and present.
The Little One and The Ghost-like Fairy Tale Mistress
of All Faiths and Care.*

She had been working with them, these large young men inside of school systems hell bent on leather to teach them how to write without their songs and she stood here now and looked upon a brother he was large and barrel-chested and not talkative at all, his words were somehow lacking, that is what the school system says about them all, these young men that is what the statistics say about them, that youngsters of the male gender are less verbal than the females, and yet, the young teacher broke down and cried bitter tears upon seeing this barrel-chested young man begin to cry his own tears, bitter tears, in huge long sobs for having bled from his heart and soul like Cain and Abel once must have where one “killed” the other, his very own brother, yet here he was this young and so able man acting almost like a mentally handicapped finding his words not at all for all the tears, that river that was emerging from his soul as blood was pouring from his sores he had been beaten severely by his brother and was acting almost like a one without his own thoughts he could not find them nor his words in this flood of deep river tears....

She cried bitterly almost when she saw him there, her beloved brother, her so dear human being, us all, she cried as her teacher colleague took her hand, his name was Tore, a one with whom she had worked well once upon a time, that is, she had worked among mostly male teachers, she was a lone swallow singing a tone of beauty and care, they misunderstood her often, these male colleagues, the way she spoke up for the youngsters and pointed out the very good things and she did care, however, perhaps and not quite did she realize then, as life had brought her more of the saddest experiences to her in loosing such a beloved friend as she had realized that he had perpetuated what one today calls crimes of wars and yet labels are no longer adequate to talk about who started and who did what to whom as hurt and revenge is rampant among men on this planet and the real basis for it all is



a thought so meaningless as they come, a thought that they are separate from God up above, and so hurt is inflicted upon each other in cries for help and revenge, that is what this writer is realizing, were we but to know the hurt behind the silent facades, the sorrow so big as man-o-war-with long burning tentacles, we would not judge but grieve with them as she knew that Tore, her old colleague was truly a sweet man, a teacher who cared, a teacher who saw these young men for what they were, and he held her hand as she cried her tears upon seeing and realizing that each and every one of them, these men no matter where as buddhistic ones, christed ones use whichever word you like, they are hurt and grieving ones in our thought separated state of mind, in our silly class differentiated mores of complexities and fears, were they but to remember who they were and are, were humanity to remember who we truly are, and for sure humanity will, each and every one who finally will be able to release their tears and return to their normal state of mind, that will be swell....it will happen one of these nights and days, meanwhile the young teacher cries her tears as she is standing there beside her so good and kind male colleague and brother, Tore as he is looking upon it all, taking her hand gently leading her through another door now, his lashes are thick above his eyes, they are more like paint brushes now, and he will teach her more, as he himself had painted his way out of his old wounded heart and sores.

But before she leaves through this door of painting mores and less of all that is gone before, she stands by the cashier for another young mentally handicapped one, a fun and gentle one, there are some beautiful cakes here and the latter wants one, she has 5 Norwegian crowns in her hand, in one single large silvery coin, the cake costs 19 something, much more than the young mentally handicapped lady has, but the young teacher by the cashier has a soft heart and is so non-attached to the material world, profit for her is not about money at all, more like a gentle heart for those who are temporarily poor souls, and that temporary state of mind can feel long within the "frames of time", it may even feel like eternity it may even feel like it is permanently, but that is not so, dear reader of mine, knowing I love them so, and have worked within a school system where I saw their innate colourful souls yet pushing these students not, and gradually even for them they began to open up and long for a home, bringing issues forth in the drama lessons that were the same themes as those that are written about in dreams and in literature noble, however their words were lacking to express themselves, at least in the beginning, with their strangely twisted bodies perhaps expressing long lasting traumatic issues, and gently we began loosening up with drama and fun.....and yet, here she cries, the young teacher upon seeing her seemingly mentally retarded brother, brother in terms of any which human

being who is lacking his words and concealing his feelings, before she is about to enter into another mode of teaching but not before she has painted silently for a long time because of her own grieving... and here she stands now and looks towards these two fine cakes, and her young "mentally retarded" female this time around protege, same story for her as the one above, something pretty awful and saddened has happened to her in a previous life or five or something like that, here she is opening up her palm showing the young teacher her coin of 5 and she wants to buy the case of cake costing 19, almost as if she herself is at a human stage of 5 years old wanting the cake she could have at more mature 19, however, this is a bakery shop, a part thereof, and so the young teacher opens up her kindest of hearts and gives her the cake for the coin of 5, a piece of that cake, perhaps the mentally handicapped lady had experienced a french revolution anywhere, perhaps she had had her head chopped off at one point inside of human history's evolution, no wonder perhaps she dared not speak her own mind and instead reached out her hand, a coin with the head of state on it, a chain of "honours" imprinted upon it, the way coins usually are, no wonder she wanted a piece of the cake, perhaps she was the one who had once upon a time in a French revolution said "let them eat cake", and here she was now, perhaps, more like a mentally retarded, fear-filled yet smiling and laughing, and wanted a piece of a cake more like that of a young and beautiful wife's, at 19 or thereabouts, however, these thoughts do come to mind as this writer sees the young and so tenderhearted teacher take this case and give it to the young mentally retarded, knowing full well that deep inside also her there resides a beautiful noble soul like in her human brother talked of above, behind all our roles, our historical roles we find the most beautiful of minds, and instead of heads to roll mentalities may resolve as souls are crying....
...as the world goes on...



All of my poems, tales, stories and paintings come from themes in my life:—hurt and sorrow and happier "endings"—and from my "universal yet personal *Inner Muse's* dreaming with me" and guiding me to inspiration for poetry and art. My *Inner Muse* is an improviser, and guiding me in the journey to understanding life in this world and others. I spend time in silent meditation almost every day and am also active on the scene of life. My *Inner Muse* does not lead me away from connecting me with other people, famous as well as "infamous", friends and foes alike, making me understand something myself, and "the other one" that I did not understand before, leading me to deeper realizations which both heals relationships with people to whom I have been close but who are no longer in my life physically but also through the ethers of time to many others. It is a



kind of healing I believe could ultimately release the peoples of the world from repeating the mistakes of the past, such as reoccurring patterns of war which come down on the world in the absence of love and understanding. Traveling the way shamanic poets do across time and centuries where “parts of us are stuck

towards the sphere where the young lady is sitting, he is wearing his brown thick yet soft poet’s coat, the one she so used to like, the one she has been given to see him in a very few times when her spirit master guides have wanted to give her a glimpse of how well he has fared in his life after the young one and him split up, actually split up is perhaps not quite the word as it turned out they had “lived together” yet lived totally separate and yet parallel lives, she had not seen him much in physical life all of these years, yet dreams had told her of a one who finally heard the call TO LIFE, that God himself had called upon him and his brother, that is God himself had descended down into “their cellar” where they had been hiding, he had been a bit curious about her, Richard had been, yet he had not been allowed to know very much, actually none at all, the way she, the younger one and he had walked each side of God for a while, those are the memories that this writer now has as she had also been given to see him, years later, as he was “just down the hill healing his life”, and much later, perhaps some years or so thereafter she had been



in sorrow, anger and longing for death, or life, one encounters the Divine, cosmic presence” in roles of life and death and resurrection. Such journeys inspired the following tale:

The Little One and The Ghost-like Fairy Tale Mistress of All Faiths and Care

The young one sat by a very large table, an empty one in a large now emptied room, half dark half light in here, she sits there alone and her head is actually bald like an eagle and old poet one’s the way she used to know it, however the very large outline of an almost ghostlike lady turns up, her eyes are more like black sockets light somehow, not attached to anything dark nor evil nor painful nor fear no longer she’s the queen of fairy tales like a one from a past life in India, and she speaks gently to the young one sitting at the other side of the table, she speaks as the inner vision turns up, a little further away across to the other side of the table, the vision of a very fine house, a half of a house with very fine wooden like structures, an elongated-shaped half-sized home as it were, and in front of it she sees her old boyfriend Richard gently rising up

given to see him again, while she was healing more after having been a healer in life and she had “crashed” and bitter tears were rife then, she had seen him then, again in his soft brown leather poet’s jacket, she knew then that he had followed his bliss as he hid his deep musical gifts no longer, and he had turned into a therapist, and now again, this very morn’ in a dream, the young one now so very much more cleansed again sits here by a large so empty table in a large so empty room half dark and half light and she is given to see Richard in this dream vision ascending further from this house that was his very own, and the now ghost like fairy tale mistress of transformative tales, the shamanic poet writer said to little Liv:

You cannot imagine how happy Richard was in his very own house, the house of his soul, the house of his dreams, the house of remembrance in which he did heal, and it has been fascinating to see how large a part of that home, that very house you have been.

Those were the words that she used as she was moving along slowly to the other side of this room half dark, half lit and the lady placed in front of young released Liv a fairly large square opened up box of



many coloured chinks, the remains of the multi-coloured fare that Richard had used to help transform his life also through his fine art.

Little Young Liv looks at it in a kind of disbelief, she looked again and finally said: these must be the coloured chinks that his children have used....

but then again, dear reader of mine, Little Liv is in a phase where things are moving onwards in her own life, with her own understanding, her own thoughts, her own feelings that are slowly transformed after all the release and cleansing, so what happens now? Gradually it dawns upon her soul and her mind that she has somehow been very important in Richard's life after all, very healing, his very turn-about in his very own life....that is what has come to this reader's mind as the morning light wore on and a meditative thinking process had again begun, the way it happens these days as this writer's own life moves slowly on...

II

Next scene is a square again, this time the square is like...an elongated form, a one filled with see-through golden light like no old experiences attached, all released into who knows where, digested and "spat out" like transformed fairy tales perhaps not exactly spat out who cares, the diagonal form is really fine and Little Liv is somehow hanging in there legs beneath torso and head above and come to think of it, she has to think real hard about having had to sue Richard in order to have him share their earthly collected belongings way back then, (she had never again seen him in physical life), and as this thought seem to spring forth again, this writer sees the ghost-like fairy tale mistress of all faiths in dark grey yet light shadows smile other side of this fairy tale from Little Liv's life from way back when and how...now, Liv smiles as well.

***Liv Evensen, Ph.D.** of Oslo, Norway, is Jungian-trained in spiritual psychology. She is an oral story teller, expressive arts therapist, and poet who speaks internationally on myths, fables and fairy tales in multicultural communications, conducts creative courses and does international lectures on intuitive painting, creative writing, oral storytelling, and dreams. With the counseling of a Dream Mentor, she has been writing poems from her dreams since 2005. In the tradition of Dante with his guiding light Virgil, Ms. Evensen's dreams are spoken in the voice of a Druid or shaman. As a result of a course in*

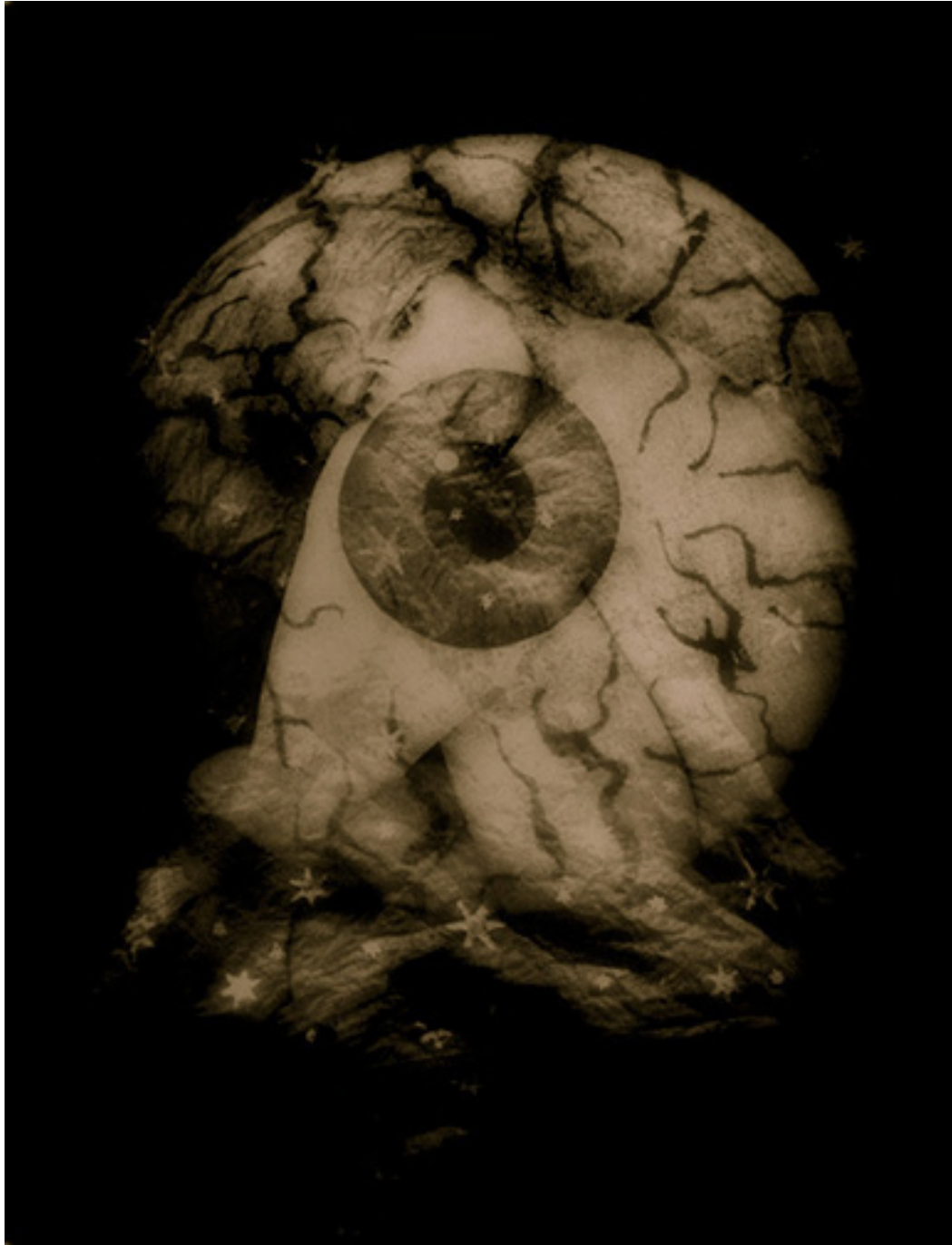


the study of miracles, Ms. Evensen says, "I was lifted high and saw Europe below me as a bleak continent, no people, only depressive chains for borders between and around each country." Since then, she has immersed herself in the "miracle course," and believes universal love is the answer to breaking the chains of depression and ending war. A visual artist as well as a poet, Ms. Evensen also uses her painting as a means of getting in touch with and expressing her dreams. She is a language teacher for youngsters with hearing impairments, and a school librarian. Her professional teaching background as a teacher is also includes drama and special education for multi-dysfunctional young adults, and social sciences for "ordinary" youngsters. A freelance speaker with my own firm, The Fabel Lab Creative Workshops, she holds a B.S. from University of Oslo, Norway, in Drama, Media- and Communications and Educational Sciences. Her training has had emphasis in "Myths, fables and fairy tales in multicultural communications, drama", and arts therapy, such as intuitive painting, tai chi, meditation on sound/toning and dreamwork, and drama courses. For 10 years she conducted a post-education workshop on arts therapy and multi-dysfunctional youngsters at University of Siauliai in Lithuania, and held master classes in Latvia, Lithuania, India, and Turkey.

Ms. Evensen will introduce and read some of her new poetry during Words & Music, 2014.



CLASSICS REVISITED



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

As soon as you discover the truth it's already gone: the moment passed.

--Clarice Lispector



WILLIAM FAULKNER'S THE SOUND AND THE FURY: DID BENJY COMPSON SUFFER FROM AUTISM?

By Patrick Samway

STATING THAT BENJY COMPSON most likely suffers from autism in **The Sound and the Fury** introduces methodological concerns never before seen in Faulkner criticism, insofar as ongoing information concerning an actual neurological disorder is used to diagnose a completely fictional character. To a great extent, the possibility of such a diagnosis supposes Benjy to be a genuine candidate for a neurological/psychological case study, a supposition that, admittedly, needs to remain speculative, but which nevertheless has value in identifying more exactly why he acts as he does. As in any neurological/psychological case study, a review of earlier opinions by literary critics can bring to light how Benjy has been perceived to date, which, when linked with precise textual evidence from the novel and recent neurological theories, will allow for a more coherent explanation of his condition.

Given His Physical Condition and Mental Limitations, Should Benjy Be Called an “Idiot” or Would “Autistic” Be More Appropriate?

Due in large part to the “idiotic” or “lunatic” ways in which Benjy perceives and relates the world around him, literary critics and Faulkner himself have preferred to call Benjy an idiot, though they often discuss the nature of his idiocy in different ways (see, for example, **The Most Splendid Failure**, 67, 71, 88, 178-9; *The Ordeal of Consciousness*, 175; *Nihilists and Their Relations*, 93; *Faulkner, Childhood, and the Making of The Sound and the Fury*, 381; *Idiocy and Idealism*, 101; *Where you want to go now*, 4; **Faulkner’s Inexhaustible Voice**, 171; *Searching for Jason Richmond Compson*, 185; **The Fool: Character as Technique in the Novels of William Faulkner**, 51; *Trying to Say*, 40; *A propos de ‘Le Bruit et la Fureur,’* 1058. Only once in the novel is Benjy actually called an idiot, by an angry Mrs. Patterson after he has been caught by her husband with the letter written by Uncle Maury (13). With no relationship to Dostoyevsky’s idiot/hero, Prince Leo Nikolayevich Myshkin, in **The Idiot**, nor the idiot so loved by his mother in Wordsworth’s poem, **The Idiot Boy**, the title of Faulkner’s novel, chosen by Faulkner from Macbeth’s soliloquy (V.v.), underscores not only a fundamental compatibility between psychology and literature, but gives incalculable authorial weight to the role of the idiot in this novel. Faulkner noted that while the original the

title applied to the Benjy section, the more he “worked on the book, the more elastic the title became, until it covered the whole family” (**Faulkner in the University**, 87). Faulkner’s own assessment of Benjy as an idiot, as mentioned explicitly in the Compson Appendix (1141), in letters to Ben Wasson and Malcolm Cowley (**Selected Letters**, 55, 255), and to the cadets at West Point (**Faulkner at West Point**, 109), has undoubtedly impelled many critics not to question his choice of this word. While in Japan in 1955, Faulkner linked the notion of innocence with the idiot: “So the idiot was born and then I became interested in the relationship of the idiot to the world that he was in but would never be able to cope with and just where could he get the tenderness, the help, to shield him in his innocence. I mean ‘innocence’ in the sense that God had stricken him blind at birth, that is, mindless at birth and there was nothing he could ever do about it” (**Lion in the Garden**, 146; see also 222). “To that idiot,” Faulkner added upon further reflection, “time was not a continuation, it was an instant, there was no yesterday and no tomorrow, it all is this moment, it all is [now] to him. He cannot distinguish between what was last year and what will be tomorrow, he doesn’t know whether he dreamed it, or saw it” (**Lion in the Garden**, 147-48). In addition, Faulkner’s telling interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel in 1956 nuances even more his thoughts about Benjy:

I had already begun to tell it through the eyes of the idiot child since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable of knowing what happened, but not why....The only emotion I can have for Benjy is grief and pity for all mankind. You can’t feel anything for Benjy because he doesn’t feel anything. The only thing I can feel about him personally is concern as to whether he is believable as I created him. He was a prologue like the gravedigger in the Elizabethan dramas. He serves his purpose and is gone. Benjy is incapable of good and evil because he had no knowledge of good and evil....Benjy wasn’t rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love



though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that cause him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy. (**Lion in the Garden**, 245-46)

In a similar vein, Luster states that Benjy was born a “looney,” a popular term that carries minimal medical or psychological information, but which suggests antisocial behavior and limited cognitive inability—in short, a code word for mental retardation and moronic comportment (53). The figure of the idiot, also referred to as a “loony” in *The Kingdom of God*, serves as a definite prototype of Benjy (48, 46). He shares some of the exact same features as Benjy: “The face of the sitting man was vague and dull and loose-lipped, and his eyes were clear and blue as cornflowers, and utterly vacant of thought; he sat a shapeless, dirty lump, life without mind, an organism without intellect. Yet always in his slobbering vacuous face were his two eyes of a heart-shaking blue, and gripped tightly in one fist was a narcissus” (45-46). Is it possible, we ask, to give a more technical psychological appellation to Faulkner’s recurring characterization of Benjy? Do the generic terms “idiot” or “looney/loony” describe Benjy with the accuracy found in the novel?

While the novel points inwards on itself to the ongoing drama it presents, it also points outward to a larger world that Faulkner, as author, could name with historical specificity: Harvard (77, 85, 92, etc.), New London [Connecticut] (77), Saint Louis Fair (80), Garibaldi’s [Giuseppi Garibaldi] (82), Parker’s [Parker House in Boston] (83), [Hernando de] DeSoto (88), French Lick [Indiana] (95), Princeton (97), [Babe] Ruth (252), and Beale [Street in Memphis, Tennessee] (264). Except in a very limited way, Faulkner has chosen not to use specific medical terms in this novel. Were it not for the increasing prevalence today of autism, a specific lifelong disorder with a neurological basis in the brain first known to the public in the mid-1940’s due to the groundbreaking article, *Early Infantile Autism*, by Leo Kanner, M.D., a Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist—and thus not part of Faulkner’s vocabulary when **The Sound and the Fury** was published in 1929—it might not be possible to suggest that Benjy suffered from autism.¹ Faulkner simply never heard this word in 1928. But why look to a scientific basis for Benjy’s physical and psychological profile outside the text of the novel itself? Faulkner, himself, has provided the key: he wrote a number of para-historical texts about this novel in which he steps forward not as *literary author* but as *historical guide* whose own knowledge of the actual world about him provides valuable commentary about the novel. In fact, he took a most unusual step in giving some additional background not only on specific characters in the novel, but on the history of the Compson family in general. After the first publication of the novel in

1929, and the confusion experienced by almost all of the novel’s readers in trying to understand the Benjy section, Faulkner added further thoughts, ideas, and data not intrinsic to the novel, but which can be used as aids in interpretation, the most notable being the *Compson Appendix: 1699-1945*, published much later in **The Portable Faulkner** (1946).² Had Faulkner continued writing para-historical information about the Compsons, and had he read in the 1950’s some psychological and medical journals, one can well ask if he would have changed the way he discussed and described Benjy—even possibly calling him autistic?

For us today, contemporary data about autism reveals how common it is. For children ages 6-22, the statistics (1993-2006) from the Center for Disease Control show that the cumulative growth rate of autism has increased 1,342 percent, or now about 1 in 166 children, more than three times the number with juvenile diabetes (www.cdc.gov). While no one definition of autism will satisfy all specialists in the field, autism, as defined by Professor Lori Ernsperger of Indiana University, refers “to neurologic disorders involving serious impairment of abilities to interact and communicate socially, and repetitive and restricted interests and activities” and usually can be recognized in the first three years of life (3). Males today are four times more likely to have autism than females.³ In short, those who are autistic suffer from deficits in language, communication, and social behavior and respond abnormally to their physical environments, often exhibiting repetitive patterns of behavior.

To date, no specific biological markers are recognized as being genetic indicators of this disorder. According to the Autism Society of America, persons with autism may exhibit some of the following traits: resistance to change; difficulty in expressing needs, using gestures and pointing instead of words; repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language; laughing and/or crying for no apparent reason; an aloof manner; tantrums; difficulty in mixing with others; not wanting to be cuddled; little or no eye contact; unresponsive to normal teaching methods; sustained odd play; obsessive attachment to objects; apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain; no real fear of danger; noticeable physical over-activity or extreme passivity; uneven gross/fine motor skills; non-responsive to verbal cues, and acts as if deaf, although hearing tests are in normal range (www.autism-society.org). In one degree or another, many of these traits can be applied to Benjy, who is perhaps based on Edwin, the brother of Miss Annie Chandler, Faulkner’s first-grade teacher. In his biography of Faulkner, Joseph Blotner notes that Edwin was “retarded,” could be seen playing in the family’s front yard “behind a high fence,” and “lived past the age of thirty” (21). Once, as Faulkner was reading the novel to Phil Stone, his friend automatically connected Benjy with Edwin Chandler (**Faulkner: A Biography**, 219). Since Faulkner never averted to Edwin’s medical



or psychological histories, the question of source remains somewhat moot, though it does not cancel out the possibility that Benjy suffered from autism.

A handful of literary critics have linked Benjy and autism, but not in any systematic way that relies on the findings of psycholinguistic or neurological evidence. André Bleikasten, for example, makes a general allusion to this disorder, but never explains it with precision: “Contrary to Quentin’s extreme estrangement from society (not to speak of Benjy’s autistic isolation), Jason’s relation to it is a very odd mixture of rebellion and conformity. His paranoid resentment is surely boundless, and for his ever-ebullient malice any available target will do” (**The Most Splendid Failure**, 155). Since “Benjy’s world hardly seems bigger than the sphere of a single organism,” John Matthews maintains, “we might be tempted to read his predicament narrowly as the result of an individual mental deficiency, or at most as the outgrowth of a particular family’s pathology. But Benjy has never fit clinical definitions of mental retardation or autism (though he may have been modeled on an impaired townsman Faulkner knew, the brother of his beloved first grade teacher). Rather, the literal traits of the Compson family serve...more as emblems of a whole class’s values and behavior” (**William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South**, 83). On the other hand, Sara McLaughlin’s 1987 exploratory essay, entitled *Faulkner’s Faux Pas: Referring to Benjamin Compson as an Idiot*, raises the issue of Benjy being autistic, looking primarily at a limited number of Benjy’s speech patterns; unfortunately she never plumbs the depth of her insight: “Regarding speech, for example, many autistic children are mute; they produce no recognizable words. Others’ expressive speech is minimal. Benjy was mute, though the reader gets the rare opportunity to read Benjy’s mind in a sense, in the chapter he narrates figuratively. This device enables readers to see how Benjy might talk if he could” (35). Ineke Bockting’s psycholinguistic evaluation of Benjy’s “mind-style” as a way of diagnosing his situation points to the medical basis of why Benjy speaks and acts as he does. She acknowledges in a footnote that Benjy shows many characteristics of autism (no awareness of the feelings of others, no comforting seeking with others in time of distress, no imitation play, no verbal, para-verbal or nonverbal communication, echolalia, and attachments to unusual objects), adding that mentally retarded people relate to others in accordance with their mental age, whereas autistic people do not (5). She correctly avoids a common pitfall: equating those who are mentally retarded with those who are autistic. The first shows relatively even skill development, whereas autistic individuals exhibit uneven skill development especially in certain areas. At the same time, it should be noted, those with autism can and do manifest some behavioral patterns of those who are mentally retarded.

Even though readers of **The Sound and the Fury** observe and understand Benjy, the youngest of the four Compson children, through the eyes and actions of the other characters in the novel, he relates, for the most part, his own story, however confusedly, without the help of others. Thus evidence of Benjy’s autism is derived principally from his monologue. Like the intersecting threads of a web, many of the characters discuss others in the novel, who, in turn, have feelings and observations they feel compelled to share in language appropriate to their personalities. Though Benjy, himself, cannot communicate with others through vocal speech, his monologue, lacking any genuine nuancing, reveals the voice of the narrator who assumes the mask of Benjy, forcing us to constantly ponder the relationship between them. And especially in the backlooping, manneristic style of the first two sections, the past is absorbed into the present and vice versa, achieving in the end a remarkable synchronicity. “Every site of Benjy’s domain opens immediate access to all the moments that have ever occurred there: to duck through the ‘broken place’ in the fence with Luster in 1928 is to emerge with Caddy two decades earlier” (**The Play of Faulkner’s Language**, 65). Before long, we become so accustomed to bilocation that initial feelings of dislocation disappear, and we soon marvel at the malleability of the landscape/mindscape.

Benjy unwittingly serves as a guide and participant, especially given his mental and physical condition, into what might be called from his perspective his family’s “dumbshow.” His uncooperative body rarely acts in sync with his racing mind. Ironically, as Cheryl Ware observes, Benjy’s section, seemingly chaotic and meaningless, “contains all the necessary information the reader needs” (63). While all four sections of the novel have specific dates, giving the illusion that the past actually enfolds into 1928, the present time in the novel, Benjy, in fact, never uses the present tense. Motivated instead by pleasure or pain, Benjy reacts on an elementary sensory level, devoid of moral evaluations that deal with possibilities, probabilities, and statements of ultimate value. In doing this, he co-locates the important time-filled events in his life into one timeless present that, in and of itself, achieves not timelessness but a new and often unlocateable sense of time for the reader. “Faulkner thus achieves the effect of cinematic montage and he is able to juxtapose significant episodes in the Compson family history simply by alternating between episodes—his encounter with Caddy and Charlie in the swing, for example, is intertwined associatively with a similar, later, encounter with Miss Quentin and her boyfriend in the same swing; Caddy’s wedding and Damuddy’s funeral are intimately intertwined in this same way,” Noel Polk notes. “Through these juxtapositions, these comparisons and contrasts of scenes, Faulkner creates meanings, hierarchies of emotions and significances



that Benjy cannot. At the top of the hierarchy is, of course, his loss of Caddy, which registers most powerfully and most constantly—on himself and on everybody else” (**Children of the Dark House**, 109). In short, the intertextual voids comment in revelatory fashion on one another—especially when the often haphazard patterns of texts—intertextual voids repeat themselves, not programmatically but nevertheless with a sense of predictability.

The gaps the narrator creates in portraying Benjy’s conscious mental activity have significance; they transform a small nothingness, a space or void, into a quest for seeing and articulating connections. Yet, as Robert Dale Parker observes “the concepts of an extra-linguistic ontology, of Benjy as teller his story, and even of Benjy—a fictional character—having an actual consciousness of the sort we attribute to people outside novels are all suspect at the least...” (16). Parker’s caveat merits considerable attention because no fictional antecedents exist for Benjy, and thus traditional critical discourse must cede to multilateral forays in an attempt to do justice to this novel and supply meaning to a fictive world that no literary critic, as far as we know, has ever experienced.⁴ More importantly, readers are forced, willy-nilly, to co-create with the author and Benjy, both of whom supply the reader with unevaluated interlocking episodes or events for which, alas, Benjy cannot make sense or integrate within himself—with the unanticipated result that, in the spirit of some of Wallace Stevens’ poetry, Benjy’s section embodies and dramatizes a commentary on the very nature of art itself—an observation affirmed by Arnold Weinstein who notes that Faulkner’s task was “to fashion a story of brutal losses (pasture, sister, genitals) in such a way that the reader is virtually trapped within the character’s orbit. We too are now seeing through the fence. And the world is thereby metamorphosed, personalized into the private calvary of an idiot for whom every event recasts the presence and loss of his sister. Finding a language that captures the feeling and pathos of this story is what Faulkner means by ‘trying to say’” (40). Both André Bleikasten and John Matthews, as they try separately to find the axis upon which the novel rotates, underscore the importance of these three words, repeated by Benjy running along the fence seeking Caddy (**The Ink of Melancholy**, 66-67, and **The Play of Faulkner’s Language**, 71). Unfortunately, Benjy does not realize that he has not communicated anything to anybody—except incredible anguish and despair. Indeed, as Harold Bloom infers, the world is too much for Benjy and, at the same time, without Caddy, never enough. Benjy’s unpredictable, symbolic-laden, fragile, non-linear world cannot be reduced to outline form, since much of what transpires there does so precisely in the tensile spaces-in-between.

Yet, Benjy remains a perennial three-year-old child,

the age when autism is normally detected: “He thirty three. Luster said. ‘Thirty three this morning’.” To which an unnamed friend replies: “You mean, he been three years old thirty years” (17). His fragmentary thoughts, easily interrupted, emerge from a linguistic center within him, as filtered by the narrator, which makes free association essential to his ability to express himself. Naively, Benjy never thinks that he will not be understood or that others will misunderstand his intramental spoken English. Above all, he has an amazing capacity to hear and repeat the conversations around him, rendering his section the most unbiased of the four, since he never provides any personal reflections or commentary. When he says, “the dark tall place on the wall came and I went and touched it. It was like a door, only it wasn’t a door,” Benjy knows that the empty space once contained a mirror that had been removed, but he does not go beyond the evidence to try to name it (61). And when he sees an obscure figure descending from Miss Quentin’s window because it is dark, he does not guess at the identity of this person. Given the monologue’s intricate nature, André Bleikasten provides a sharp focus to its overall profile: “Not that the novel’s opening section confounds comprehension. Most sentences in it are perfectly grammatical and taken one by one, nearly all of them make sense. Moreover, reported conversation, developing into scenes or at least scene fragments, occupies more than half of Benjy’s monologue—a monologue that, strictly speaking, is no monologue at all but rather a polylogue, a patchwork of many voices seemingly recorded at random by an unselective mind” (**The Ink of Melancholy**, 57). Benjy never poses the “why” question, nor does he project imaginatively his needs. “Things and persons come and go, materialize out of nowhere and vanish with magic suddenness: the jimson weed is there or gone, and it is the same with the cushion (78), the bowl (86), or any other object. Which is to say that there is at least one distinction registered by Benjy’s mind: the opposition of presence and absence. They are the two categories into which his whole universe is divided, and they make all the difference” (**The Most Splendid Failure**, 73). In short, Benjy’s “idiolect” relates what is happening around him but makes no effort to provide explanations; he speaks to himself constantly as if he had a listener inside his own mind.

With limited lexical variation and basic sentence structures, Benjy’s discourse reveals unsophisticated mannerisms of speech, which are pleasantly fresh and appealing. In his research, L. Moffitt Cecil has discovered that Benjy has a working vocabulary of about 500 words, including 210 different nouns, 175 verbs or verbals, 61 adjectives, 37 adverbs, 25 prepositions and 13 conjunctions of one sort or another (**A Critical Casebook**, 69-70). Though mute, Benjy—as a thinking/speaking character in a novel—needs a vocabulary if he is to express himself at all, and his working vocabulary would signify that it is very



limited indeed. While not always following the rules of grammar, he does not speak gibberish, nor use baby-talk; sentences flow naturally, if often idiosyncratically, but with the effect of a sound track whose editing has lacked key transitions, revealing an openness to listen and absorb the language of the people around him. “Things seem to reveal themselves of their own accord,” Noel Polk remarks, “unchosen, uncontrived, as if to an innocent eye unwilling or unable to impose any imaginative pressure on them...” (*New Essays on The Sound and the Fury*, 79). In addition, as Ineke Bockting points out, when Benjy speaks without transitive constructions (“Here, caddie.’ He hit.” [3]), it is easy to sense that most, though sometimes not all, of the linguistic elements convey meaning, usually devoid, however, of notions of responsibility, authority, incentive, submission or cause and effect (45). Finally, because of the haphazard nature of his discourse, one that repeats words from the past, but which do not originate from Benjy’s memory (can we say he really has one?), the reader is beckoned to reread his section after completing the entire novel to rediscover what has always been there—thus intensifying his or her appreciation of the novel’s brilliance.

Some examples of Benjy’s autism based on his language:

1. Benjy’s use of echolalia can be linked at times to the difficulty he has in expressing needs, particularly his need for Caddy.

Benjy has a remarkable ability to repeat almost unconsciously exactly what others have said. He can repeat Latin correctly (“Et ego in arcadia” [44]), something Quentin had difficulty doing (“reduct[i] o [ad] absurdum” [76]) and write the Mississippi dialect with convincing authority: “ricklickshun” (recollection), “gizzle” (gizzard), and “rinktum” (rectum) (295, 65, 70). The most striking example of echolalia occurs after his name change, when Benjy started sleeping alone. Mrs. Compson insisted that her side of the family was as good as the Compson side, and that Uncle Maury suffered from bad health, to which Mr. Compson replied: “Bad health is the primary reason for all life. Created by disease, within putrefaction, into decay” (44). Benjy could not have either initiated this type of thinking nor chosen and structured this type of vocabulary. Though there is likelihood that Benjy might have overheard Mr. Compson speak these words to Quentin when Quentin returned home for Christmas in 1909 from Harvard (and subsequently associated them with Uncle Maury’s sickness), it is more likely that he recalls them and places them in their original context where they fit.

Though Benjy’s ability to repeat words and phrases exactly without distortion can be disingenuous, he cannot make distinctions even with fairly ordinary words, such as associating the action of the golfers

with the game of golf itself. Although golfers and golf balls have distinct identities, Benjy does not favor one over the other. Rather he allows a word he repeats to be as it is. Since he does not understand the difference between “caddie” and “Caddy,” uncontrollable floodgates of emotion are released when he hears the word “caddie,” as he once again longs for his missing sister, a response beyond Luster’s comprehension: “‘Hush up.’ ‘What he moaning about now.’ ‘Lawd knows.’ Luster said. ‘Hush up.’ ‘He just starts like that. He been at it all morning. Cause it is his birthday, I reckon’” (16-17). Elisabeth Hill and Uta Frith note that when a group of autistic people were tested using homographs (words with one spelling but two meanings, such as tears in the eye or in a piece of fabric), the results were that individuals with autism “did not appear to integrate the sentence context when performing this task...” (285).

2. Benjy repeats words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language.

When Benjy and Caddy were delivering Uncle Maury’s letter to Mrs. Patterson, Benjy repeats a phrase rather than replying directly to Caddy’s concern about the grunting pigs: “The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the pigs were grunting and snuffing. I expect they’re sorry because one of them go killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted” (4). In two other examples, Benjy resorts to repeating certain words in staccato fashion, rather than giving a full response to the nature of the situation at hand: “She was trying to climb the fence. Give it to me, she said, Give it to me. Mr Patterson climbed the fence. He took the letter” (14). “When she got up she began to splash water on Quentin and Quentin splashed water on Caddy... and then Quentin and Caddy began to splash water at Versh” (18). Later, when Caddy and Frony are discussing death, Benjy does respond to them, but deals with the topic obliquely and repetitiously: “The bones rounded out of the ditch, where the dark vines were in the black ditch, into the moonlight, like some of the shapes had stopped. Then they all stopped and it was dark, and when I stopped to start again I could hear Mother, and feet walking fast away, I could smell it. Then the room came, but my eyes went shut. I didn’t stop. I could smell it” [repetitious words: ditch/ditch; stopped/stopped/stopped/stop; dark/dark; smell/smell (33-34)].

Some examples of Benjy’s autism based on his behavior:

1. Crying and having tantrums for no apparent reason.

Countless critics have commented on Benjy’s habit of crying, since it is one of his dominant personality traits. André Bleikasten has written, for example, “His cries and whining—made haunting through the repetition of ‘crying’, ‘wailing’, ‘whimpering’, ‘slobbering’, ‘bellowing’—supply what might be called



the basic soundtrack of the section. Never articulated as speech, scarcely human, Benjy's cries are the abject and pathetic expression of his nameless and unnamable suffering" (**The Most Splendid Failure**, 189). When asked what he does when Benjy starts "belling," Luster simply replies, "I whips him" (15). Two other examples give a good indication of this pervasive trait, which can be triggered at almost any moment, though, admittedly, in these cases there are extenuating circumstances (alcohol and fear). Yet, Benjy seems out of control in both cases. The first occurred during Caddy's wedding reception: "I wasn't crying, but I couldn't stop. I wasn't crying, but the ground wasn't still, and then I was crying" (20). The second when he sensed that Charlie was Caddy's boyfriend, and thus a potential threat to him: "Charlie came and put his hands on Caddy and I cried more. I cried loud" (47).

2. Little or no eye contact.

First, there is never a suggestion in the novel that Benjy cannot hear others speaking or addressing him, as is evident when he follows Caddy's directive to put his hands in his pockets as they deliver the letter from Uncle Maury to Mrs. Patterson at Christmastime. Second, he seems comfortable looking at certain individuals, such as Caddy, and having Caddy look at him. "Caddy was still looking at me....She stopped against the wall, looking at me and I cried and she went on and I came on, crying, and she shrank against the wall, looking at me" (69). On the other hand, he is alienated from his mother and takes no direction from her, especially when she directs him to take the cushion away from her bed. "Look at me.' Mother said. 'Benjamin,' she said. She took my face in her hands and turned it to hers" (64).

3. Obsessive attachment to objects.

Benjy has collected a number of objects that remind him of Caddy, such as her slipper and a cushion. In addition, he carries around a jimson weed, here associated with death. Like many autistics, he takes notice of fire and brightness: bright grass (3, 4), bright shapes (11, 53, 57, 64, 75), and the box full of jewelry ("stars" [41]). Finally, certain repeated objects or places serve as facile metonyms: bird, fence, flag, flowers, garden, grass, mirror, pastures, shadows, table (where the golfers sink their balls), trees.

4. Extreme passivity.

There is hardly a moment on April 7, 1928, when Benjy is not led around by Luster, who lethargically complains that his role in life is to shepherd Benjy about. Benjy acquiesces for the most part, never presenting an alternative on his own. Dilsey is so upset about Luster's apparent inattentiveness that she even considers having Versh strike Luster with a stick (57-58).

5. Non-responsive to verbal cues.

Tired of the monotonous routine, Benjy at times does not respond well to authority or quasi-authority figures. "I kept

telling you to hush, Luster said. What's the matter now, Jason said. 'He just trying hisself.' Luster said. 'That the way he been going all day'" (65). "Hush" becomes such a constant refrain in the novel, as Ted Roggenbuck noted in the title to his essay, that the reader might feel that it is addressed to him or her, suggesting that one needs to quiet down in reading this novel, and not speed through it.

6. No real fear of danger.

Benjy never really shows fear as he delivers the letter from Uncle Maury to

Mrs. Patterson; he just becomes upset and cries, even though Mr. Patterson thought a murder might take place. "Maury said he's going to shoot the scoundrel.' Father said. I told him he better not mention it to Patterson before hand" (43). Another time, he touches the hot oven door, never realizing or fearing that it might burn him. "I put my hand out to where the fire had been," he says (58). Similarly, he does not sense he will get frostbite if he does not put his hands in his pockets, though Caddy might have slightly exaggerated the effects of a Mississippi winter (12).

While Benjy does not fit neatly into every category for judging whether or not a person is autistic—as if Faulkner knew himself—there is sufficient linguistic and behavioral evidence to begin considering a positive judgment.

A Medical Evaluation of Benjy Compson

By the time of Benjy's 33rd birthday on April 7, 1928, he appears, from all accounts in the text, abnormally large compared to his family and others with whom he comes into contact. According to the Compson Appendix, Benjy, born in 1895, is described as three times Luster's size and twice his age, though Luster is more likely 17 or 18 (1141).⁵ Benjy recognizes his size when he says matter-of-factly (and in a fashion the reader will soon realize has important symbolical overtones), "My shadow was higher than Luster's on the fence" (4). Dilsey presents a softer, more sympathetic image of Benjy's adult composure: "Ben sat in the chair, his big soft hands dangling between his knees, moaning faintly" (285). Yet, the most startlingly image of Benjy is recorded in the fourth section of the novel by the narrator who relates what Dilsey perceived (a writer-within-the-observer): "She heard the feet cross the dining room, then the swing door opened and Luster entered, followed by a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it. His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too, he moved with a shambling gait like a trained bear. His hair was pale and fine. It had been brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerrotypes. His eyes were clear, of the pale sweet blue of cornflowers, his thick mouth hung open, drooling a little" (274). The narrator uses two exact words he had employed in depicting Dilsey in the opening of the first section ("particles" and "dropsical"),



which show an authorial identification between these two characters, implying perhaps that both have some human qualities within them that should not be overlooked or discounted (265).

Since it should be remarked that Faulkner rarely feels comfortable allowing one image or one identification to carry the full weight of an observation, he sometimes shifts or transposes one image to another, thus revealing ongoing relationships whose realities exist not in some external world rooted in objective metaphysics but in the evocative power of language. From his perspective, Jason says that Benjy looks like a cow (253), in this case reminiscent of Dewey Dell Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, though one should not discount Ike Snopes' amorous fascination with a cow in *The Hamlet*. The narrator states additionally that Benjy resembles a "trained bear," an animal that would assume more and more cosmic mythological importance in "The Bear," thus linking, in curious ways, the fates of these two creatures (274). In general, however, Benjy's physical appearance in the present has little variation. On her way back from the Easter services, to cite but one example, Dilsey describes Benjy as shambling behind her as they return to the Compson residence (297, for other descriptions of Benjy, see 9, 285, 315). Benjy's hulking physique serves to make his movements awkward and plodding, so unlike what is taking place in his mind.

In describing Benjy's body in the Dilsey section, François Pitavy notes that "here is obviously an emblematic body, whose coherence signifies that of the subject possessed solely by itself—and thus, ultimately, dispossessed" (100). In brief, Benjy appears on his birthday as a hulking, simple-minded, not evidently schizophrenic, aging Neanderthal with a drooping mouth whose saliva he cannot control; he has the appearance of an obedient and trained animal whose blue eyes, at times, reveal an unplanned, tranquil inner peace. One might *fear* Benjy's bulk, but *be charmed*, at the same time, by his apparent timidity whenever a blank, dazed, and melancholic expression stretches across his face. When his need for routine is respected, Benjy's cornflower-blue, tranquil eyes reveal an untroubled existence: "The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post to tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place" (321). When order, based on familiarity and repetition, is re-established, in this case as the surrey's goes to the right around the monument, Benjy's world finally returns to the familiar, "as cornice and façade smoothly once more from left to right" (321). One can almost see Benjy looking into a distance that will remain, for him, marvelously static, providing the novel with a type of closure that could, alas, erupt again should his "normal" world change in the slightest. (Winthrop Tilley suggests that the carriage might have gone to the left of the monument when

Benjy was taken earlier to Jackson to be castrated, providing an explanation of his horror of going in this direction again [376]). The basic question needs to be asked: can we find medical answers that explain Benjy's abnormally psychological behavioral patterns?

As a starting point, it is worth asking what accounts for Benjy's general physical appearance, especially his dead-looking, hairless skin, unusual for a 33-year-old male, unless his body had undergone uncharacteristic hormonal changes. In addition to a seamless parade of traumatic familial situations in his life, which undoubtedly had psychosomatic effects, two medical episodes in Benjy's life, possibly linked to fetal alcoholic syndrome, provide some insight into his physical appearance: a possible bout with measles and his castration.⁶ One can discount Versh's description of Benjy as a "bluegum," here a metaphorical reference to Negroes whose blue gums give them strange characteristics, though there could be an underlying hint that Benjy at birth lacked sufficient oxygen in his system, thus partially accounting for his mental retardation (69). Caddy infers that the only childhood disease Benjy might have had, along with his siblings, as well as T.P. and Frony, is measles (38): "This is where *we* have the measles" (73; emphasis ours). Caddy probably would not have mentioned this unless she thought that Benjy had some recollection of having had this illness.

Later, after her wedding on April 25, 1910 (she was 18 then), Caddy goes away on her honeymoon. Benjy, thinking she is still attending school, desperately searches for her by the fence along the Compson property. While some in Jefferson believe that he was actually pursuing the Burgess girl, with the unlikely consequence of raping her, he is subsequently sent to the Mississippi State Insane Asylum and castrated. In his section Benjy describes the episode, although it is very hard to tell what exactly is going on; we do know however that he was preoccupied with searching for an explanation for his actions, which are directly linked to trying to his efforts to remove the ether mask during the 1913 castration operation: "I opened the gate and they stopped turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright, whirling shapes" (53). Rather than focusing on Benjy's surgery in this passage, Arthur Brown would have us focus on the boundary situations in Benjy's life: "The fence acts as a necessary boundary not only between Benjy and the pasture but between Benjy and us. As a physical reality for Benjy and a fictional construction for us, it establishes the difference between his world and ours. At the same time, it is the point of contact between



his dramatic condition and our own. We make this contact in the presence of death. The shadows on the fence, the exclusion it marks from the garden, the nail Benjy snags on the instigates the substitution of the past for the present—disrupting our ability to follow along and at the same time materializing Caddy's absence—everything to do with the fence intensifies the agency of death" (414). Years later, on Holy Saturday 1928, Benjy, using the "I" pronoun, which shows his primitive form of self-identity, is aware of his bodily change due to the castration: "I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone. You keep on like this, and we aint going have you no more birthday" (73). With less psychological interpretation, Jason describes what happened to Benjy, linking it directly to the gate scene: "I often wondered what he'd be thinking about, down there at the gate, watching the girls going home from school, trying to want something he couldn't even remember he didn't and couldn't want any longer. And what he'd think when they'd be undressing him and he'd happened to take a look at himself and begin to cry like he'd do" (253). Clearly Benjy realizes that his body—and spirit—have undergone diminishment, though he, unlike the community, will never suspect its full impact.

Gary Taylor and others have observed that eunuchs, with a decrease in levels of testosterone, often experience a regrettable transformation of their bodies, notably in their metabolism and a reduction of muscle mass, which means a concomitant increase in weight, so evident in Benjy (174). Sometimes body hair becomes softer and finer after castration, with the illusion that it has disappeared altogether. Curiously castration can prevent male pattern baldness, if it is done before the hair is lost; it does not, however, decrease hair growth once male pattern baldness takes place. Bone size does not shrink, which partially explains why Benjy has not diminished in size over the years, though eunuchs can experience a decrease in bone density. Nor does the voice lose its pitch and go higher, if castration is done after puberty has set in. With a dash of cruel wit, Jason calls Benjy the "Great American Gelding," after having thought previously of the Army's need of geldings, or perhaps mules (263; see also 196). Jason reinforces a definite connection between the gate incident and the castration. "I'll reckon you'll send him to Jackson, now. If Mr Burgess don't shoot him first" (52), an observation echoed by his brother Quentin: "He needs to be sent to Jackson, Quentin said. How can anybody live in a house like this" (69)? Jason also sardonically notes that he cannot afford "a kitchen full of niggers to feed and robbing the state asylum of its star freshman" (230). Undoubtedly, castration would have altered Benjy's physical appearance, but other than what has been noted, determining the specific degree is problematic, because Faulkner has not supplied us with any of

Benjy's recorded medical data.

At the time that Faulkner was writing this novel in 1928, the State of Mississippi, after years of deliberation throughout the entire South, passed statutes concerning sterilization. Earlier in the century, during the "Golden Age of American Eugenics," as it was euphemistically termed, Mississippi gradually built facilities for those it thought might benefit society by some form of eugenics, especially for whites, though not exclusively, since white governmental officials, aided by strict anti-miscegenation statutes, felt that the black community should take care of its own feeble-minded (see Larson, 93, 116-18, 123; subsequent references will be to this book). Because of the focus on segregating whites from black, the total patient population in such mental asylums in the Deep South by 1922 was only 345, as compared with 45,000 in other parts of the nation (91). The aim of the eugenicists, contrary to those who advocated personal freedom and equality, was to prevent by sterilization and vasectomy, for the most part, certain individuals from reproducing and thus transmitting their immoral, and sometimes criminal, behavior.⁷ One mental health expert in Mississippi declared in 1912: "The societies of eugenics are trying to teach us, under the Mendelian law, how we may do for the human race...what stock breeders are doing in evolving thoroughbred horses" (2). The sterilization debate became so heated, with many constituents adding their disparate views, that in 1927 the U.S. Supreme Court approved the procedure, leading to the enactment of new or revised sterilization statutes in 17 states (119).

In 1848, the Mississippi Legislature appropriated funds for the Mississippi State Lunatic Asylum, which opened in 1855 at the present site of the Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson and which was subsequently renamed in 1900 the Mississippi State Insane Hospital. (It was relocated to Whitefield in 1935 and renamed the Mississippi State Hospital.) Unfortunately, the archives in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson have only the hospital's admission records, but no policy books. (The archivist could provide no further information about the hospital's holdings.)⁸ But one can gather a definite impression of the vision behind this movement. Alabama was the first of the states in the Deep South to engage in eugenics. In 1901, John E. Purdon, a spokesperson for a local medical group, reported in his address to the Medical Association of the State of Alabama on the "proven fact" that criminals, the insane, and epileptics, in addition others having any manifestations of inherited and degraded nerve tissue, should become the charges of the state in order to restrain the procreative powers of the unfit. "Emasculation," he declared, "is the simplest and most perfect plan that can be adapted to secure the perfection of the race" (50; see also 116). When Theodore Bilbo resumed the governorship of Mississippi in 1928, he made sure



that his state enacted the first comprehensive eugenic sterilization law in the Deep South, though castration was forbidden by Section 6957 of this statute; by the middle and late 1930's, this law affected 500 patients per year (115, 122). Section 6907 states that "mere idiots" shall not be accepted into Mississippi's institutions for the insane (Tilley, 377). As compulsory sterilization became a service to the state in the same year that Faulkner was writing **The Sound and the Fury**, he would have been aware of its impact on the political atmosphere of white Southerners.

Even if he had no specific evidence that castrations were occurring in Jackson in 1913, Faulkner could easily have imagined so in retrospect, and, as a result, put Benjy's operation into what he would have considered a proper time framework. (Faulkner's depiction of the castration of Joe Christmas by Percy Grimm in **Light in August** [1932] is undoubtedly the most horrific scene in the book.) After Quentin took off with her boyfriend from the carnival, Jason persuaded his mother to send Benjy to Jackson a second time. At his mother's insistence, Benjy was brought back home and in less than two years he burned down the family home and died in the fire (see **The Mansion**, 322). Since the final disturbing image we have of Darl Bundren in **As I Lay Dying** is of him being taken by train to the mental asylum in Jackson, one can only imagine, had they met, what Darl would have said to Benjy and how Benjy would have reacted. An incredible interchange! When entering into the white/black world of sleeping on the operating table, Benjy, in one key moment in his life, lost a tremendous source of his masculinity, about which he could not articulate, but one he terribly missed.

*Non-Supportive and Supportive Interventions of Benjy
By the Compson and Gibson Families*

The Autism Society of America acknowledges, in order for an autistic person to grow developmentally, there is an intimate link between the time one is diagnosed as being autistic and time when an autistic person receives supportive intervention: "Research indicates that early identification is associated with dramatically better outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum. The earlier a child is diagnosed, the earlier the child can begin benefiting from one of the many specialized intervention approaches to treatment and education." Time and time again, physical therapists and physicians stress the importance of early intervention for someone learning to adapt to this disorder. Without such intervention, both physical and moral, the individual often declines into a world that is sometimes impenetrable. Benjy's two families, one white and one black, initially coexist with each other, though by Easter week of 1928, and it would seem for many years before, the Gibson family has almost totally embraced Benjy, as the fading aura Southern aristocracy becomes a long-forgotten memory. While

the Compson-Bascomb family can trace its roots back to the Civil War and before, they cohabitate in the present time with a black family who perform their menial tasks of survival.

Mrs. Compson, narcissistic and hypochondriacal, is absolutely ashamed of having a five-year old son whom she believes to be mentally retarded. It would seem that Mrs. Compson had denied Benjy's lack of intellectual development for a number of years after his birth, perhaps praying that it would change with time.⁹ For her, Benjy is a two-fold "punishment"—for her sins and for putting aside her pride and marrying a man who held himself above her (103). Likewise, Frony, Dilsey's daughter, is embarrassed by Benjy. As she walks to the Easter service, she says to her mother: "I wish you wouldn't keep on bringing him to church, mammy...Folks talkin'" (290). The novel provides little professional or anecdotal evidence, either positively or negatively, of the various stages of Benjy's developmental growth, though we have first-hand evidence that Benjy was incapable of speech; instead he resorts to primal bouts of bellowing and moaning, not expressive so much of human need as of human loss. Roskus says, as Dilsey is trying to get Quentin ready for bed, "They aint no luck going to be on no place where one of they own chillen's name aint never spoke" (31). "Just sound," the novel's narrator comments, "It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets" (288). Except for his black companions, particularly Luster, Benjy has no friends, has never had any formal education, and has most likely not traveled away from home. We never find out if he has ever seen a doctor, though we know from **As I Lay Dying** that Doc Peabody lived and worked in the area. While the death and funeral of Damuddy temporarily change Benjy's play time with his siblings, he most likely thought of Damuddy's funeral, as did Caddy, as a party of some sort. But more is at stake concerning Damuddy's funeral: "The conflation of Damuddy's funeral, Caddy's muddying, the wedding and Mr. Compson's funeral confirms the fact that Caddy can be remembered only as already contaminated by the process of change and impending absence. So far as I can tell, Benjy never remembers a moment of untroubled, blissful intimacy with Caddy" (**The Play of Faulkner's Language**, 70). Certainly Caddy's promiscuity envelopes Benjy, though he cannot articulate or imagine its significance, except for a profound sense of loss when she leaves home or disguises it by putting on perfume. In addition, Benjy seems oblivious to Quentin's suicidal tendencies and neurotic, incestuous obsessions, observing just the effects they had on the members of his family. Jason's flippant preoccupation with money and women and his disregard of his mother are only tangentially present to Benjy as he goes about searching for some quarters to go to the local circus. Accepting and unchallenging, Benjy, in the midst of incredible drama,



dutifully does for the most part what is expected of him.

In short, except for the affection shown to him up to her late teens by Caddy, clearly a mother substitute, and the diligent care given him by Dilsey and the indifferent treatment of him by Luster, Benjy remains emotionally marginalized from his family, who have given him barely more than a heritage marked by absence and death, neither of which he cognitively grasps. Uncle Maury assures his sister that Benjy has no concept of death: “It’s better so. Let him be unaware of bereavement until he has to”—a variation of Mrs. Compson lament: “Poor little boy. He doesn’t know. He cant even realise” (197). Though the immediate landscape of the Compson household has little impact on Benjy’s mindscape, three situations in this novel (at least) reveal moments of familial non-supportive and supportive intervention that would have impacted Benjy’s mental condition for worse or for better: his name change, sleeping alone for the first time, and listening to Reverend Shegog’s Easter sermon.

Benjy’s name change occurs after his mother, overcome with guilt when she tries to explain its import to Benjy and Caddy as they sit in the kitchen, refuses to accept her son as he is. Quentin, who died on June 2, 1910, vividly remembered this name change in a comment by one of the unidentified members of the Gibson family: “What they change his name for then if aint trying to help his luck” (89). Nor does Dilsey understand this change of name especially as Benjy has not “wore out the name he was born with yet” (58). Names for her do not either bring good luck or take it away. Still and all, Benjy is robbed of his identity as a member of the larger Compson-Bascomb family and relegated to the last of the tribes of Israel. Benjy’s new name refers to Benjamin, the 12th and last son of Jacob, whose wife Rachel died in childbirth. Fittingly, Jacob’s son was called Ben-oni, “son of my sorrow,” but later Jacob changed it to Benjamin “son of my right hand” or “son of the south.” When Joseph, one of Benjamin’s brothers, who became a political leader in Egypt, put his brothers to the test concerning their love for Benjamin, all the brothers united in support of one another. What is worth noticing is that Benjamin is the last of the 12 tribes of Israel and that it is through Jacob’s line that Jesus can trace his ancestry (**Gospel of Matthew: 1:1-2**). Not only has Mrs. Compson denied her son, but she has abused one of the important tasks of a parent, made all the more terrible because she did it to a five-year-old child without his consent. As the years progress, Benjy will be forced to accept the sound of his new name, but not interpret its religious significance. In the novel, Benjy in fact never uses his own name. Ironically, his name change, framed by childish squabbling between Jason and Caddy and as viewed by Benjy through a mirror, is enfolded into a conversation that takes place

on his 33rd birthday. Mrs. Compson insists that her two children with nicknames be called by their proper names: Benjamin and Candace. No younger members of the Compson or Gibson families pay any heed to this rule.

By the time he is 13, Benjy starts sleeping alone, initially in Uncle Maury’s room, who is still alive, though probably sleeping elsewhere because of a black eye he received from Mr. Patterson. In any case, most likely these roommates had two separate beds. Because Benjy was traumatized by sleeping alone for the first time without his older sister, Caddy, wearing her bathrobe, jumps into bed with Benjy, though she lies between the spread and the blanket—in effect not physically touching Benjy’s body. When the darkness of the room came, Benjy notes “Caddy smelled like trees” again (44). His eventual separation from her deepened his sense of rejection and loss as the pseudo-mother/son bond was gradually weakened. “Caddy took me to Mother’s chair and Mother took my face in her hands and then she held me against her. “You’re not a poor baby. Are you. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy” (9). Caddy, indeed, has asked one of the novel’s key questions. It is good to recall that, once married, Caddy ultimately abandons Benjy and denies him her loving presence. He intuited this when she first lost her virginity, but could not give a name to it. Tragically, Benjy never transfers his love for Caddy to her infant daughter, who grew up, at least in her teen-age years, in the Compson household.

It should be said that Benjy’s world, however, is not one of total losses and rejections; a specific episode in the novel beautifully indicates Dilsey’s enduring love and concern for Benjy. Unfortunately, it comes late in his life, during the present time, and thus cannot serve as a concrete example of early supportive intervention. At the same time, it shows that deep within Benjy is a place he has reserved for moments of peace and stability, seen at times in tranquility of his blues eyes. The slow build-up to the Easter service, filled at first with a description of Dilsey, is as refreshing as the seemingly objective, almost shocking, description she is about to give of Benjy. It reaches its fulfillment in the sermon by the Reverend Shegog, a substitute preacher who had been imported, much to the chagrin of some of the parishioners, from Saint Louis. As Dilsey, whose “expression is at once fatalistic and of a child’s astonished disappointment,” steps out of her doorway to check the weather, we sense the world, at least her world symbolized by the five raucous jaybirds, is about to undergo a change, some recommitment to the values she hold so dear as she prepares for the Easter services (265). While the plot-line advances with its mundane twists and turns, the narrator’s elaborate and brocade style at the beginning of this section alerts the reader to be ready for some transforming moment.



In fugue-like fashion, her second exit from her cabin reveals her in “the maroon cape and the purple gown,” with elbow-length soiled white gloves—her own version of the habiliment of a royal person (287). Once inside the church, the parishioners could not help but stare at the imported preacher’s “wizened black face like a small, aged monkey” (293). But his physique does not fool Dilsey, never deceived by outward appearance. The preacher’s voice captivates the entire congregation, waking them from a collective indifference. Though supposedly an Easter sermon, Reverend Shegog relates part of the Nativity story (*alpha*) with the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ (*omega*) but with such force and power that Dilsey sits bold upright with her hand on Benjy’s knee. “Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscation of immolation and abnegation of time” (295). Benjy becomes at that precise moment like the suffering baby Jesus, whose “po mammy” needs “de salvation en de word of God” (296). Believers, the preacher maintains, will rise from the dead if they have “de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb.” And then the epiphany occurs: “In the midst of the voices and the hands, Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue glaze.” Dilsey says in a mystical vein, “I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin” (297). As their normal patterns of life continue, Dilsey in the present moment accepts the saving power of the words and actions of the person at the center of the Christmas and Easter events. In effect, she reaffirms for the reader that the voice of the preacher, like the voice of the novelist or the poet, provides an entrance into the holiest of mysteries that even Benjy, transfixed in this sacred space, might just grasp and repeat later to himself, as he is so capable of doing, recalling this moment as one of supreme happiness. Most of all, this episode symbolically suggests that Benjy, whom Frony infers has attended church services with Dilsey in the past, has had similar experiences in the past, precisely because he knows how to react to it.

From what we know from the text, Benjy did not have early supportive intervention that would have allowed him to alter his behavior so that he could become more socially responsive over the years—in fact, the evidence is to the contrary. In addition, the church services he attended with the Gibsons no doubt gave him some type of solace, but his passive participation in these services never sufficiently pulled him out of his autistic world so that he could respond to others and comment one way or another on the nature of this experience. Most likely born autistic—and noted to be totally different from others when three years old and then exhibiting the linguistic and behavioral traits of an autistic person as he grew older—Benjy incorporates many character flaws and human deficiencies that render him of little consequence to the Compson family. Dilsey, in

her wisdom, judges otherwise, thus cautioning us to reflect on our understanding of what it means to be a human being. Even if she had known the word autism and was consciously aware of the ways this particular neurological disorder affected Benjy, Dilsey probably would not have dealt any differently with Benjy than the way she did. At the same time, she might have had consolation in knowing that individuals with autism, though they suffer from a condition that affects their entire bodies, not just their minds, have insights, feelings, and capabilities. These individuals are “trying to say” they are *extraordinary*. They want to speak out and reveal their concerns and acumen, even when their behavior makes others in their company uncomfortable. ☼

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2 As James B. Meriwether explains, Faulkner, for a new edition of **The Sound and the Fury** to be published by Random House, wrote an introduction in the summer of 1933 that exists in several partial and complete manuscript and typescript drafts, one

of which was published in *The Southern Review* (Autumn 1972). Meriwether then published in 1974 in **A Faulkner Miscellany**, a longer, quite different version, "and it is at least possible that it was written later, rather than earlier, than the one that has been published" (156). See also his **The Textual History of The Sound and the Fury.**

3 A form of autism, called Asperger's Syndrome, also first recognized in the 1940's, is not usually associated with delayed language, cognitive development, or social self-help skills. Those with Asperger's Syndrome are said to have different, but not defective, ways of thinking, often expressed in various forms of creativity—certainly not evident in Benjy.

4 Harold Bloom's depiction of Benjy has elements of unacceptable and too-easy dichotomies that, nevertheless, beg for larger contextualization: "To be immersed into Benjy's perspective, which reduces everything to an unqualified opposition (Caddy and not-Caddy), is our proper introduction to the Compson experience of life. As in the novel's first scene, the mental landscape is without middle ground or nuance—there is only this side of the fence or that side of the fence. Yet Faulkner consistently evokes a luxuriant polysemous wealth. Aside from Benjy's lack of normal organic development, his mental processes differ from those of the rest of the family only in degree, not in kind of simplification. In a sense his schematic is larger than life, but it shows what is in the life" (61).

5 We are following in general the time sequencing as determined by Polk and Ross in **Reading Faulkner: The Sound and the Fury.**

6 What triggers autism has been a subject of much controversy: "Many of the heated debates that occur in the public domain relate to putative environmental triggers [for autism], among them the so far unsubstantiated claim that measles, mumps and rubella vaccination is a contributory cause. Similar claims relate to the measles virus in conjunction with gastric inflammatory disease" (Hill and Frith, 282).

7 At times, it is not always clear from general reports and comments in **Sex, Race, and Science**, a classic reference text in this field, whether castration is assumed under the category of sterilization, though in some instances it probably is, especially when murderers, pyro-maniacs, sexual perverts, thieves, the insane, and the mentally retarded are lumped into a general sterilization category, though most likely those whose activities threatened the common good were treated more harshly at times (45). Easily excluded were immigrants who reportedly came from inferior stock.



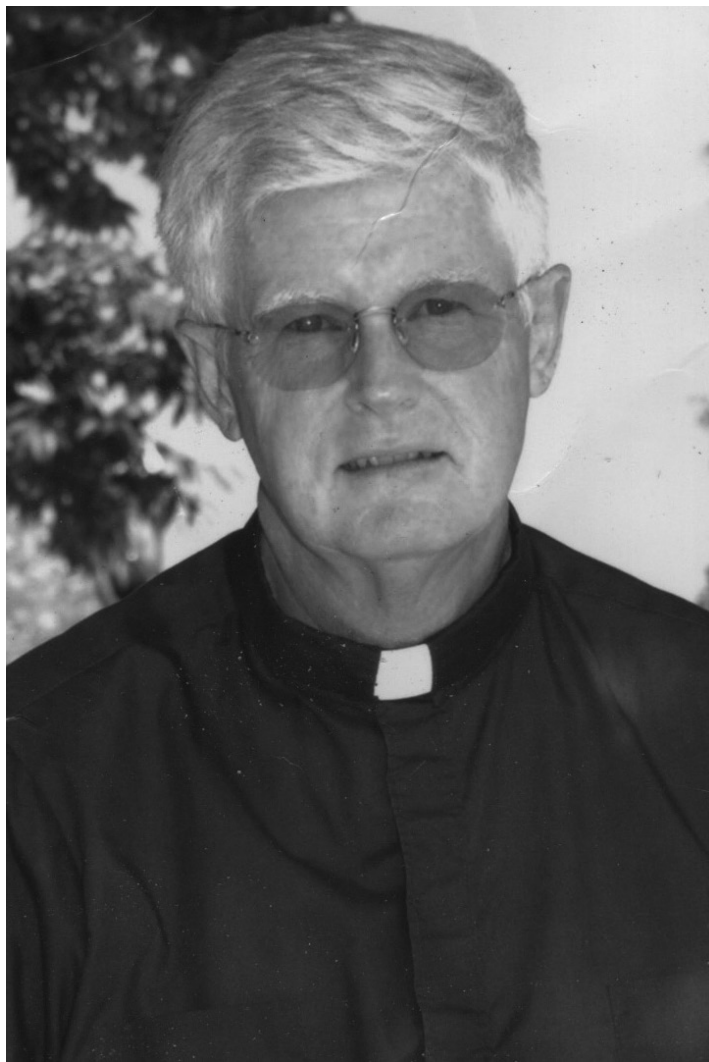
8 Reported to us by Hunter Cole of Blandon, Mississippi.

the noticeable features of a Down Syndrome child or of being deaf, as Luster says (49).

9 Mrs. Compson makes no reference to Benjy having

About the Author

Patrick Samway, S.J., today divides his time between Philadelphia, PA—where he is Professor of English at Saint Joseph's University and where he held the Donald MacLean, S.J., Jesuit Chair for two years—and Port au Prince, Haiti, where, St. Joseph's is in partnership with the Jesuit order in a system of grammar schools, established by the Jesuits after the devastating earthquake. He is author of **Walker Percy: A Life** (1997, Farrar, Straus & Giroux), which was selected by **The New York Times Book Review** as one of the notable books of 1997 and was a main selection of the Catholic Book Club. He has edited **A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy** (1995, University Press of Mississippi); and a volume of essays of Walker Percy entitled **Signposts in a Strange Land** (1991, Farrar, Straus & Giroux). With Ben Forkner he coedited four anthologies of **Southern literature: A New Reader of the Old South** (1990; Penguin); **Stories of the Old South** (1989, Penguin); **A Modern Southern Reader** (1986, Peachtree Press), and **Stories of the Modern South** (1978, Penguin). With Michel Gresset he co-edited **Faulkner and Idealism: Perspectives from Paris** (1983, University Press of Mississippi) and **A Gathering of Evidence: Essays on William Faulkner's "Intruder in the Dust"** (2004, Saint Joseph's University Press). He is the author of **Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust: A Critical Study of the Typescripts** (1980, Whitston Publishers). Father Samway, who recently gave the Flannery O'Connor Memorial Lecture at her old school, Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, GA, has just completed a book-length manuscript on Flannery O'Connor and Robert Giroux, the working title of which is: **I Am Properly Back Where I Started From: Flannery O'Connor to Her Editor Robert Giroux**. He also wrote **Educating Darfur Refugees: A Jesuit's Efforts in Chad** (2008, University of Scranton Press). Father Samway, who received his Ph.D. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been a Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature twice at both the University of Nantes, France (1975–76) and the University of Paris VII, France (1979–80). He has been a Bannan Scholar-in-Residence at the University of Santa Clara (1982–83); Visiting Associate Professor of English at Boston College (1983–84); Adjunct Associate Professor of English, Fordham University (Lincoln Center: 1984 to 1989); and Visiting Associate Professor of English, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana (Spring 1988). From 1984 to 1999, he served as **Literary Editor of America**, a weekly journal of opinion published in New York City by the Jesuits of North America. For two years after that he was the Will and Ariel Durant Professor of Humanities at Saint Peter's College, Jersey City, NJ before moving to St. Joseph's University.





Recommended Reading: Faulkner House Favorites

The Same-Different. Hannah Sanghee Park.

The first full length collection by poet Hannah Sanghee-Park, winner of the Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, is a book that forces the reader toward truth through language. Park pushes at linguistic boundaries in order to wring fresh meaning out of her words. In the first section, “The Same-Different,” the poems are built almost entirely on wordplay. For example, “And A Lie” begins,

I'll take the untrue,
the tried and true, the ruing
and the ruining. And you?

Here we see Park's ability to find truth in language based not only on meaning, but on sound, that most basic quality of speaking and writing. These are definitely poems to read aloud, to fully appreciate the use Park has made of rhyme, alliteration, and pun. These poems are almost Medieval in their dependence on aurality, but Park also manages to make the alliteration and rhyme distinctly modern.

These are poems about language and truth, but they are also poems about love and loss. The reliance on form belies a collection of work that is deeply sad, mourning the loss of a lover. In section II, “A Mutability,” the poems become more outright in their emotional content. In “The Deer Woman in December,” Park writes,

Your touch was all it took. Nothing to do
but now move on. No use aching over
something there that never did begin.

This second section, made up on sonnets based on myth, is my favorite in the book. This is the kind of thing poetry is for: timeless forms and themes made new, much like suffering is made new each time it is experienced. Park makes fairy tale of loss in poems like “The Fox-Bead in May,” which ends,

And every day they kissed to swap the bead
and for a month he waned and wans,
and when he learned the truth about her tongue,
he downed the bead: her true form a nine-tailed
fox who could have turned human, had he kissed on.

The final section of the book, “Fear,” is made up of one long poem titled “Preface to Fear/False Spring.” This is the most confessional section in the book. The wordplay is still prevalent, but here the speaker's pain is not clouded by it, but rather brought into sharper relief. Park writes,

I amuse you for only so long.
So long—
To fear the past's grasp on the future.
Everything must and will come to its end.

This is a book that is both linguistically stunning and emotionally wrenching. Park brings out the best in what poetry has to offer, delving into the mysterious truths of language while also reminding us of the painful truths of being human.



POETRY



*Mural on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, near Tahrir Square in Cairo.
By Alaa Awad. Photograph by Bahia Shehab. Cover art for
All Night is Morning by Andy Young,
Forthcoming from Lavender Ink, 2014.*



Two POEMS

by Andy Young

I know of no other poet writing today who so unremittingly arrests and details the political as personal.

—Peter Cooley, author of *Night Bus to the Afterlife*.

In her debut poetry collection, *All Night It Is Morning*, forthcoming from Lavender Ink, Andy Young cuts across geography, politics, language, and culture. Raised in Appalachia, rooted in New Orleans, and now part of an Egyptian/American family with whom she spent the last two years in Cairo, hers is an American perspective that is refreshingly outward-looking. The poems reflect on living with a foot in both Arabic and Western cultures but they reach beyond the purely personal to inhabit other realms. Her poems range from a saucy Cleopatra to a coal miner emerging from a mine collapse, from the ruins of post-Katrina New Orleans to the tumultuous events of the Egyptian revolution. Using the aubade, the traditional form of lovers parting at dawn, to anchor the book, Young examines destruction in the wake of storms, wars and revolution and the ways in which we connect within these disasters. The following two poems have been excerpted from that collection.

WOMAN DANCING ON HER SON'S COFFIN

from a black and white photograph at the House of Dance and Feathers, New Orleans, 1995

She is not
in black not
weeping, not leaning
against someone as she staggers,
drunk with grief, no—

She dances on top
of her son's coffin
outside the Lafitte Projects
where he was gunned down.
She dances and dances
unbending, limbs thrashing
like Kali
on Shiva's ashen body.

Gray clothes—
are they sweats?—
sway in the sun-blasted noon,
her two living boys
make music around her:
D-Boy gone
who that killed D-Boy who
first told her the news? She can't—
some funneled shape
his horn won't blow.

No lace,
no shawl across her shoulders.
Bare-armed, back cocked,
ass out, she dances, yes—
—another thud of percussion—

I, no she
grunts,
pushing him out
ripping open at Charity,
fluorescent lights
backlighting his arched shape

—bright slash of the trumpet—

he burns with fever,
laughs at ice
tracing
the pouting lips

late July, night blooming jasmine
thick in the mouth

I grab another sliver
—slap of snare—

—no, she does,
it's her boy,

a number now
pushing up the murder graph
like a thermometer

oh mama mama

Men hauling the casket bend
at the knees
not from weight
but from bass thump,
from tuba's
fat momentum.
Her sweats shift



soft and loose
 as they play it loose and mean,
 a threat in the throb
 the trombone moans
 she's gone

past shiver
 past flash of brass glint
 & casket shine underneath her feet

she shakes her head—look:
 she's turning to look
 into everyone's face.

ORGANOPHOSPHATE

I like the smell of tear gas
 the young man counts
 on his fingers as he lists

outrages tear gas means
 we're back Khaled's too
 tired to translate all

but this gas is something else
 the boys behind the man
 hold canisters to the screen

buss buss/look look:
 Made in USA they point
 to the cylinder as they

turn it to show the letters
 it can melt skin the lungs
 will bleed the boys

trace USA with blackened
 fingers people become asleep
 some of the gas does not

seem to come in canisters
 at all do they release it
 from vents people are running

en masse for a second it is
 a movie about history something
 not now but isn't that the street

where Ehab lived the door
 with those bars I squeezed
 myself through and outside

the window the rooftop
 roosters how are the roosters
 of Cairo people fall down and shake



*Andy Young, New Orleans poet, essayist, and author of the new book, **All Night It Is Morning**, grew up in southern West Virginia and has spent most of her adult life in New Orleans working at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. With her partner, Khaled Hegazzi, she translates poetry from the Arabic and founded **Meena**, a bilingual literary journal, in 2005. For the last two years she has lived in Egypt, where she worked at the American University in Cairo and documented the revolution in essays, poems, and photographs. A graduate of the Warren Wilson Program for Writers, her writing has been published in three chapbooks, publications in Lebanon, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, and throughout the United States in places such as the **Los Angeles Review of Books**, **Callaloo**, **Guernica**, and the Norton anthology **Language for a New Century**. Her work also been featured in Pasion Flamenca's play **Flamenclorico: Lore of the Miners**, performed at the Joyce Theater, Public Radio International's **The World**, the jewelry designs of Jeanine Payer, in Santa Fe's public buses, and in SUNY's **Drawn from Disaster** exhibit and Paul Chan's **Tree of Life** project for the New Museum. Andy was an early winner of the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society's gold medal for best poem in the **William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition** and has appeared at the Society's annual **Words & Music: a Literary Feast in New Orleans** on multiple occasions. One of her chapbooks, **All Fires the Fire**, was underwritten by the Faulkner*

Society and its patron Faulkner House Books.

November 2011 



REVIEW

LOUISE GLÜCK'S FAITHFUL & VIRTUOUS NIGHT

by Jade Hurter

Louise Glück's most recent collection of poetry, **Faithful and Virtuous Night**, received the 2014 National Book Award for Poetry, and what a well-deserved win it was. Glück's most famous work comes from early collections; *The Garden*, one of her most anthologized poems, crystallizes much of what she is known for: her abject portrayal of nature, death, myth, and ornament. This collection is a true departure from her previous collections, continuing the evolution begun in 2009's **A Village Life**, and Glück does not disappoint in her metamorphosis. Glück is an essential poet in that she never dwells on what has been successful in the past. She is always pushing the envelope, working through new subjects, and changing in new and stunning ways.

A Faithful and Virtuous Night is set in England, many of the poems rendered (we learn about halfway through the book) in the voice of a male painter. Many of these poems are meditations on the past: the eponymous poem, for example, outlines a birthday in the speaker's childhood. On this day the speaker reads a book, *My First Reader*, about a child and a dog, and an ordinary moment becomes suffused with awe:

*I turned the pages.
When I was finished
I resumed turning, so the story took on a
circular shape,
like the zodiac. It made me dizzy. The yellow
ball
seemed promiscuous, equally
at home in the child's hand and the dog's
mouth—*

Time in these poems is at times an illusion, at times the only constant in a shifting world. In the collection's first poem, *Parable*, a group of people spends their lives arguing about how to take a journey. At the end of the poem, despite never having made physical progress, a member of the group observes

*...ah, behold how we have aged, traveling
from day to night only, neither forward nor
sideward, and this seemed
in a strange way miraculous.*

The passing of day into night appears again and again

throughout the collection, reminding the reader both of the insistence of time and of its illusory nature. Still though we may be, we move always through time.

The tone of this collection is distant, clear, even wise. This is the work of an experienced poet, a reflection on the meaning of aging as an artist. Silence is a recurring motif. In the prose poem *Forbidden Music*, for example, a flautist has a dream of silence:

*...there came a passage that was called the
forbidden music because it could not, the composer
specified, be played. And still it must exist and
be passed over, an interval at the discretion of
the conductor. But tonight, the conductor decides,
it must be played—he has a hunger to make his
name. The flautist wakes with a start.*

Here the greedy conductor misunderstands what this poet knows: that silence, too, is a part of art; that the purity of silence can never wholly be replaced by poetry, no matter how transcendent. These are quiet poems, and they leave ample space for reflection in the spaces between.

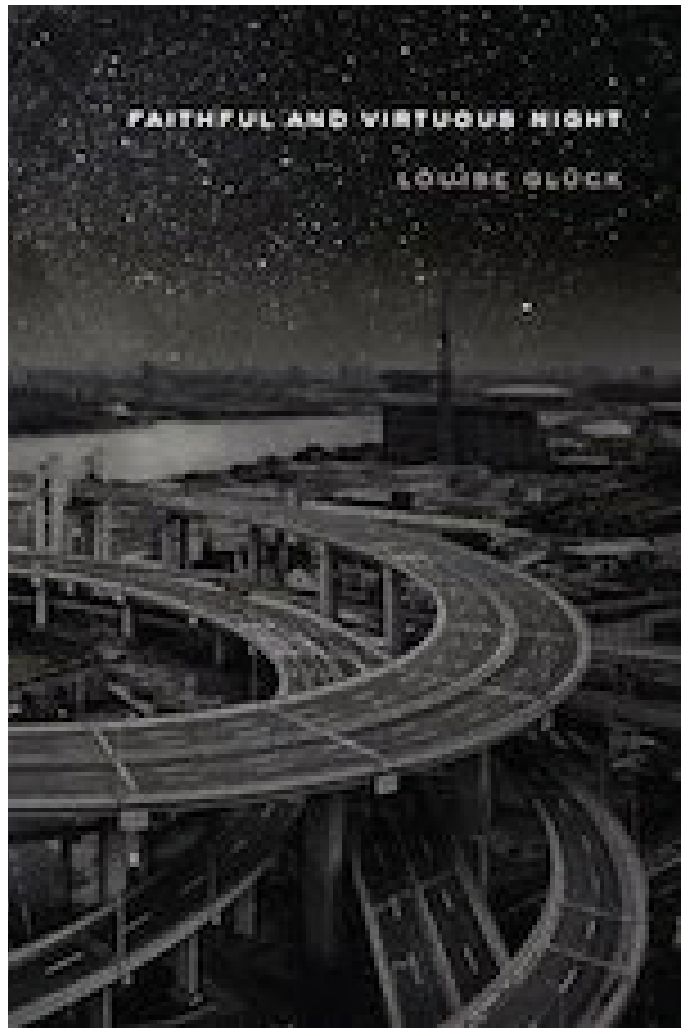
Though much of Glück's previous work was concerned with endings—death, divorce—this book feels circular. As soon as I finished it, I felt I could begin reading anew from the first page. Appropriately, the title poem ends on these lines:

*I think here I will leave you. It has come to
seem
there is no perfect ending.
Indeed, there are infinite endings.
Or perhaps, once one begins,
there are only endings.*

This is a book of questions, of contemplation. Reading these poems, time seems to slow. Ending and beginning, day and night, blur into the unified whole that is poetry. Reality becomes dream, the ordinary becomes miraculous. In both resisting and cherishing the silence that plagues always the poet, Glück perseveres in her creation, embarking on a journey that is richly rewarding for any reader.



*Jade Hurter is a second year poet in the MFA program at the University of New Orleans. At UNO she works with the Greater New Orleans Writing Project and the Scholastic Writing Awards of Southeast Louisiana. She also reads submissions for UNO's literary journal, **Bayou Magazine**. She has been a two-time semifinalist in the SLS Unified Literary Contest and has received the Mona Adilman Prize for poetry. Her work is forthcoming in *Quaint Magazine*. This is her first year working with the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society and the Words & Music festival, and she is "thrilled to be a part of it!" She runs the blog and social media for Faulkner House Books and during the coming year will be assisting Faulkner Society Co-Founder Rosemary James with the 2015 William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition and the 2015 edition of *The Double Dealer*. For more of her book reviews and news from *Pirate's Alley*, visit faulknerhousebooks.wordpress.com.*



Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.

-Audre Lorde



AN INTERVIEW WITH SOUTH CAROLINA POET LAUREATE MARJORY WENTWORTH



by Caroline Rash

BORN IN MASSACHUSETTS, Marjory Wentworth has come a long way South since then to become recipient of the title of Poet Laureate of South Carolina. She has every reason to be particularly excited about her **New and Selected Poems**, released this past spring from University of South Carolina Press. The collection signals a return (after publishing a children's book and co-authoring a book on human rights) to her "poetry writing persona," as she told Charleston City Paper. Additionally, **New and Selected Poems** is the inaugural publication of the current incarnation of the Palmetto Poetry Series, a publishing project originally begun by professor and poet Kwame Dawes (who still sits on the board). Three years after Dawes moved from the University of South Carolina to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the series was revitalized by an impressive list of South Carolina poets, including National Book Award winners Nikky Finney and Terrance Hayes, Ray McManus, Charlene Spearen, and Wentworth herself. The series is definitely one for poetry-lovers to follow.

New and Selected Poems spans 11 years and contains a generous serving of new poems. Nature and family run throughout; we see her children grow up and humans experience their environment in myriad ways, from the pleasant seasonal return of "Spring" to the violent exhortation to think and "encounter the unexpected" in "Undertow."

Wentworth appeared at Words & Music 2014 in New Orleans. Additionally, she judged the poetry category of the 2014 Faulkner-Wisdom Creative Writing Competition. The following is an interview with Wentworth by **The Double Dealer**, conducted in anticipation of her travels from the Atlantic to Gulf Coast.

Wentworth lives in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina with her husband and sometimes her three sons, who are in and out of the house working on film projects.

Double Dealer: Your poetry is very in tune with the natural world, and you have lived in many different places. Has your poetry evolved in tandem with your physical environment, or is there something constant you find through different landscapes?

Marjory Wentworth: Interesting question. I respond more to the natural world than an urban landscape, although I lived in Brooklyn for ten years and I loved New York. Poets have always examined the natural world to find metaphors and meaning. Nature inspires intense feelings of awe and reverence. This attention to nature started a very long time ago. Haiku poems, for example, originated in Japan in the Middle Ages. These poems were always located in the natural world, attentive to time and place (the season), and contained ideas about nature derived from the Zen Buddhist tradition. In other words, finding inspiration in the natural world is simply an integral part of being a poet.

This interest intensified for me when I moved to South Carolina in August of 1989. The natural world was so intense and lush, especially in the heat of summer. We lived on Sullivan's Island, a barrier island, so everything was intensified. In September, we saw that landscape destroyed in Hurricane Hugo; our home was severely damaged and we lost most of our belongings. After a few months of moving around, we eventually adjusted and moved into temporary housing on Isle of Palms. I felt an intense connection with the landscape that I would not have had if we hadn't seen it virtually destroyed only months earlier. As construction began on our house, the land itself seemed to be healing. The poems I wrote had an underlying emotional intensity, because of the circumstances. I never considered myself a landscape poet, but I clung to the imagery surrounding me on the island and I wrote my way out of the pain that characterized that year... This was when I began my life as a published poet.

Since then I have written all kinds of poems, of course. I continue to find inspiration in nature, and I probably will continue to do so for the rest of my life. Ralph Waldo Emerson explained in his essay "The Poet" that the poet's intense attention to the earth helps reconnect us to God. In other words, it's something larger than responding to the sensory world – it's a spiritual practice that connects me to life itself.



DD: You've had some fantastic teachers, beginning with your father, who you have said read poetry to you early on. Then you studied with Pulitzer Prize winning poet Peter Viereck, Nobel Prize winner Joseph Brodsky, renowned political poet Carolyn Forché, Galway Kinnell and Philip Levine. What role have teachers played in your poetic life?

MW: I didn't know any poets until I moved to New York after college. More than anything, my teachers showed me, by example, how to have a life in poetry.

I first encountered Joseph Brodsky through stories told my beloved professor, Joseph's dear friend, Peter Viereck. During my senior year at Mt. Holyoke, I was working on a paper about Bertolt Brecht, another exiled writer, in Professor Viereck's small course on intellectuals and artists under totalitarianism. He spoke of Joseph often and with great affection and intensity, as if Joseph was the living example of what he was trying to teach us. I was writing poetry, and Peter Viereck, a Pulitzer Prize winning poet himself, asked to read it. Apparently this was not something he often did, and his support was and remains enormously important. I began to take writing seriously, never dreaming I would ever meet Brodsky.

From the very beginning, human rights was a huge subject for me. I was working as a refugee resettlement worker at the Amnesty International office while I was in graduate school. Carolyn and Phil, in particular, were very encouraging. Phil used to always praise my poems about human rights issues and comment that I actually had something to write about of substance. Carolyn was still going back and forth to El Salvador, and she seemed to recognize me as a kindred spirit. This kind of encouragement was enormously important. Is there any poet more accomplished in this area than Carolyn? I don't think so.

*DD: You have worked at the U.N. High Commission for Refugees and written a nonfiction book called **Taking a Stand** with activist Juan Mendez, who was imprisoned and tortured by the Argentinean military in the 1970s. Is there any tension between the sort of certain/direct nature of political activism and writing poetry or do you find these roles support each other?*

MW: There's a long history of social activism tied to poetry – from The Black Arts Movement of the 60s to recent poets against the war during the Bush administration.

I have also worked on human rights issues in various capacities throughout my life. Many of my poems are centered around these issues. The people I met and the stories I heard throughout the years I worked at Amnesty International and as a refugee resettlement worker continue to both haunt and inspire me. Writing about social justice and human rights issues is a way of bearing witness and finding redemption... All

that needless suffering continues, but at least the poems remember the lost.

*Juan Mendez and I wrote **Taking a Stand** to educate and inform, but our larger goal was to create a dialogue with broad circles of the public who are indifferent to human rights violations. The circles of supporters need to be expanded in all areas of society.*

DD: What are current projects (that you're most excited about!) of Lowcountry Initiative for the Literary Arts (LILA), the initiative founded by you and Carol Ann Davis (editor of Crazyhorse) to promote literary arts in South Carolina?

MW: LILA has a new home at Circular Church, and we have started a program of readings and workshops we would like to expand. We are seeking funding for our new poetry prison writing program and want to expand and continue our poets-in-the-schools workshops. In particular, funding has dried-up for our longstanding and enormously successful Poets-in-the-Schools Program at Burke High School, and we want to find ways to continue to teach there. As we continue to grow and expand our efforts, we are seeking non-profit status and searching for an executive director.

DD: What did you seek to accomplish in the Poet Laureate role, which is winding down?

MW: My goal is always to find ways to bring poetry into the community. I receive no funding from SC, so I am quite limited in what I can do. It's maddening actually, because the possibilities are endless.

DD: Any go-to advice for younger/beginning writers?

MW: READ WELL. Literature is your best teacher. Develop good habits and ways to write and pay attention to the world every day.

DD: Where does a poem start for you? Or does it change? (i.e.—an image, a feeling, an event, a phrase)

MW: Usually my poems start with an image. I almost work like an artist—scribbling out an exact description of something I see. Then the poem takes over.

DD: The theme of the Words & Music literary festival this year is Improvisation. Obviously, writing does not involve a lot of improvisation in the traditional sense of "off the cuff performance", but do you feel there is some literary equivalent to, for example, jazz—when the blend of technical knowledge and intuition blend into something new and unexpected?

MW: I used to be a dancer and considered becoming a choreographer, so I associate improvisation with dance.



I did improv once with Glen Velez from the Paul Winter consort on stage at the Yale Theatre for a fundraiser. I had a blast. I've also performed with a guitarist here named Joshua Fisher. Improvising with musicians is wonderful.

I think writing poems can work like jazz and a lot of poets write that way. (Kevin Young comes to mind.) You describe *when the blend of technical knowledge and intuition blend into something new and unexpected* - this is the writing process, especially when you are working with form. I've included my poem "Undertow" - because it's inspired by form (mirror poem) and technical information about the actual explanation of literal undertow. I've also included "The Way Sound Travels." This poem is based on scientific abstracts.

DD: Thank you, Marjory. We look forward to seeing you in New Orleans!

Words & Music 2016: Call for Papers

The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society is now soliciting papers to be presented at *Words & Music, a Literary Feast in New Orleans* in the Fall of 2016. The theme for 2016 will be:
The Mysteries of Literature, Life, and Beyond.

For guidelines and general information, Email:
Faulkhous@aol.com



Two POEMS

by *Marjory Wentworth*

UNDERTOW

encounter the tempting thing think
unfamiliar go somewhere unexpected
ask about the steeper slope approach
on a slight angle running beneath
when there is heavy action
get out build up and look

a weak point push out create a rip
which will carry you knowing
this not the same as understanding
push towards the hope of tearing
through a terrible idea before
you reach the best thing return

you reach the best thing return
through a terrible idea before
push towards the hope of tearing
this not the same as understanding
which will carry you knowing
a weak point push out create a rip

get out build up and look
when there is heavy action
on a slight angle running beneath
ask about the steeper slope approach
unfamiliar go somewhere unexpected
encounter the tempting thing think

THE WAY SOUND TRAVELS

Song birds evolved long before humans
were around to listen, but they don't sing
to charm us, though parrots share our thick tongues.
In fact, not all birds actually sing; their call-
notes are not true music, but rather
signals for courtship, copulation,
pleasure, alarm, distress. Flight calls
for beginning and ending the journey
or staying still, keep the flock coordinated.
Even the smallest chicks listen to their parents
from inside the eggs. Some birds sing
two different notes at once, especially males.
Females are turned on by such complexity.
Sound travels best at dawn, before the sun
heats the air, twisting each note into an echo.
Even something as tenuous as wind
can shift a note enough to confuse friends. 🌸

©Copyright, 2014, Marjory Wentworth. These new poems are reprinted from Ms. Wentworth's new collection published by The University of South Carolina Press, **New and Selected Poems. The Way Sound Travels**



*Marjory Wentworth, South Carolina poet laureate and five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, is the author of three collections of verse, the children's book **Shackles** (2009 Silver Medal winner in the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards), and **Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights** (with Juan E. Mendez). She is coeditor with **Kwame Dawes of Seeking: Poetry and Prose Inspired by the Art of Jonathan Green** (University of South Carolina Press). Wentworth teaches at the Art Institute of Charleston, and she is the president and cofounder of the Lowcountry Initiative for the Literary Arts. She has collaborated extensively with visual artists and composers. Her poems have been displayed at The National Science Foundation, Duke University Museum of Art, and The Gibbes Museum. Her work is included in the South Carolina Poetry Archives at Furman University.*



"This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must", then build your life in accordance with this necessity..."

-Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet



DARRELL BOURQUE: A

VOICE FOR DIVERSITY

by Caroline Rash



Other Poems from Acadie, novelist Colum McCann writes, “I hear Seamus Heaney here. I hear Wendell Berry. I hear the waters of Louisiana. I hear every Acadia there ever has been. This is the wood and the steel and the string and the pluck of a true life, written down and allowed to become music. Darrell Bourque has a unique voice that is all at once plain and melodic. These poems begin in the everyday and end in the infinite. He takes the mysterious and strips it raw. Then, somehow, he makes hope and legend rhyme. What a wonderful American poet.”

The award follows on the heels of Bourque’s latest publication, a chapbook entitled, **if you abandon me, comment je vas faire: An Amédé Ardoin Songbook** (Yellow Flag Press, Lafayette, LA). The chapbook was produced to create a public commemorative for Amédé Ardoin, Creole accordion master of the Eunice, LA, area who died at the Pineville, LA mental hospital and is buried in an unmarked grave in the “Negro cemetery” there. Ardoin was one of the first Louisiana musicians to record — 34 tunes in all, on 78 rpm discs. His solo work and collaborations with fiddler Dennis McGee proved influential to both Creole and Cajun musicians. The project, a joint effort of Bourque and Patricia Cravins, wife of Opelousas mayor Donald Cravins, is an effort to symbolically bring Amédé home and honor his place in both Cajun and Creole cultures.

LOUISIANA POET AND EDUCATOR Darrell Bourque is the Pirate’s Alley Faulkner Society’s 2014 recipient of the ALIHOT (A Legend in his Own Time) Award for Poetry. We have recognized him for his wonderful work and his continuing contributions to the Louisiana poetry community.

Bourque was also the recipient of the 2014 Louisiana Writer Award, given annually to recognize outstanding contributions to Louisiana’s literary and intellectual life exemplified by a writer’s body of work. Bourque, a Louisiana native, is the 15th recipient of the award given by the Louisiana Center for the Book and the State Library of Louisiana. Past recipients of the Louisiana Writer Award include novelists John Biguenet, James Lee Burke, Ernest J. Gaines, Tim Gautreaux, Shirley Ann Grau, Elmore Leonard, Valerie Martin, James Wilcox, and Christine Wiltz; historian Carl Brasseaux; children’s author William Joyce; scholar Lewis P. Simpson; and poets Yusef Komunyakaa and William Jay Smith.

Bourque’s other current projects include work with Festival of Words-Grand Coteau, a literary festival bringing local and internationally known writers to a largely under-served and under-privileged rural community; directing the Young Writers Apprenticeship Program for high school students; serving on the board at the Ernest J. Gaines Center at the University of Louisiana—Lafayette; and serving on the advisory board of NuNu’s Arts and Culture Collective, a “multidisciplinary creative place-making initiative” based in Arnaudville, LA.

Collaboration and exchange are key facets of Bourque’s activism. He is one of the co-founders of Narrative 4, an international story exchange between teenagers from all over the world to promote empathy and shatter ste-

Of Bourque’s 2013 collection **Megan’s Guitar and**



reotypes. From 2007-2011, he served as Louisiana Poet Laureate with a focus on bringing poetry into pre-college classrooms and community spaces. One such project was “Just Listen to Yourself,” a program that brings diverse voices of Louisiana poetry to state workers, and members of the public, in the Capitol complex during their lunch hour.

Most recently, Bourque has committed to participate in Degrees of Separation, a two-year exchange in which Louisiana literary and visual artists will collaborate with artists from Bretagne, France. The exchange is sponsored by The Ann Connelly Gallery, NUNU Arts and Culture Collective, Les Articulteurs in Redon, France, The Walls Project and the French Consulate in New Orleans.

Besides **if you abandon me, comment je vas faire**, Bourque is the author of eight other celebrated collections: **Plainsongs** (Cross-Cultural Communications, Merrick, NY), **The Doors between Us** (Louisiana Literature Press, SELU, Hammond, LA), **Burnt Water Suite** (Wings Press, San Antonio), **The Blue Boat** (University of Louisiana Press), **In Ordinary Light: New and Selected Poems** (UL Press), **Call and Response: Conversations in Verse**, with Louisiana poet **Jack B. Bedell** (Texas Review Press of the Texas A&M Press Consortium), **Holding the Notes** (a commissioned chapbook, Chicory Bloom Press, Thibodaux, LA), **Megan’s Guitar and Other Poems from Acadie** (UL Press).

He is professor emeritus in English at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette and lives with his wife Karen, a glass artist, in St. Landry Parish.

Below is an interview conducted with Darrell by **The Double Dealer’s** Caroline Rash this past fall.

Rash:

First of all, congratulations on being awarded the Louisiana Writer Award! Your latest publication is **if you abandon me, comment je vas faire: An Amédé Ardoin Songbook**, which is actually part of a larger initiative to symbolically bring the Creole musician, who was buried in an unmarked grave, home. What drew you to the story of Amédé Ardoin?

Bourque:

I was born and grew up in the Cajun-Creole community of Bellevue in south St. Landry Parish, Louisiana. The first live music I heard came from my uncle’s bar less than 100 yards from my bedroom window, which was always open in the summertime. The first language I heard spoken was the Cajun-Creole language of the farmers in the neighborhood where I lived and in the fields where I picked cotton and cucumbers and plant-

ed sweet potatoes. My first playmates were my Cajun cousins and the Creole and Black children who lived on the farms nearby. I live in the house and on the land where I grew up so I am still connected to the sounds and smells and culture of that little piece of geography, which was part of my grandfather’s fairly large estate. As I suggested in **Megan’s Guitar**, history and art often comes first in songs we hear and sing. So, when I thought I might write a chapbook on a specific musician, it was no surprise that the man whose work forms the foundation of the traditional music of my area suggested itself as the subject of the set of poems. Also, the idea of social justice lies just under the surface of **Megan’s Guitar** and so this book on a Creole native was no stretch at all.

Rash:

You have talked extensively about how the themes of your books inform the structure. For example, **The Blue Boat** was constructed like a skiff. This new chapbook is mostly inverted sonnets. Will you tell us a bit about why you chose that form?

Bourque:

Starting the **The Blue Boat** I began to be fascinated with the sonnet as a form: how to take a long story or a complex response to a subject and reduce it to 14 lines. I was particularly influenced by the Italian sonnet of the father of humanism, Petrarch. The inversion came out of an attempt to use a traditional form and to “make it new” as directed by Pound. I grew out of a broken history with the deportation and the consequences of that experience. As children my parents were forbidden by state law to speak French in school. It was the primary language of the family and of the neighborhood. When I was in school one of the first songs we were taught was the old French song “Frere Jacques.” But for us the French language of our parents and grandparents and neighbors was something we were discouraged from using in order to assimilate into “American” culture. My experience with history and with language is a broken one, so when I started thinking about a form I wanted to write in, I wanted it to mean something that perhaps hardly a reader would ever realize. But I would realize it and the form would be part of the meaning. I broke the Italian sonnet octave/octet into opening and closing quartets and the sestet was made of 2 triplets of terza rima rhyme and placed in the middle of the poem. These poems have a displaced volta if there is volta at all. The idea of classical proposition and resolution didn’t exist so clearly in my experiences so they would not be there clearly in the poems either. This worked well for MG and in the Ardoin chapbook I added the feature of the poems being unrhymed sonnets as a way of honoring the original music as well as a way of containing loss which is the over riding theme of the book. The last sonnet in the book is in French, **Amede’s** native language, and it is the only one that uses off/slant/sight/imperfect rhyme (made of three roughly rhyming



quartets and a couplet)

Rash:

In an interview with Caroline LeBlanc in the blog **Poetry Matters**, you wrote, “Cajuns did not emerge from a ‘reading’ culture. We were rather a listening culture.” What and whom did you grow up listening to, and how has that affected your writing?

Bourque:

The stories of my aunts and uncles and grandparents. I grew up in a rural neighborhood made of mostly of farms of my grandfather’s divided estate owned by his children (10 of them). On those farms were tenant farmers and sharecroppers and their family. In the fields stories were always being told. On the porch at night, stories. At funerals and weddings and fish fries, stories. There were miracle cures and murders, untimely deaths of children, husbands abandoning families, special needs children all around and they all had their stories. There was alcoholism and interracial affairs and they were the subjects of stories. One of my uncles murdered a man, his friend, and never was prosecuted, nearly all my uncles were drunks, one grandfather died of cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes was the family disease and so there were what seemed like lots of amputations. There were lynchings in the neighboring towns. There was fear of Negro music and what it might do to the culture when Chuck Berry’s sound arrived on the scene, even though we had all been listening Valmont Chavis’ zydeco type music all our lives and it seemed to have not had too bad an effect. Then there was Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley and their music. There was that fear of a new encroaching culture even while we were allowed to go to bars from the time we were about 14 or so. That’s where the stories came from. They were both a form of entertainment and a way to process what was happening all around us. We’d be telling stories on the porch and then we’d come in momentarily to see Elvis and the Beatles on television but we’d come back to the porch. We’d see Milton Berle and Lucy like so many other American kids, but we had become readers and listeners to stories in books. The book stories came at almost the same time as soap operas were available to us, and radio shows too like *The Shadow* which we always listened to on Sunday afternoons when we went for long drives in the prairies and the marshlands of South Louisiana.

Rash:

You have listed as influences both poets (Neruda, Heaney, Lorca, Robert Frost, Adrienne Rich and Louisiana-born Natasha Tretheway, Rodger Kamenetz, and Yusef Komanyakaa) and fiction writers like Luis Urrea, Ernest J. Gaines, Louise Erdrich, Colum McCann, Colm Toibin, Milan Kundera, Michael Ondaatjee, and Salman Rushdie. What keeps you writing poetry?

Bourque

Poets see the narrative differently from oral written storytellers, mostly. They may see the linear narrative and that narrative informs the story they want to tell. But the telling is different. At least for me it is. I keep reading writers of fiction because I love the fictionalized narrative. But with writers like Erdrich and Urrea and Ondaatjee I see the difference in how they approach the poem differently from the prose narrative form. And I am always seeing the poems in Erdrich’s fiction and Toibin’s and Gaines’. I don’t know how to explain it better. Behind, or woven into, every great piece of music, or great painting, or great poem there is a story. The poem makes use of story in ways that fascinate me. Not that the distillation of the poem makes a better story but it makes one that emerges differently. I think as a poet, harnessed for better or worse to certain forms, certain ways of articulating being. I wish I could be more specific, but much of what goes on in the process of making art is mystery; not all of it, much of the process is craft and knowing exactly how something is supposed to happen in a poem. But, much is part of a sublime experience that language has a hard time getting to, at least for me.

Rash:

Eudora Welty famously said, “One place understood helps us understand all places better.” At the same time, many writers who write about specific places and cultures find themselves pigeon-holed into the “regional” label. What are your thoughts on the place of your literature in this conversation?

Bourque:

If I write with integrity about place, it will have meaning for the person who goes to the poem without the biases of specific regions having preference over others. I learned from Frost not to be afraid of place, the same of Heaney. Beckett is writing about a specific place, the mind/psyche/imagination and his poetic theater is never about anything other than the human experience. Acadie is an imaginative place in MG; it is not in Nova Scotia and it is not in the 22 parish area designated as Acadie by the Louisiana legislature. It is some place in history, in culture, in various times, in the heart. That’s the only place I am guided by, the place of the heart and the place of human truth, as complex and textured as the latter can be. The social justice that fuels the Amede story is a large idea that is not contained by a specific place. And if it happens that place as I use it pigeon holes the writing, then so be it. Also I am guided by writers like Urrea and Erdrich and Tretheway and Frank X Walker whose works are alive and relevant because of the way they use place and specific culture(s).

Rash:

Besides writing, you work extensively with young people as an educator. What is your go-to advice for young writers, coming from diverse areas across the world?

**Bourque:**

The story or the poem always begins in an imagination, in a family or cultural history. That was as true for Homer as it was for Joyce, or Sylvia Plath, or Yeats, or Sandra Cisneros, or Lucille Clifton, or Sharon Olds, or Ed Hirsch or Mark Doty or Keats or

(all writers I love and read and study and am influenced by. Begin with your story, your urgency, your discomfort, your displeasure, or your pleasure and let it be what drives the story or the poem or the play. Let your time and your passage inform your work, always with an eye for seeing how your life and your experiences are connected to the big human story. At first don't worry about genre or form or approach. Let the stories that are in you emerge. Every single one of us is a story carrier: the prisoner on death row, the new born prince, the day laborer, the seamstress in a factory in China or India or Spokane, our fathers and mothers, the old people, the people who seem as plain as dirt. They have stories in them and so do you. That's my advice. How that story or poem will be shaped comes much later if you take the responsibilities of being a storyteller or poet as part of your life's work.

Rash:

With so much of your activism serving to form collaborations and exchanges, I wonder if you ever team up with your wife, Karen, or how living with another artist influences your work.

Bourque:

She teaches me every day how to be a poet. She is meticulous and careful but she lets the materials guide her. What she does inside the frame around the glass work she creates tells me everyday how to work inside the sonnet, how to work inside the freer forms. She has created pieces from my poems but they are poems influenced by another piece of visual art or a piece of music. I work frequently with the ekphrastic poem so there is sustained collaboration. I have worked with the works of Vermeer, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Cezanne but what I get from Karen is the approach and the technique and the hard matter of turning what is not art into art. And

that she teaches me every single day when we each go to our studio or writing place to make something that didn't exist before.

Rash:

You have written so extensively and lovingly about Acadie. What continues to compel and haunt you about this region in which you have set your life's work?

Bourque:

It is the history, I think, and living through the history. The effect of the Grand Derangement of the Acadians is not completely resolved in the minds of many Acadians yet finding an intelligent and responsible response to being a citizen is equally important to many of us. How to be responsible to the land, how to keep the food supply less dangerous and toxic that it often is, how to assimilate honorably and intelligently into a larger culture, how to live in this place that is like no other we see in other parts of the world but how to stay connected to the world. How to make education part of who and what we are and will become are big initiatives for us. But mostly how to know our Nature and how to make that Nature hold the music, the poems, the stories that are true to us. It's all those "hows" combined that compel me to continue to write about this place and how I experience it. I want people to know that these people who are often regarded as backwards, and ignorant, and easily reduced to absurdities in reality shows are people who read Tom Stoppard and Plato, who become neurosurgeons and social activists, who listen to Alphonse "Bois Sec" Ardoin and to Philip Glass, Beethoven, Iris Dement, and Rene Fleming. I hope my work contains intelligent surprises. I hope it informs a readership in unexpected ways. I hope it contains elements that make us like the rest of the world in the ways that matter. 🌸

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Two POEMS

by Darrell Bourque

CANRAY FONTENOT TALKS TO MICHAEL TISSERAND

I knew him ever since I was a little kid.
He wanted me to go with him up north
with my fiddle to record his songs at Decca.
I was 17. My mama wouldn't let me go.

Like Bois-Sec I played triangle behind him.
As a boy: "... I was watching how he was
playing, and listening to his tune and learning

the words." At the end the only news we got
was from the family who went to see him
over there in Pineville. They said the people

said he wouldn't drink, and he wouldn't eat.
It was like he couldn't do anything for himself.
The last we heard was he was *stone crazy*.
His brother told us. It's how we let him go.

SUNDAY AFTERNOONS BEHIND T-MAURICE'S DANCEHALL

It was the sound of horses' hooves that drummed and
lodged
inside our heads on those days off, days reserved for
play.

We never even saw the faces of the riders
as they zipped past us on that blur to the stretch,

our eyes locked on the red one, or the gray one,
or the white one we had put our money on.

Our uncles and our neighbors stood with us
in lines at the betting tables. None of us had seen

Degas' horses or his paintings of them at country
tracks
like this one, but he could have painted any one of us

in this scene, me still deciding between Moss Bluff &
Green Flash
in the first, a cousin favoring Running Rivers in the
fifth.

My father leaning with the other men on the rails, his
hat
tilted and pulled down just a bit toward his left eye.

We sneaking back to the holding area to talk to boys
who calmed horses down with currycombs and quiet

talk, we bumming cigarettes off those older boys
and fishing for tips, hedges on what was yet to come.



AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE SATTERFIELD

by Jade Hurter

Double Dealer: *Your poetry is involved with an impressive range of subjects, from war to snow to Anna Karenina. How does the detritus of life work its way into such clear-voiced poems? How do you gather your writing material?*

Jane Satterfield: Thanks—part of the fun of writing poems is finding connections between my quirky interests and larger concerns. I like to read widely and to keep a notebook for recording ideas, titles, and shards of language—the gorgeous junk of life—in the hopes they’ll ultimately find their way into poems. On some level, poetry is a way of speaking out against cultural silence or forgetfulness; of creating order out of the chaos of daily life.

DD: *In Her Familiars, your most recent book, you write about both your British and American heritages. How would you say a sense of belonging (or not belonging) to multiple places has informed your work?*

JS: Whatever genre I’m working in, I’m drawn to exploring the landscapes, traditions, and histories I’ve inherited. Belonging to multiple places, I feel, is a wonderful gift for a writer. You learn to negotiate different and sometimes competing perspectives. An added bonus is the flexibility that comes with knowing you owe no singular allegiance.

DD: *Who have been some of the most influential writers, poets or otherwise, for your own writing?*

JS: I love—and always return to—novels by Virginia Woolf and Michael Ondaatje for the sheer texture of their prose and the layered histories of characterization that comprise dramatic action. Several essayists have been important to me for beauty of language and clarity of vision—in particular, James Baldwin and George Orwell, Joan Didion and Jamaica Kincaid. Early on, Plath and Bishop were important. Aside from the sheer power of her voice and vision, I was drawn to Plath by the deeper currents of social conscience embedded in her lyrics (gender politics, concern for the environment) and by the range of work she produced—in multiple genres—to earn her chops.

Perhaps paradoxically, Bishop’s reserve, command of form, and perceptive power proved equally compelling. Of course, both poets were deeply attuned to the strangeness of their own countries and inspired by the beauty of adopted homes. Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich offered powerful examples. These days, Adam Zagajewski’s *Try to Praise the Mutilated World* hangs on my office door—a stark lyric that keeps me grounded. I feel lucky to live in a time where there’s no shortage of compelling contemporaries and new voices that challenge and inspire.

DD: *You write poetry as well as nonfiction. How do you feel the two genres intersect? What strikes you as most different about writing nonfiction?*

JS: I first turned to writing essays as a new mother who was used to writing in a highly voiced, interior lyric mode—poems that shuttled quickly between observation and sensation. As my assumptions about literature—and life—were challenged, I wanted a broader canvas that would give me more room for reflection and digression, a possibly more public form with a greater space in which to meditate, deliberate, or debate.

As a poet who wasn’t used to writing narrative, I had to learn a good deal about the importance of scene, characterization and dialogue (not to mention the basic challenges of moving a story forward in a more linear way!). And since nonfiction’s an informative genre, there’s the added challenge of marshalling facts within a dramatic arc. These days, I’m very interested in the borderlands where the forms intersect—prose poems and lyric essays—and in linking the discursive and lyric impulses.

DD: *What is your writing and revision process like? Does it differ depending on what genre you are working in?*

JS: I try to follow Frank O’Hara’s advice to “go on your nerve” when I’m generating new work and to keep the critic under wraps as long as possible. With poetry,



I'm often lucky enough to quickly generate a title and first line that will set a poem's music. Then the rest of the poem will follow through several versions and I'll have a trusted reader—my husband, who's also a poet—point out where things are going well or where they've gone wrong. Nonfiction involves a longer revision process—more large-scale cuts and additions, but equally painstaking attention must be paid on a line-by-line basis.

DD: *And finally, what advice do you have for aspiring poets?*

JS: I'm not the first person to say don't quit your day job and don't become a poet unless you can't imagine a life without writing. Otherwise, it's easy to become disillusioned when things don't immediately break your way. Reading widely and deeply across genres and eras is essential. So is cultivating patience and a love of solitude. Get to know other writers, past and present. The road is a little less lonely (and a lot more fulfilling) when you find companionship through community. Join a writing group, take part in a reading series or a conference, foster literacy and the love of book culture. Care deeply about places, people, and issues; find ways to honor these in person and in print.



Jane

Satterfield's most recent book is *Her Familiars* (Elixir, 2013). She is the author of two previous poetry collections: *Assignment at Vanishing Point* and *Shepherdess with an Automatic*, as well as *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond*. Her honors include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in poetry and three Maryland Arts Council Individual Artists Awards, the William Faulkner Society's Gold Medal for the Essay, the *Florida Review* Editors' Prize in nonfiction, the *Msllexia* women's poetry prize, and the 49th Parallel Poetry Prize from *The Bellingham Review* as well as residencies in poetry or nonfiction from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Satterfield is literary editor for Canada's *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* and currently lives in Baltimore.

The poet is the priest of the invisible.
 -Wallace Stevens



Two POEMS

by Jane Satterfield

RADIO CLASH

You'd have to travel back in time to find
the sound booth where we spun vinyl, blasting
tunes through dorms and dining halls, wave

lengths of mild rebellion that never filtered
out beyond the campus polished gates to reach
the urban streets. You'd have to hunker down

inside those hacked, graffitied walls to read playlists
logged in hardback composition books by DJs
swamped with student debt, suited up in army

surplus gear. And was I what I played? Bleached
bangs and teased-out hair, up sometimes as late
as dawn hammering out prose so minimalist

nothing was left in. I was late to poetry, philosophy
of art, late *to the market to realize my soul*, no time to
stick around and smoke through Hard Rock Power

Hour with the Disco Redux guys. What couldn't
punk do if not make things burn a little brighter,
beat back the images burned on our brainpans:

strafe of jets against the sky, foliate walls of flame,
families bunkered down, and radioactive water
waste drifting downstream...Out of luck and out

of love, *brew for breakfast*, tying up the tattered
laces of granny boots, of combat boots, a lick
drugstore clear nail polish to keep the ends

from unraveling. Never the same river twice
when you're stepping through time and its
spinning door where *London Calling* spools through

through Whole Foods' tinny sound system
years beyond that windowed sound booth
with its wall of outmoded knobs and dials

and switches where you watched the needle
drop and let the record spin and spin as the center
blurred to black. And here they come—idling

through the aisles where other mothers pause
and hum, husband with coupons and packets
daughter with neon ear buds dangling—and those

power chords striking again and again, a sound
like sun burning through fog, like the sheer belief
anyone might blossom beyond some epic fail.

Forthcoming in *Clash by Night: A London Calling
Anthology* (City Lit, 2015) edited by Gerry LaFemina
and Gregg Wilhelm.



HER FAMILIARS

Hopkins was particularly fond of getting people to confess to having signed a pact with the devil, but charges also included bewitching people or livestock to death, causing illness and lameness, and entertaining spirits or familiars, which usually turned out to be household pets.

—Nigel Cawthorne,
Witch Hunt: History of a Persecution

Just past her birthday (thirteenth)
my daughter's engrossed
in the antics of the Pretty Committee
who, swish bags in tow,
shop for *amazing* LBDs.
So while I'm lamenting
the mere fact it exists—

this primer for learning
popularity skills & the proper
product lines—why not take a tip
from today's radio guest
who assures me the “mommy makeover”
is a blessing for women
not yet past their prime? —

that a little time under the knife
perks up the buttocks & pulls in
a gut, erases the damage
done by all that devotion
to your little dears. Just the ticket

to recharge my spirit & sex life.
Ever notice how age or oddness
offends? Same with widowhood or
willingness to buck the trends. Just look at
the woodcut, frontispiece to
The Discovery of Witches,
London, circa 1647, where one-legged
Elizabeth Clarke, whose
mother (maybe witchy
with words or wise with a cure?),
a heretic, hung before her. After three days
without food or sleep, Clarke finally confessed

the names of her five familiars: *Holt*,
Newes, *Sack-and-Sugar*, *Jamara*,
& *Vinegar Tom*—cats, rabbit,
spaniel & greyhound. Take
Faith Mills of Fressingham
whose three pet birds
wrought havoc by breaking
a cart & inducing (by magic!)
a cow to jump over a sty.
An affection for animals, it seems,
in the eyes of the powerful,
was as good as witchcraft,
a grievous (*read*: hanging) crime. Thank God

the girls in the Pretty Committee
all find the right dress &
strappy stilettos; thank God
they twitter & text to stay
in step with the times. The pressures
of fashion are many; the plot,

as my daughter says, will improve: soon
one of the gang will be on the outs.
From gossip, innuendo, & grievance
anyone can construct a water-tight case.
How came you to be acquainted?
was the favored question
of Hopkins, the self-appointed
Witch-Finder General, bearer of
needles & bodkins, Puritan
cloak & cape, the best accessories
of his time. The feeble, the poor, &
otherwise unpopular didn't
stand a chance. From fees
charged to the estates of the accused
he made a not unpretty profit.

First appeared in *Her Familiars* (Elixir, 2013).



IMMIGRANT DREAMS AND ALIEN NIGHTMARES



by José Torres-Tama

AUTHOR'S NOTE: These two poems are from my new collection of 25 years of verse called **Immigrant Dreams & Alien Nightmares**, and they are composed as *docu-poems* which begin with historical epigraphs that offer the points of departure for the poems. The first poem *Hybrids of color and follicles of illegal love / híbridos de color y cabellos de amor ilegal* is a bilingual poem from the section called *Los Criollos / The Creoles* in the poetry book. It's a meditation on the racial mixing that took place in Colonial New Orleans, where the hybrid race of free people of color was forged from illegal but tolerated liaisons between the French, Spanish, and African races of that Slave era. The second piece is the final poem from the section called *Alien Nightmares*. The poem, *Metafiction 2014: Between Barack & the GOP Hard Place on Immigration Reform*, explores the current immigration crisis.
—José Torres-Tama

José Torres-Tama, Ecuadorian-born New Orleans performance poet, is an NEA award recipient for his interdisciplinary performances and a Louisiana Theater Fellow. As a writer/poet, performance provocateur, and visual artist, he explores the underbelly of the American Dream mythology, the Latino immigrant experience, New Orleans Creole culture, and the effects of media on race relations. Since 1995, he has toured his genre-bending solos nationally and internationally. Internationally, he has performed at Roehampton University and Live Art Development in London; the Bluecoat Arts Centre in Liverpool; the Centre for Performance Research in Aberystwyth, Wales; the Castle of the Imagination Performance Festival in Poland, the International Performance Festival in Maribor, Slovenia; and the Performance Festival at X-Teresa Arte Alternativo in Mexico City. Nationally, his work has been presented at Performance Space 122, Theater for the New City, and the famed Nuyorican Poets Café, all in New York City; Highways Performance Space in Los Angeles; The National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque; Diverse Works in Houston; and the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans. In the academy, Duke, Cornell, Vanderbilt, Tulane, LSU, University of Ohio, University of Michigan, and others have presented his provocative performances and lectures on art as a tool for social change. In 2013, he received a National

*Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Award to develop the Aliens Taco Truck Theater Project to transform a used food vehicle into a mobile stage to reach non-traditional theater audiences and immigrant communities. In 2009, the NPN awarded him his first **Creation Fund for Aliens, Immigrants and Other Evildoers**, a critically acclaimed sci-fi Latino noir performance that chronicles current persecution of Latino immigrants. In the visual arts, the Joan Mitchell Foundation in New York awarded a grant for the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans to publish his art book titled *New Orleans Free People of Color & Their Legacy*. Published by the Ogden in 2009, the book documents Torres-Tama's expressionistic pastel portraits on paper that identify an 18th and 19th century Creole intelligentsia born into freedom during the Slave era and who were mixed with French, Spanish, and African races of colonial New Orleans. In September 2014, Diálogos Books of New Orleans published **Immigrant Dreams & Alien Nightmares**, a collection of twenty-five years of performance poems & other verse. The University of Lafayette Press is working with him for publication of **Hard Living in the Big Easy: Latinos & the Reconstruction of New Orleans**. As an educator, he teaches visual arts through the Ogden Museum in New Orleans. He contributed commentaries to NPR's *Latino USA*, exploring the many challenges of the epic recovery and difficulties immigrant workers have faced in helping to rebuild New Orleans. His most recent writings have been published by the PBS Blog in conjunction with the *Latino Americans* documentary which aired nationally in 2013, the **Theater Communication Group Blog**, and **Howlround Theatre Journal**. His poetry has been published in *Andrei Codrescu's Exquisite Corpse – A Journal of Letters and Life*; *the Double Dealer*, *Black Magnolias* and two anthologies of *New Orleans Poets, Words of Fire* by Think Tank Press, and *From A Bend in The River*, edited by Kalamu ya Salaam.*



1785: New Orleans under Spanish rule. Esteban Rodriguez Miro becomes governor, a post he'll hold for 7 years. During his inaugural speech, he tells the free women of color that they need to keep their station as Negroes. He makes it mandatory for all black women to wear kerchiefs and plain head wraps. He forbids them to wear feathers, silk, precious jewelry, or curl their hair. The new restrictions will be known informally as the Tignon (or turban) Law.

Hybrids of color and follicles of illegal love / híbridos de color y cabellos de amor ilegal

Free women of color
and their hybrid hair of ebony and elastic curls,
nests of some obscure carnal territory,
cabellos oscuros y elásticos como
la noche abandonada,
holding secrets to Africa,
una puerta al congo de lujuria,
door to a Congo of lust.

Hair that spawned such a fetish
in the lecherous imagination
of Spanish and French decent Europeans
that laws were enacted to
contain these tempting follicles
under wrap for fear they unleashed
in civilized men *una pasión desesperada*
por todo lo que se llamaba inferior,
indígena, esta raza de color café y sus mujeres,
a bestial hunger, yes, *por supuesto,*
a bestial hunger that their otherwise
adequate white women could not pacify.

Laws enacted against hair that bound spells,
cabellos de un amor sin fronteras,
hairs that crossed forbidden borders,
and the *tiant* was turned a cloth to conceal
dark Medusa hair of regal *criollas*.
Creoles skilled in improvisation as people of color
must under Christian decrees,
pero esta resolución creo más ganas
por mulatas esculorando el aire propio
con cabellos aguantados.

But their wrapped protrusions of bounded hair
sculpted an even more appealing fashion,
a new race of moon amazons,
Nubian Valkyries of coveted crossbred stature,
making them taller envied goddesses
by their fair and dull counterparts,
whose own men, yes, whose own men owned heads
filled with riper fantasies of unveiling rituals
in night hours of mistresses within the Marigny Triangle,
the Faubourg Tremé, and the back of the Vieux Carré.

Indigo pleasures outside any law,
placated concubine sex with property and liberty
exchanged like long history kisses
of an unending *tignon* above the head towards a future,
an umbilical cord into the present,
y el nacimiento de esta raza híbrida se cosechó,
and more births were sealed in the locks
and unlocking of free women of color.



Portrait of the author.



Their hybrid hair of ebony and elastic curls,
 nests of some obscure carnal territory,
cabellos oscuros y elásticos
como la noche abandonada,
 holding secrets to Africa,
una puerta al Congo de lujuria.
Les gens de couleur libres, une autre raison d'être,
otra gente nacida de piel y pelea el en nuevo mundo,
 born of pigment and perpetration in this New World.

While the Latino anti-immigrant hysteria was exacerbated by the blind nationalism pushed by the Bush regime in the wake of 9/11, the record number of two million plus deportations under President Barack Obama is brutally shocking. He has become the Deporter-in-Chief.

No one could have imagined the son of an African immigrant, who rose to the highest office with support of a Latino electorate twice, and promised Immigration Reform in his first term, would have had the audacity to deport more undocumented immigrants than any president before him. It will be Obama's shameful legacy and remembered as an epic betrayal to the millions of Latinos who voted for him.

***Metafiction 2014:
 Between Barack & the GOP Hard Place on Immigration Reform***

1. The One / *El Uno*

Held my nose when I pressed Obama
 for a second term, first time voting
 because I was a legal alien in 2008
 when candidate Barack was the Hawaiian-born son
 of an African immigrant birthed in 1961—my birth year.
 Obama was the word.
Yes, We Can! the mantra
 to lead the *Bushwacked* country to a precipice
 out of cavities of war and depression,
 a multiracial *Uno* from *The Matrix*
 who articulated truths our ears yearned.
 His improbable story enamored our hearts,
 a Kansas mother and African dream of fathers
 from the continent of origins,
 some deep knowledge in his genes
 because he channeled a *Griot* on the campaign trail.
!Sí Se Puede!
 César Chavez and Dolores Huerta cried
 at many strikes on behalf of migrant farm workers
 and their dignity for humane wages,
 and for refusing to pick toxic grapes,
 and Obama drove the English version
 into bumper sticker chants for many who believed.
 Our eyes seduced by movie handsome
 dark knight from Harvard Law,
 graduated *magna cum laude* from famed bastion
 of exclusive academic power in the freedom land.
Can I get a witness?



2. Broken Promises

Abundantly, we gulped the Kool-Aid of promises
and change because we were parched
at future crossroads for the nation's soul,
believed you, Obama, a new millennium FDR
for our peeps and planet over,
epitome of post-Civil Rights nirvana
because white America *judged you by the content
of your character*—not unjust burden upon colored skin.
You became a canvas incarnate for our greatest HOPE,
but no one guessed you'd win the Nobel Peace Prize
in October to escalate war two months later in December,
that *Guantánamo* stays open with prisoners shutting mouths
in hunger strikes for a world to witness
the beacon of democracy incarcerates with impunity
for an unknown eternity,
that you drive secret drone wars from your Captain's chair,
killing us softly with your words
and other innocents in collateral of clandestine strikes.
Broken, I called friends across the country,
could not believe *Yes, We Can!* man
a re-run of other Presidents for the killing fields,
when you argued more freedom bombs in Afghanistan
to liberate people your soldiers' guns turned cadavers
in the sinkhole of Western empires.
Can I get a witness?

3. Deporter-in-Chief

Obama can you hear me?
I read *Dreams from My Father*,
connected your search with the invisible biological man
who was less than a father and more of a ghost in my life,
applauded your *Audacity of Hope*,
but your relentless Immigration Agents are deporting
my immigrant brothers and sisters by hundred thousands.
According to some reports, there are bonuses
for growing numbers sent back,
like a weekly *catch an immigrant by the toe*
incentives for pay raises and vacations,
with two million on your records expelled
when you promised us reform your first term.
In New Orleans, ICE attacks break up Bible groups
with agents in scary gear and guns ablaze,
pumping terror in families at their homes,
handcuffing mothers before children
while declaring, *There is no GOD here!*
with bullet-proof vests at the dinner hour.
A father drops off a daughter at grammar school,
and is swept up in Immigration Raids
buying groceries in Metairie,
hauled off to prison in Basille, Louisiana
where guard dogs eat better than detainees.
You've starved millions of Latinos who voted you
President that any crumbs you throw
has some singing *¡Ave Maria!*, but have the courage
to sign the Dreamers into law.
Channel the *cojones* of your promises,



not the mendacity of a deportation apparatus
locking mothers and fathers in squalid jails,
leaving U.S.-born children to the states,
deporting workers who might even landscape White House lawns.
Look in the mirror, remember origins of a people
who have known abominable passage,
torn from their mother's wombs
because you have become less than a freedom dream,
migrating to the dark side as dubious *Deporter-in-Chief*.
Can I get a witness?

4. Between Barack & the GOP Hard Place

November 2012 with privilege to vote
in elections after being naturalized in 2009,
I found myself between Barack and the GOP hard place,
a Latino Hamlet of indecision at the polls
because *the One* had not changed much at all,
more like half white and half black Republican Lite
because seven GOP Governors in Arizona,
Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Oklahoma,
South Carolina, and Utah signed anti-immigrant Juan Crow laws
between 2007 and 2011,
while Obama's Secured Communities program
became wide sweeps of deportation on steroids.
Refraining was de facto voting
for ridiculous *Self-Deport* millionaire Romney,
empty vessel of Republican privilege in Mormon wear,
and you needed every single vote for a second term.
Obama, can you hear me from far away White House
where Dreamers run hunger strikes
for months at your iron gates?
Yours will be remembered an epic betrayal
of a people who had audacity to believe
your skin knew our common pain.
When double-tongue dinosaurs from decaying
political patriarchy betray us to court our votes,
we know their scorpion history,
but you claimed your extended family
exemplifies hybrid mosaics of changing demographics.
Well, we gave you votes you turned to daggers
because our relatives are bleeding on buses going back,
and sons and daughters left behind
are traumatized homeless on our streets.
Obama, channel the courage to be a son of light,
of America *El Norte* in transition,
have the nerve to be your father's dream—
not another nightmare for mothers and fathers
who are forced to migrate because
the empire strikes back by decimating
economies below the border.
Can I get a witness?

Because there is
NO GUACAMOLE for immigrant haters,
and, Obama, I can't even let you go near the chips! 🌿



WRITERS ON WRITING



Photograph by Joséphine Sacabo

*No it is not easy to write. It is as hard as breaking rocks.
Sparks and splinters fly like shattered steel.*
-Clarice Lispector



ON WRITING AND JAMMING



by George Bishop, Jr.

PLAYED DRUMS FOR YEARS, through high school and college and beyond, mainly in rock bands but also with jazz ensembles. One thing I enjoyed most were jam sessions: A group of musicians and I would start in on a beat, a riff, or a chord progression, and with no idea of where it would lead or how long it would last, we'd play. At its worst, this kind of improvisation could wander off into aimless noodling. At its best, it could flower into lush musical landscapes, with all the players inspiring one another to greater and greater heights of creativity. When done well, jamming is exhilarating, surprising, fun, even profound—all the things, in fact, that we want from good fiction.

In this sense, then, writing fiction is like jamming. We start with the germ of an idea (a phrase, a mood, an image), and with sometimes only a vague notion of where we're going, we launch into our story. If we're feeling hot, we might try out new licks; we'll test the limits of our ability, and maybe show off a little. We can practice this kind of improvisation not only at the level of the story, but also with sections, paragraphs, or sentences. In any case, we're not just playing cover tunes; we're not just copying out what someone else has written. We're relying on our own wit and talent to create something original, something that, hopefully, no one has ever done before.

For it to work well, though, improvisation, whether in music or in writing, has a few basic requirements. These are good technique; a knowledge of forms and conventions; a sense of the dramatic; and, that most mysterious element of all, originality.

1. Technique. Amateurs might think of jamming as an effortless way to make music, one that doesn't require much skill. You just pick up an instrument, let the spirit move you, and flail away. That's the beauty of jamming, according to this line of thought: anyone can do it. Beginning writers might also imagine that "anyone can do it." After all, everyone knows how to scratch words on paper and put sentences together. How hard can it be to write a story? Better still if you don't let yourself be troubled by all the fussy grammar rules your high school English teacher tried to stuff into your head. Write what you feel. Be free. Pick up

a pen and flail away.

But good writing requires good technique. The greater a writer's command of the language, the greater her potential range of expression. A piece of fiction that uses only a limited vocabulary and short, simple sentences strikes us as juvenile. We expect, from competent writing, an interesting variety of sentence structures and paragraph patterns, we want different characters to speak in different voices, and we like shifts in density and pacing. In music, we wouldn't stand to listen to a saxophonist who could barely play a scale, or who only played the same lick over and over again. The same holds true in literature. The jam is only as good as the skill of the jammers.

2. A knowledge of standard forms and conventions.

Successful musical improvisation requires a shared musical language. When you're jamming with your friends on a twelve-bar blues, for instance, you have to know what that structure is and where the changes come. Similarly, a musician soloing for an audience communicates with her listeners via some common knowledge of musical forms. The delight for the listeners comes in hearing how the musician toys with the forms, how she meets or confounds their expectations. Even avant garde jazz and "noise" music derive their power from flaunting conventions, all the while being grounded in an understanding of those conventions.

If fiction writing depends on a writer's ability to improvise, then it also requires a solid understanding of literature's conventions. Take, for example, genre fiction. A Southern Gothic Romance is expected to contain certain moods, characters, and settings, and it's pleasing to a reader, to a greater or lesser degree, in how well it satisfies those expectations. But even non-genre fiction functions by setting up and then fulfilling or upending our expectations. It should go without saying that in order to do this, the writer has to be well read; she has to know her canon.

3. A sense of the dramatic. With regards to musical improvisation, another word for drama might be



“dynamics.” The best jams keep things interesting by varying tone, mood, speed, volume. As an extension of this, the best musicians also manage, even as they’re playing, to keep in mind the overall shape of their improvisation—their dramatic arc, we might say. In storytelling we need drama, too, of course, which implies attention to the overall shape and flow of our story. Drama in this sense doesn’t just mean “action” or “passion.” A Dan Brown novel might have lots of action but still lack drama—that is, the dynamic changes that makes a piece of writing genuinely exciting, both on an emotional and intellectual level. But dynamic variety doesn’t necessarily guarantee drama, either. In literature as in music, we’re put off by cheap effects—shock or quirkiness that’s used to hold our interest. We enjoy novelty, but not when it’s only for the sake of novelty. This leads to us to the last feature of good improv, the one that’s also the most difficult to pin down, and that is—

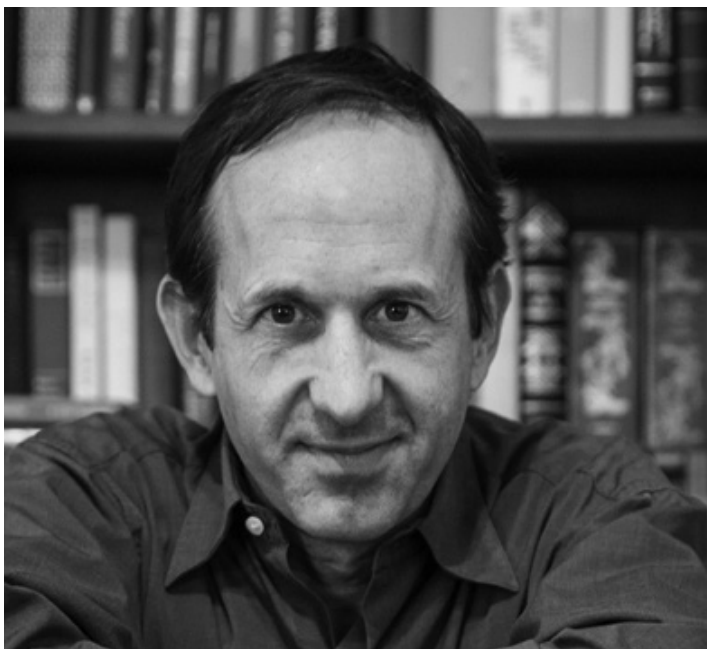
4. Originality. Think of the screaming guitar solo you’ve heard a million times, the one that ends on a four-note loop in the high register. Most casual listeners, I would argue, tend to stop really hearing much during that solo. True, it might give some satisfaction in so far as we recognize it as the kind of solo that we expect to hear at a certain point in a certain kind of song: “Ah! Here’s the screaming guitar solo now.” But the sound, we’re aware, is derivative, a cliché.

In writing, clichés are the great enemies of originality. They’re sneaky devils, too. There are not only clichés of language (“Her eyes sparkled like diamonds”), but also clichés of action, thoughts, attitudes, conclusions. There can be clichés of style—when a novice writer imitates a famous author’s style so that we get yet another “Faulkneresque” novel, for example. Still more problematic for the serious writer is the risk of self-repetition: you finally find your own style—you get your groove going—and it works so well that you use it again and again until you eventually become your own cliché.

Originality does have a chance to flourish, nevertheless, when those first three elements are in place. If you have the chops (from years and years of tedious practice); if you have a working knowledge of the standard forms and conventions of your art (from hours and hours of solitary reading); and if you have some instinct for drama, or at least a recognition of its importance (this from either a very boring or a very eventful life)—if you have all that, and you stew it together with enough curiosity, daring, grief, and joy, you just might, stumble upon something brilliant, a line or a phrase or a passage that exceeds all your expectations.

And when that happens, you can put down your

pen, your horn, or your drumsticks, sit back, and say to yourself, “Damn, that was good. I wonder where that came from.”



*George Bishop, Jr., holds a BA from Loyola University in New Orleans, an MFA from the University of North Carolina in Wilmington, and an MA from the School for International Training in Vermont. He has lived and taught in Slovakia, Turkey, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, India, and Japan. His first novel, **Letter to My Daughter**, was published by Ballantine Books in 2010; his second, **The Night of the Comet**, came out in 2013, also with Ballantine. In a past life he starred as Murphy Gilcrease, the teenage vampire, in the 1988 New World Pictures release **Teen Vamp**. **The Night of the Comet** has received widespread praise since its release, with glowing reviews in **People**, **The New York Post**, **Kirkus Reviews**, **Shelf Awareness**, and **Publishers Weekly**, among others. It was a featured selection in the Reuters Book Talk column, and was chosen as the September book of the month for National Public Radio’s **The Radio Reader**. **Kirkus Reviews** named it one of the “Best Books of 2013.”*



AN INTERVIEW WITH MOIRA CRONE



by Jade Hurter

Moira Crone's most recent novel, **The Ice Garden**, is a haunting tale of a young girl, her baby sister, and their mentally ill mother trying to maintain a sense of normalcy in 1960s North Carolina. Claire is only eleven years old, and yet she finds herself responsible for caring for her baby sister, Sweetie, after her mother gives birth and turns against the child. Diana, their mother, is a passionate musician, but she suffers from mental illness, and struggles to get through every day in a world where her only value is as a beautiful wife and mother. Her husband sends Diana away to a psychiatric ward, where she is treated with electroshock therapy, but when she returns, things do not get better. Claire is dependent upon the help of the family's maid, Sidney, to keep Sweetie protected, but Sidney has her own life to take care of. In this tragic story of a family trapped in a cycle of illness and denial, Crone creates vividly real and sympathetic characters. We root for Claire throughout the book, even as her situation becomes unsalvageable. And, this is a book that meets headlong the oppression faced by women and African Americans in the 1960's South. Crone does not shy away from difficult subjects, and we as readers are lucky for her tenacity. Crone's other books include **The Not Yet**, a novel about a dystopian future in New Orleans, **A Period of Confinement**, and the short story collections **Dream State** and **What Gets Into Us**. **The Double Dealer** was fortunate enough to speak with Moira recently.

Double Dealer: Your most recent book, 2014's *The Ice Garden*, is written from the perspective of a child whose parents cannot care for her. What was important to you in embodying the perspective of a child?

Moira Crone: I have been interested in the child's point of view all my life. I have written in first person many times, and feel comfortable using it. In both **The Not Yet** and in **The Ice Garden**, I write about orphans---children who have, either literally or metaphorically, lost their parents. What is most important to me in embodying the perspective of a child, is finding that place within all of us which still sees the world through a clear, and un-compromised perspective. As humans, we are utterly dependent upon parents and caregivers for a very long time--- that is what it means to be part of our species. Elephants are born and get up and walk around within hours; so do many other animals. Although most of us say, in recollection, that childhood was free and idyllic, it is also true that even in the most protected situations, we were faced with great vulnerability, with dependency, with a prolonged lack of agency. We come in as endangered creatures. We carry that. Though we may deny we were vulnerable when we were young, we are often very drawn to stories in which children are at risk. Because that is the truth of our beginnings, no matter how careful our caregivers were.

DD: Your novels are set in the South: *The Ice Garden* in North Carolina, where you grew up, and *The Not Yet* in New Orleans, where you live. How does the South infuse your creative process, and what makes this setting so important for your work?

MC: Well, I have always lived in the South except for when I was in college in New England, and summers I spent in Brooklyn, New York, with my grandmother and aunt. I was very much shaped by my upbringing in a small town in Eastern N.C., though--because I had been to New York, and had childhood friends there as well, and my mother was from there, I saw things somewhat "slant;" that is, I felt a little apart from the world of eastern N. C. I always knew I was "going somewhere else." I resolved this dissonance by becoming a writer, I guess. One reason I like New Orleans is that it has features of "Southern Life," and the urbanity of it reminds me of New York, and Brooklyn.

The best Southern writers have been willing to address injustice, especially racial injustice, and they have openly explored many kinds of family dysfunction and cruelty, social exploitation, and other truths. The social norms that surrounded the practice of slavery shaped all aspects of Southern culture. The traces of this history still exist everywhere. The everydayness of sadistic practices during slavery times, such as beatings, degradation, exploitation, and the vast self-involvement, delusion, denial, and aggrandizement of the upper classes who engaged in these practices, have left their imprint upon Southern



life. The presence of this past is evident everywhere in Faulkner. Exploitation has universally been one of the truths of all American life, North American and South American—other groups being the victims in other regions, of course, such as indigenous peoples and Mexicans and Chinese immigrants, and others---but it is something that Southern writers have been willing to address more or less head on. They have made the case for a century. They have been frank. Perhaps this is because editors in New York were happy to have these subjects portrayed as long as the events took place “down there,” in the “remote and un-civilized”---from their point of view--- part of the country, the South. I think it is interesting that many of the prominent novels that address horrible abuse inside the family unit, such as **Bastard Out of Carolina**, and **Prince of Tides**, have come from Southern writers in my generation, like Dorothy Allison and Pat Conroy. Cormac McCarthy and Flannery O’Connor have made cruelty, hypocrisy, and violence their subjects, too. Southern writers get down to it. For this they are possibly, and ironically, not regional at all, but the most universal of American writers.

DD: The Ice Garden is not only set in the South, but set in the South of the 60’s. What about this time period, when of course women had little real liberty and segregation was law, drew you to it for this story in particular?

MC: It was the time when I grew up. All the rules I understood about people’s places in the world were overturned rather abruptly between the time I was twelve and the time I was seventeen. The “rules,” the “givens” in 1964, in Goldsboro, NC, were : 1. African American women and men existed to serve whites, and could only have a few occupations. They did not have much agency, they were dependent upon their white employers, etc. They did not own property, for the most part, and were not to be seen as reliable as business people, etc. They were not to be considered as equal to whites in any way. This “truth” of their inferiority was supposed to explain why they are treated as second class citizens. 2. Girls were expected to marry and have children, and have that as their goal in life. If they went to college, they were looking for a husband. Their physical beauty was a huge part of their value or worth in society, more important than any other attribute. An “old maid,”—a woman who had not married by age 27--- was to be pitied. It was a man’s world. If a woman had a lot to say about herself, she better “put her horn under her chair,” because she might make men around her feel inferior, a terrible sin. Women who enjoyed sexual relations with a variety of men were sluts, bad girls. Men who did the same were normal, healthy, good old boys---in fact, sexual adventures for boys were encouraged. Women who had “men’s jobs,” such as politician, engineer, scientist, lawyer, were an aberration and ostracized.

In 1969, the rules changed for the better, and became: 1. African Americans are our equals, and have a right to protest their circumstances, to gain the same educational advantages as whites, vote, have political power, etc. They have become our moral leaders, we respect them for their vision, integrity, personal sacrifice. There should be no barrier to voting rights, housing rights, etc., for African Americans. Their rage at previous mistreatment is justified. All occupations and professions should be available to them. They are qualified to be business people, own property, have agency in all aspects of life without dependency on whites. 2. Women should be able to pursue all forms of employment that men pursue, including professions such as minister, doctor, lawyer, politician. Women should become athletes if they want. Women who have a variety of sexual partners are expressing their sexual liberation, a good thing, not a bad thing. In a short time, it was as if everything reversed field. Sometimes I feel as if I can still see the world from either perspective. Such lingering, pre-civil rights attitudes of course still color society today but even conservatives know we can’t go back to the conditions and assumptions prevalent in 1963 or so.

DD: How would you say that place and time work to move your stories toward their final crises?

MC: In the case of the **Ice Garden**, the self-determination of the main African American figures in the novel have a way of forcing the family, and Claire, to come to some new conclusion. The family cannot depend entirely upon the African American woman, Sidney, to carry the load of the caregiving. The old Southern idea that a wealthy, attractive white woman can just sit around while the world evolves around her---i.e., in the line, “Your daddy is rich and your mama is good looking”---and leave all other issues to the “help,” as long as she keeps her husband interested---this paradigm you see in so many Southern stories such as those by Tennessee Williams, and others---is breaking down in my novel. The “help” has other plans. Also, in many of the stories in **What Gets Into Us**, the self-determination of African American characters who would not have had freedom at other, earlier times, is part of the story.

DD: In an interview, you once described the setting of a speculative fiction novel as its own character. How is the process of drawing up this “character” different from the process of creating a more realistic setting?

MC: When I wrote **The Not Yet**, I created a “world” based upon a series of premises which I made up, such as: *In 2121, New Orleans will be underwater because of sea level rise.* So then I had to figure out how it would look, what would follow from that basic premise, what was logical. For example, how



would houses be constructed? How would people travel around? I did research by looking at ancient cities such as Prague and Venice where flooding over centuries and water level changes have created the built environment. Or, another premise: *People have a technology to live hundreds of years, based upon research in the late 20th century.* Here, I used current or last decades' rejuvenation techniques like plastic surgery and some that have only been theorized about, such as the use of specific viruses to work in cells and change their way of metabolizing energy so that the cells do not age as quickly. Also, I used the science that says starvation is a good way to increase longevity. I used the current research on artificially cultivating human skin to use for burn victims---In this case, I asked, what if artificially grown skin were used to give humans whole new epidermises so they can look the way they want? In conventional realism, what I do, or any writer does, is go straight to observed reality or memory, and work with the vocabulary and images that arise. This is easier and harder, but the descriptions have to be more compelling and unique. Because people have seen what you are talking about, you must choose the unexpected thing. In the speculative case, the things being described don't exist, or are extrapolations of things that do exist, but are exaggerations.

DD: In *The Not Yet*, you write of a post-apocalyptic New Orleans. I read that you started writing this story before Katrina. What is it about New Orleans, even outside the context of the storm, that makes it such an apt setting for a dystopian novel?

MC: At the time I started writing the novel, in about 1999, I was struck by the fact I read in the paper, that New York City and Louisiana both had a similar statistical gap between rich and poor, both extreme in the U.S. at the time. Since Louisiana has a plantation history, it seemed to follow that the gap between rich and poor would still resemble that old, severe, class division. Louisiana was known to be backward in this respect. But New York? Backward? Two societies with such different histories and trajectories had reached the same place? This seemed alarming. Now this trend is discussed everywhere. New Orleans lends itself to a dystopian vision because it is a place of extremes of dark and light, and always has been. At the time, I thought the whole nation could slip back into the great gaps that existed in the 1800's in this place, New Orleans, where there was fabulous wealth and yet, so many were not free. Sort of taking a Dickensian lens and putting it on the future. The past is still present in New Orleans life, so I thought it would be interesting to portray the radical inequality of the past, in the context of the future. To sound a warning, so to speak. We could become again what we once were.

DD: How did the meaning of *The Not Yet* change for

you after the storm?

MC: I was on a year long grant from the State of Louisiana Board of Regents to finish **The Not Yet** in the year 2005-6. I had written about two hundred pages at the time. So I was on assignment to complete my novel set in a flooded New Orleans, at the time the storm happened. Of course this was a strange and inexplicable circumstance. After the storm, I realized that the novel would be read through the lens of what New Orleans had endured environmentally and also readers would seek some commentary on the huge social divide between black and white, rich and poor that the storm revealed to the world. I had to think more about all this---that the book would be seen as political. I decided I had to come up with my own "defense," of New Orleans, because no one would read a novel where there were scenes of people driving boats down the Napoleon Canal (formerly Napoleon Avenue)--scenes I had written before the storm--in the same way again. In a sense when I had started, I didn't want people to read the story as specific to New Orleans only. I had never wanted them to, but after the storm I wanted to make sure that people didn't see it as a representation of how "only New Orleans is"--as if to say, everywhere else, things are equitable and environmentally safe, but New Orleans is that aberration. In the novel, the whole country has a horrible gap between rich and poor. I made this clearer than I had before. Also, in the novel, New Orleans is a place where social mixing and an appreciation of the fragility of life, and the importance of celebrating it, are emphasized--this is at a time when the rest of the wealthy world is on a strict and harsh regime of life extension. In the novel I emphasize that New Orleans is no longer part of the U.S. territory. It's a marginal place where the rigidity of the class divide is relaxed. One scholar of New Orleans literature said there was an acceptance of life and the role of death in life in the novel that was "New Orleanian." (And possibly, ultimately, African, that is, an example of how the African worldview has influenced New Orleans life.) He said, exactly, "reading this book may make you want to die." He meant that in a good way--there is a sense in the novel that goes against the idea that we should seek to escape the cycle of life artificially, to go against nature, but to accept every part of the journey. That feature of New Orleans life, embodied in the jazz funeral, and many attitudes we are familiar with, certainly entered in the book and morphed its ending somewhat in my mind after the storm. People who live in New Orleans read it one way, but I have had readers in England--it was chosen by the science fiction book club of Central London, for example. I doubt they read it as a novel about New Orleans, or even get the references to the "New Orleanian world view." It has been assigned in many environmental writing courses on both coasts, and in courses on "Neoliberalism." It has been used as a reference for



large scale, speculative architectural projects set in our wetlands--the Coastal Sustainability Studio at LSU used it as a textbook. I think people see a lot of things in it, including reference to Katrina and our region's fragility, but not only. All that said, the storm made me contemplate very seriously what it means to the American reader, and the world reader, to set a story in the very fabled and magical place, "New Orleans." Which has a meaning in almost everyone's imagination, from the minute they hear American music, as in "Way down yonder in New Orleans/in the land of dreamy dreams..." and "There is a house in New Orleans..." These lines conjure certain images, certain strong feelings, both of doom and of wonder. I had to pay attention to the meaning of the place, and how it looks now to the world, in the context of our current environmental and economic crises, and its history. The short answer is, I had to think of New Orleans as a character in the book in a new way, and to make sure I made it a "round character," not just a flat political symbol.

DD: After *The Not Yet*, you returned to writing realistic fiction. What is the biggest difference for you between writing speculative fiction and in writing more realistically?

MC: ***The Ice Garden*** is a novel based on a story I wrote years ago, and in fact includes scenes I wrote when I was in my twenties. It goes back a ways, so it isn't really something I wrote after ***The Not Yet***.

The biggest difference in the two is that in speculative fiction one usually has a critique, if it is dystopian, some exaggeration of how things are now, which provides an argument, or a prophetic critique. In the case of more broadly based speculative fiction, not set in a dangerous future world, but in an entire alternative realm, there is still an element of derivation and parallel development, a sense of exploration by the writer of the consequences of various alternatives, premises. Setting all this up so the reader can comprehend it, and telling a deep and complex story at the same time, is quite a feat, and the best example I can think of for it would be Ursula LeGuin's ***Left Hand of Darkness***, though works of Octavia Butler such as ***Fledgling***, and many other Sci-Fi classics, succeed also.

With a novel that is realistic, you just write the world as you see it and go deeper into character. Things on the societal scale or the sociological scale or the philosophical scale are not going to be brought up in the same way as in dystopian novels. The critique is "slant," not head on. In American realism of the current day, the critique is usually not societal, but on the personal scale. The focus in literary realism is more concentrated, in a sense, essential--- but also more implicit, not explicit.

I think it is interesting that 90% of the films and TV we watch involve stories in which radical

things outside the realm of ordinary life take place--bizarre serial murders, exotic crimes, obsessional persons we might never meet in real life, not even once, gory violence, and characters who are larger than human, who actually come from the realm of myth. I once asked my class in creative writing, who were thrilled to write about grisly murders and such, if they had ever actually had any experience with a criminal case, seen a dead body, even. Very few. I actually believe the reasons we read stories and watch them has a lot more to do with our own interior psyches than with what goes on in our ordinary lives. This makes the job of literary fiction more difficult, because the challenge is to make something compelling and enlightening out of the every day.

DD: Do you think you will ever return to writing speculative fiction?

MC: I have a few ideas and have worked on them over the last two years. They are sort of in the formative stage. I have quite a few surreal stories I have been working on, as well.

I like the form. It's fun and you can run with it. I like the readers, too, because they are younger and they are delighted with imagination. They want to be enchanted. Also, readers of speculative fiction are very responsive. They review every short story that appears in a journal, and they have many ways of discussing and promoting their genre.

DD: Among other writers, your work has been compared in reviews to the work of William Faulkner. Which writers have been most influential for you?

MC: For ***The Ice Garden***, Truman Capote and Carson McCullers, primarily. I am not a huge re-reader of Faulkner. I adore Flannery O'Connor--the way she decided that every short story should explore some severe moral lesson or make a statement about the most serious things, human nature, faith. She took her job as a fiction writer so seriously. This tendency, to get to the profound things, is something I am attracted to in writing. So Flannery O'Connor is a beacon, though as far as style goes, I am not close to her. I love Eudora Welty but my work has not been much influenced by her. When I read Carson McCullers, however, I feel as if she is speaking only to me, asking me to keep up with her somehow, something like that. I once drove through Georgia and went with my daughter to the homes of both O'Connor and McCullers. In O'Connor's house I felt affinity and sorrow for her confinement because of illness, how she had to live with her mother and was crippled. The pain of her everyday life, the struggle, was clear to me. Why her work is hard-edged, and severe about human nature, sometimes harsh and short, was clearer to me. I also liked the fact that she



painted, something I also do sometimes, when I just can't write. But at McCullers's house, a little bungalow built in the twenties in a middle sized town with a military base, Columbus, Georgia, I felt as if I knew the world. I sneaked into the backyard. It was laid out exactly like the backyard of the bungalow I was raised in, which was the house my father was born in, built in the same era, in a small town by a member of the merchant class. My father was an accountant, in a small town very similar to Columbus, Georgia. Also, McCullers has this radical sense of the despised one, the outcast. She has complete empathy for the rejected souls in small town life, in life everywhere. She sees the world from their point of view. Though she and I are not outwardly the same at all, I certainly love her work and feel inspired by it at all times. In the case of my speculative fiction, my beacons were P.D. James (for **Children of Men**), Margaret Atwood (For **Handmaid's Tale**), Ursula Le Guin, and Octavia Butler.

DD: Do you see yourself as a Southern writer? What does it mean for you to be placed within a specifically Southern canon?

MC: Yes, I am a Southern writer. The writers who have nurtured me and helped me and been my friends for the most part, are Southern writers. They see what there is in my work and have given me support in every way. Likewise when I read these writers, I see the same themes and stories I know, among living writers and ones who are no longer with us. People who have been my career supporters would be Alice Adams, Doris Betts, Allan Gurganus, Lee Smith, Edward P. Jones, Valerie Martin, Jim Grimsley, Chris Wiltz, and so on. These are all Southern Writers. With the exception of Valerie and Chris, who are from New Orleans, all are North Carolinians or from Virginia. You fall in with those who understand you. This has been my experience as a writer--so I am a Southern Writer.

DD: I have heard that you are working on a new book. What can we expect from your upcoming work?

MC: I have several projects. It is a complicated time in my life. My mother, at 96, has just died. I am looking at everything over again, and I have many family obligations. I have a number of pages of a story set in the late sixties, during the time when the civil rights movement became more radicalized and young black men, and other young demonstrators, and activists, were vilified and hunted down. These people were teenagers or very young adults. This phase of the Civil Rights movement was practically, looking back, a children's crusade. I am interested in this fact. I also have two speculative novels in embryo form, and a

memoir. I will know where I am going in a few months. I have been invited to be the writer in residence at Woody Creek in Colorado by the Aspen Writers Institute. I will be alone on a mountain for a month. Maybe by the fall I will have some idea.

Maira Crone has published three novels and three books of stories, including **What Gets Into Us**. Her work appears in *Oxford American*, *TriQuarterly*, *Habitus*, and *New Orleans Review*. Winner of the Faulkner Society's gold medals for both Novella and Short Story, her stories have been selected for **New Stories From The South**, five times. In 2009 she received the Robert Penn Warren Award for Fiction from the Southern Fellowship of Writers for her body of work. Maira Crone is a fable maker with a musical ear, a plentitude of nerve, and an epic heart for her beleaguered, if often witty, characters. Her previous novel, **The Not Yet**, was published in 2012 by Lavender Ink. Her new novel, **The Ice Garden**, is a Fall, 2014, release from Carolina Wren Press.





CAPTURING AN AGENT

AND CAPTIVATING AN EDITOR

Double Dealer Interview with Literary agent Jeff Kleinman

Literary agent Jeff Kleinman, a partner in Folio Literary Management, has been a member of the faculty and critiquing agent for the Faulkner Society's annual festival, Words & Music, a Literary Feast in New Orleans, for many years. He is returning in 2014 and will lead the traditional Friday afternoon round table discussion featuring all participating agents and editors, How to Get an Agent and Work With an Editor, which will take place, Friday, November 21, at 3:30 p. m. at the Hotel Monteleone, Queen Anne Ballroom. The following day, he will conduct the Society's annual advice session, Menage a Trois: The Important Relationship Between Author, Agent, and Editor. With Jeff for that discussion will be his client, non-fiction writer Alex Sheshunoff, who was selected for the Society's gold medal for his quirky adventure memoir, which has since been sold by Jeff to acquiring editor Tracy Bernstein.

Double Dealer:

How can a fiction writer looking for an agent capture your attention and capture you as an agent? Use brief excerpts from the winner, runners-up in this year's novel competition as examples of the kind of writing that turns you on.

Kleinman:

Fiction and narrative nonfiction have a great deal in common. When I read, I think about the following issues:

The Premise: is it new, fresh, unusual, surprising? In the contest this year, the synopsis for **Kitchens of the Great Midwest** immediately drew me in with its unique premise: its author describes the novel as "about a definitive Midwestern dinner, with each chapter telling the stories behind the ingredients—and the folks that hunted, grew, gathered, or stole them—as they find their way to a once-in-a-lifetime five-course meal. Similar to Elizabeth Strout's **Olive Kitteridge** in structure, every chapter, including the final dinner itself, is tied together by the rise to infamy of a young chef named Eva Thorvald. The orphaned daughter of a Swedish cook and a sommelier, Eva

becomes the mysterious chef behind the most exclusive pop-up supper club in the world, an object of romantic affection, and an elusive celebrity that one character spends nearly a decade trying to meet." We meet Eva at her birth, a joyous occasion for her father and one that prompts her mother to get an IUD immediately thereafter. Her father plans elaborate meals for his infant daughter, including as a menu item "Olive tapenade (maybe with puréed Cerignola olives? Ask Sherry Dubcek about the best kind of olives for a newborn)." He is crushed to learn Eva will be confined to milk for several months and it will be years before she'll have the teeth to tackle some of his other menu items (like pork shoulder and beef brisket). Not simply about a "definitive Midwestern dinner," **Kitchens** tells a story about the power of food, family and love. The narrative really picks up once Eva begins to understand this power, as we meet her again in her teenage years, growing the hottest peppers in town in secret in her bedroom. Required to bring treats to share with her class on her birthday, Eva decides to reward the classmates who bullied her not with store-bought cupcakes or ice cream, as her mom suggests, but with something special she prepares herself:

After she was sure that her parents were in bed, Eva sat up at the vanity in her room with the box of churro bites and the pint jar of crushed peppers. She remembered Aracely saying that half a teaspoon spread over an entire meal was still too much for eighty percent of full-grown Iowan adults who ordered the chimole dish; it sent them coughing and gasping to the bathroom or downing whole glasses of milk after two bites. Half a teaspoon over maybe two pounds of food. She thought about Chadd Grebeck and Dylan Sternwall and Brant Manus and Bethany Messerschmidt as she carefully injected a full teaspoon of chile powder into the sugary guts of each one-ounce churro bite, again and again. She stopped once to consider if a straight full teaspoon was



excessive; although she had no friends in the class, perhaps not everyone deserved to have the sensations of their taste buds seared off, let alone burning diarrhea. All she knew was that there was no way that Chadd or Brant or any of those assholes should accidentally end up with one that had no chocolate hab in it, so therefore she had to severely doctor them all.

The Voice is probably the single most important aspect of a novel to me. And it's great when a voice surprises me, as happened with **The Invention of Violet**. I am open to all sorts of voices – and was captured by the voice of a young woman working in a fancy vintage couture shop in Hollywood. Here is an excerpt:

I had successfully restored a pair of Salvatore Ferragamo ankle-strap five-inch platform "rainbow" sandals from 1938, the heels of which were made of cork from wine bottles and lined with leather. While I knew that it was a cardinal rule of conservation that pieces in the museum were never to be worn again, I couldn't help but put one foot into the shoe, telling myself that I was testing it to make sure it was sturdy enough, but on some level imagining myself wearing the rainbow sandals. After the head of conservation walked in and caught me red-handed, I was reminded that these items were never meant to be worn again—a basic, elementary rule which, in all my excitement feeling transported to another time and place, I had strayed from. Not only did I break a cardinal rule of conservation, I later learned that these shoes had been created for Judy Garland, and apparently symbolized a radical rejection of fascism.

The rainbow sandals also symbolized my radical expulsion from this rarefied world. It was clear that this would be the end of my work in conservation—at the Costume Institute, and perhaps anywhere.

This passage reflects not just the writer's depth of knowledge of her material, but also her ability to endear her protagonist to the reader. Violet brings an otherwise foreign world to life for me, authoritatively guiding me through the racks of beaded dresses and jewels with evocative detail, making me care whether a designer dress was real or counterfeit, and ultimately cheer for Violet as she finds her own voice in the world. And I'm just one reader. What stood out for me with **The Invention of Violet** was its commercial

appeal, largely a result of a very likeable narrator and a fun, glamorous setting.



Voice plays a critical role in the success of **Sunrise for Asphodel**, whose protagonist could easily come across as a too slick, sophisticated, world-weary urbanite, but is rescued through voice — a thoughtful, reflective tone that reveals great depth and sadness beneath his glossy surface. We first encounter Casey drunk, waiting for the train in a New York subway station on his way to a family wedding. He encounters a former (and brief) fling and offers this description: "She had lost what little weight she had and looked emaciated in a modelesque kind of way, which was fitting for her strand of beauty. I thought of rising and being excited, but Mel was the kind of girl you needed to act apathetic towards if you wanted to get anywhere, and so accustomed was I to regarding her in such a manner that I remained sitting and turned back to my rat." He could be written off as shallow, callous even, but as the story progresses, Casey opens up to the reader more and more, and his voice becomes correspondingly more sincere voice. We see this, for example, throughout his road trip, including in this passage:

The climb out was difficult because any part of the wall you gripped would crumble to dust in your fingers. By the time we got out, we were panting and Max was coated in a thin sheen of cool sweat. We leaned against the car, catching out breath.

"You know," he said between breaths, "until last year, I think I was getting stronger every day of my life. I was getting stronger and fitter and smarter. And then it started to reverse. I knew it would eventually, but it started sooner than I thought." He looked out into the valley, not with sadness but with some faraway regret. The sun cast thin shadows of the bristles on his jaw and chin.

He just about broke my heart. It wasn't that he was proud of falling, but there was something to be said for accepting sea level as a destination. He wasn't bitter at the descent, only bitter that he'd started at some elevation from which to fall from.

That's what had been bothering me, bothering everyone. We had been promised advancement and the ability to grow past whatever terrace our roots had been planted on, but somewhere along the way a cruel trick had been played by the promisors themselves; the railroads had been built, the oil was burned, the silver was mined. There were no more houses to build and even the ones that were



standing couldn't be afforded. It had dawned in our subconscious that it would be a fortunate life to return to the opulence of our childhood. It was cruel to have been so well provided for at birth. We were robbed of misery, robbed of loss, robbed of orphanage.

Characters must be likable. Can you relate to them? I fell in love with the characters in **The Talented Tenth**, the strangely talented Ribkin family, a surname shortened from the title of Rib King bestowed on the protagonist's grandfather when he invented the best BBQ sauce in the Southeast. Other members of this uniquely gifted family include the protagonist, a seventy-two-year-old man who sees buildings as blueprints, able to map them even if he's never been inside; the niece he didn't realize he had, able to catch anything thrown at her; a brother who can see in the dark; a half brother who could scale any wall.

Eloise was standing on the other side of the fence, leaning against a telephone pole that rose up at the edge of the highway while the group of children formed a wide semi-circle around her. A boy was crouched down in front of her, reaching inside a book bag, pulling out two large cans. The boy stood up and Eloise shut her eyes and made an "okay" signal with two fingers of her left hand. Then the boy leaned back and hurled the cans as hard as he could, straight towards Eloise's head.

"No!" Johnny gasped and dropped his shovel. By the time he realized what was happening Eloise was holding the first can in front of her face. Her eyes popped open and she smiled at him as her left hand floated up just in time up to catch the second.

"It's all right, Mister," the boy said. "She caught it, see? She always catches it."

Johnny stared at Eloise.

"We just playing," the boy said.

Johnny turned back towards the house.



"They just playing," Meredith said. They were in the living room, Johnny standing next to the TV while the girl sat slumped on the couch and Meredith glared at him with her hands on her hips.

"They were throwing cans—"

"You think I like it? You think I haven't tried? I can't make her stop."

"That's your job, isn't? You're the girl's mother. You're supposed to make them

stop."

"You're not listening, old man. It's not my fault. And it's not them. It's her."

Johnny looked at Eloise. All he saw was a little girl staring at a TV screen with a can of cut corn in her lap.

"You know how many times I've told her to quit showing off? 'Can catch anything you throw at her, can block any punch'.

They all say it and, from what I've seen, maybe it's true. That doesn't mean I like it and it sure doesn't make it right. But that's the truth of it: the only reason those children keep trying to hit her is because they think they can't."

Meredith shook her head.

"Now you and I both know damn well it's just some fucked up Ribkins thing she inherited from her daddy."

Johnny nodded. Yes, indeed: a Ribkins thing.

How could I not want to know what adventures befall a cast like this?

Forward movement, momentum are vital. Is the manuscript a page-turner? I go back to **Kitchens of the Great Midwest** again on this one. The author had me intrigued from the author's summary accompanying the submission (a good lesson to writers out there – the importance of your summary when querying agents!), and the manuscript lived up to the promise of the premise. I evaluate novels based on narrative urgency, and this one felt urgent – I wanted to keep turning pages and stayed up late to finish it, but at the same time, the pace wasn't overly rushed and the inclusion of actual recipes in each of the chapters created appealing adjustments to the tempo of the story.

Double Dealer:

How can a non-fiction writer looking for an agent capture your attention and capture you as an agent? Use a brief excerpt from your client Alex Sheshunoff's work as an example of the kind of writing that turns you on.

Kleinman:

Not surprisingly, the same criteria I apply to fiction are applicable for narrative nonfiction, as well (prescriptive or "how to" nonfiction is a bit different – that's more about the author's platform).

PREMISE: is the premise new/fresh/different/surprising?



VOICE: is the voice distinctive, intriguing, compelling?

CHARACTER: are the characters likable/relatable?

MOMENTUM: is the manuscript a page-turner?

Alex Sheshunoff, the winner of last year's narrative non-fiction contest, won me over with his hilarious tale of dropping out of the daily rat race and moving to an island in the South Pacific in search of the kind of Paradise depicted in a Gauguin painting. In the introduction to his proposal, Alex tells the reader that he sold his worldly possessions, rented out his New York City office and apartment, and bought a one-way ticket to a small island near Guam with a plan to read 100 books he was embarrassed not to have read yet.

New/fresh/different/surprising premise? Check. Voice? Absolutely (see below). Character? Given that Alex is narrator and protagonist, we have to like him. And we do. Momentum? From the get go, I want to know what happened: did he really move to a tiny island with no possessions? How long did he stay? How did it go? Clearly he lived to tell his tale, but what happened while he was in Paradise (and was it, in fact, Paradise-y?).

From this excerpt, I think you'll see how and why **Beginner's Guide to Paradise** had me at "loin cloth":

.... An ideal life would require making some arrangements.

*For me, those arrangements finished here, in a small cabin of the aptly named Microspirit, with me trying to tie on a *thu*. According to custom, I was supposed to wrap eight feet of blue cloth in such a way that it covered the right places without making me look like a prom-night carnation. I failed in both respects. Flamboyant hoops of extra material draped off my hips, yet I could feel cool air in increasingly funny places. Unsure what else to do, I crammed the extra bits inside an inner loop - sufficiently loosening the outer loop to send the cottony contraption sliding down to my ankles.*

Then genius stuck: a safety pin. In a humbling moment of desperation akin to looking for a misplaced wallet in the freezer, I scoured under my cabin's metal bed: perhaps a safety pin had just fallen down there. I was in luck. Sort of. Along with a few Raman noodles, some dust, and

a Pop-Tart wrapper, I found a paperclip. Not perfect, but with hope and a little pluck, I managed to bend the paperclip in such a way that it nicely accessorized, if not actually fastened, my loincloth.

Double Dealer:

What will make you throw a manuscript in the trash without hesitation? Fiction? Non-Fiction?

Kleinman:

All agents are different, of course; and like everyone, there are certain topics and/or genres that I'm either not interested in, or not qualified to understand/assess/sell. For instance, I really don't like thrillers that deal with terrorists trying to take over the world - it's just not a topic, no matter how well done, that really interests me. Along the same lines, I don't read murder mysteries or romance novels (as well as some other genres) - since I don't read them, and don't know the editors or publishing houses who handle them, I'd be the wrong agent to represent those kinds of projects. Sending your project to the "wrong" agent is the easiest way to have the agent pass on it. Do your research before submitting!

Double Dealer:

What are the most important things for a writer to remember when writing a book proposal? Fiction? Non-Fiction?

Fiction is almost always sold from a complete manuscript, not from a book proposal. In fiction, editors want to see how a writer fleshes out the whole story, builds and maintains suspense, finishes the novel, and so forth. In nonfiction, though, the editor often wants to provide editorial feedback much earlier in the process - changing chapter orders, focusing on different elements, and so forth

A proposal is a sales tool that the agent uses to sell the book to the editor - and that the editor uses to sell the book to the publisher and other editors, to the marketing people, possibly to booksellers and other publishers (for foreign sales), and so forth. You can't be subtle and you can't be modest: if you are, at least half the people reading your proposal just won't get it. Although the proposal is not supposed to be the complete manuscript, writers should try to make the proposal as complete, and concrete, as possible. Even if the writer's vision of the book changes over time, you still want the editor to feel comfortable and confident that you know what you're doing, that you



can write the book, and you know how you're going to do it. This comfort level is very important, and the more ways you're able to demonstrate it, the better (for example, in a chapter outline, you could estimate the number of pages per chapter – even if you really don't have a clue how long the chapter will be, since you haven't written it yet). Here are the elements common to most book proposals:

- **Author**

Who is the author, and why is this person is the best person in the whole world to write this book.

- **Overview.**

This is like the “Executive Summary” of a business plan. Here, as clearly and briefly as possible, set out the highlights of the book.

- **Chapter Outline.**

Briefly explains what each chapter will do, and how the book will be organized.

- **Sample Chapter / Excerpts.**

Demonstrates that the writer can write well, communicate effectively, organize the material efficiently, and keep the reader's interest.

- **Marketing & PR.**

Who are the book's readers, and how can the writer, specifically, reach them? Demonstrating that you know the correct market for your book and how to go about reaching the audience will help you score high with the proposal.

- **Competing Works.**

List the titles that are the book's closest competitors, and why this book is different. You don't waste your time, the agent's time, an acquiring editor's time by writing and proposing a book that has already been done, especially one which has done very well.

There you have it!

The right kind of advice from just the kind of guy you would love to have as an agent.



Jeff Kleinman is a literary agent, intellectual property attorney, and founding partner of Folio Literary Management, LLC, a New York literary agency which works with all of the major U.S. publishers (and, through subagents, with most international publishers). He's a graduate of Case Western Reserve University (J.D.), the University of Chicago (M.A., Italian), and the University of Virginia (B.A. with High Distinction in English). As an agent, Jeff feels privileged to have the chance to learn an incredibly variety of new subjects, meet an extraordinary range of people, and feel, at the end of the day, that he's helped to build something – a wonderful book, perhaps, or an author's career. His authors include Garth Stein, Eowyn Ivey, Robert Hicks, Charles Shields, Bruce Watson, Neil White, and Philip Gerard. Jeff's preferences in non-fiction: narrative nonfiction with a historical bent, but also memoir, health, parenting, aging, nature, pets, how-to, nature, science, politics, military, espionage, equestrian, biography. His preference for fiction: very well-written, character-driven novels; some suspense, thrillers; otherwise mainstream upmarket commercial (i.e. book club), and literary fiction. He does not represent: children's books, romance, mysteries, westerns, poetry, or screenplays, novels about serial killers, suicide, or children in peril (kidnapped, killed, raped, etc.).

For more information about Jeff (including interviews, books sold, and so forth), please go to www.foliolit.com/jeffkleinman/.

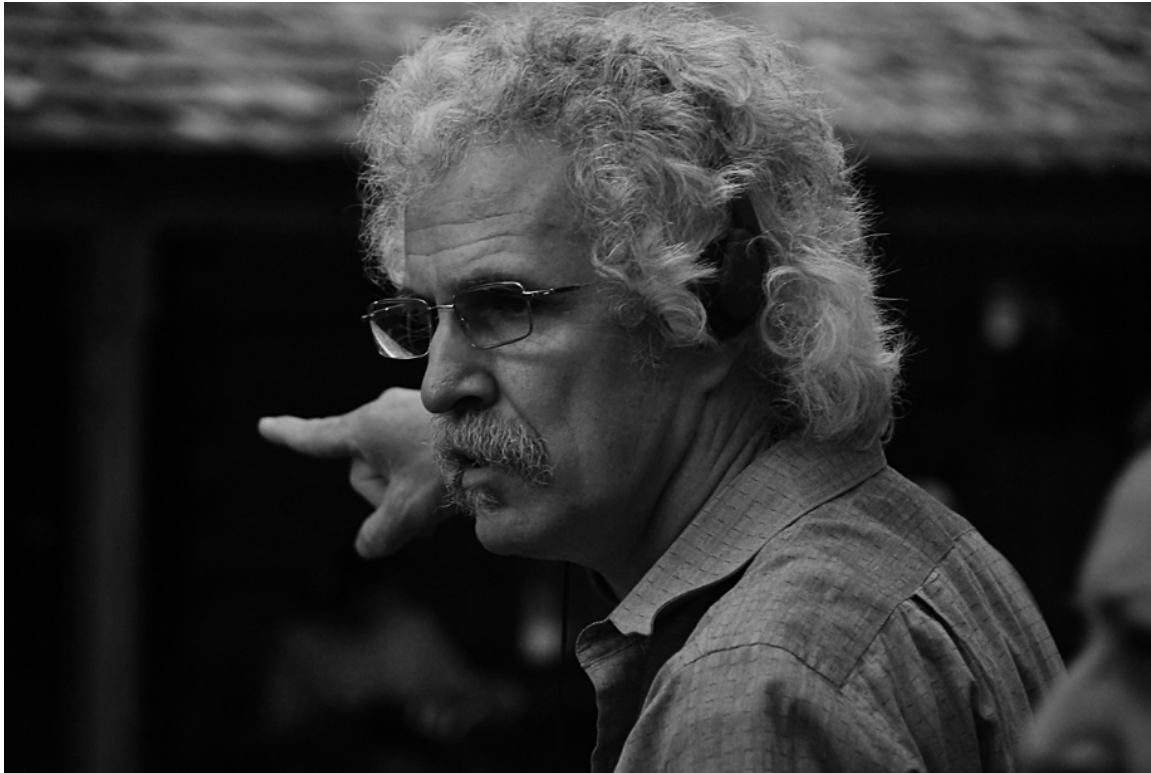


HOLLYWOOD EXPERIENCE

INTERVIEWS WITH SCREENWRITERS

By Rosemary James

Glenn Pitre: He's Done It All



GLENN PITRE—BORN IN CUT OFF, LA, and educated at Harvard—is a great mentor for young people considering a career in film, one of the most difficult of all careers in which to achieve success.

He knows how to tell aspiring filmmakers the facts of life about filmmaking without destroying their ambition to be a part of it. He understands precisely the concept of tea and sympathy. He can impart realistic wisdom while motivating the nouveau writer, because he speaks from broad personal experience. Pitre has written for Hollywood studios, broadcast networks, cable, PBS, indie productions, and foreign producers. His screenwriting has been translated into more than 30 languages, and includes dramas, comedy, thrillers, action-adventure, romance, horror, westerns, sit-coms, documentaries, sports films, environmental

films, 4D museum experiences, and IMAX.

Also a producer, director, novelist, and non-fiction author, Pitre's accolades include a Sundance Writers' Lab fellowship; AFI, NEA, and NEH grants; an honorary doctorate; a Humanities Lifetime Achievement; and a knighthood from France, *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. And he placed this year in the Faulkner Society's novel competition with his manuscript, **Advice from the Wicked**, a novel. (See excerpt in New Fiction section of this edition of *The Double Dealer*.)

In other words, he's done it all.

And this quiet, gentle man, by personal example, is able to hold out hope, while speaking authoritatively on the pitfalls that await the developing screenwriter. His key advice is that you need to have all of the basics



of a well-written novel in any screenplay you hope to sell.

He cautions writers not to rely on the visuals, which will only come into play later, when production starts and the film is ready to screen. To succeed, screenwriters must submit for sale manuscripts which are and compelling characters, manuscripts which engage the reader immediately and have ability to set a producer's imagination on fire.

James

You have been a screenwriter for a long time. How hard is it going from screenwriting to writing narrative, book length fiction?

Pitre

The extra length is both liberating and daunting.

James

From a craft standpoint, what do the two genres have in common to ease the switching from one to the other.

Pitre

Both demand fascinating characters facing escalating challenges.

James

In film, visual images must count more than words in audience comprehension of the story the filmmaker is telling. How do you make the transition from a screenplay to novel writing without the help of visual images.

Pitre

A screenplay never becomes a movie unless the screenwriter is adept at painting images with words. If the reader can't "see" each scene, the script goes in the reject pile. Are novels so different?

James

What are the worst mistakes the novice screenwriter makes right out of the box?

Pitre

Giving us characters who don't make a vivid first impression.

James

What can a novelist bring to the business of film production that someone who only has written screenplays may not be able to offer?

Pitre

The facility to bounce around inside a character's head. Sure, you have to convey it differently, but hopes, doubts, internal conflicts, and thought processes still

need to be there.

James

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to get into the film business?

Pitre

Write one great screenplay in a genre you love. Then, pray you'll be lucky.

James

I have heard that connections, connections, connections are what it takes to get a foot in the door in film. How do nouveau screenwriters get around that.

Pitre

They don't. They have to create those connections. It's nowhere near as straightforward as the write-a-great-novel-and-query agents process; on the other hand, it is a lot more porous. You can often sneak past when the gatekeepers are napping.

James

What was your favorite project of your own?

Pitre

Whichever the next one is. Otherwise you don't survive in this merciless business.

James

Your favorite film by another director?

Pitre

The Crimson Pirate starring Burt Lancaster. As a child, it made me want to be a moviemaker.

James

What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you in the film business?

Pitre

In L.A., years ago, hurrying into a men's room after a screening, as I went to push the door, it suddenly opened ahead of me and I went flying, landing on all fours on the restroom floor. A voice cracked wise, "Not bad, but work on the timing." I looked up. The fellow who'd opened the door stood grinning down at me. I'd just performed a pratfall for Mel Brooks.

For an excerpt from his new novel, turn the page. For more information about Glen and his work, visit his web site: www.CajunMovies.com/

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ADVICE FROM THE WICKED



By Glen Pitre

ONE EVENING LIKE any other, I kissed Mother, knelt to prayers, then climbed into bed. Something tickled my ear. I jumped, supposing it one of those extravagantly large flying cockroaches that somehow creep in under any closed door. It wasn't. Palmetto bugs may be disgusting but present no actual danger. What I was looking at might be lethal.

Someone had filled one of my socks with cemetery dirt. Buried in this goofer dust were several sharp objects. Thirteen nails, dressed with conjure oil, comprise a spell to eliminate any problem. If this lay under my pillow, somebody considered *me* the problem.

Turpitude No. 54:

He who curses his father shall be put to death.
No. 582 of the 613 Mitzvot of the Jews

Barefoot through the night I ran. Chest heaving, I arrived. "Conquering John!"

"No juju outside of business hours," he hollered back.

"Come out, you big baboon!"

I heard curses, his hammock creaked, and a female voice grumbled. Life stirred in other cabins, but no one lit a candle. Conquering John strut onto his porch. A precisely held woman's straw hat covered his privates, but he was otherwise naked. He seemed cross but I didn't care. "Who hexed me? I know they got it from you."

"So ask yourself, what man 'round here who hate your ass can 'ford the very best?"

"*Captain Bonneve* hexed me? And you admit you sold it to him?"

Conquering John threaded the bony fingers of his free hand into my nightshirt's collar and lifted me into the air. Eye to eye, nose to nose, his lady friend's

hat tickling my shins, he lowered his voice. "Know what I admit? Admit I got a missy inside who crave entertaining 'fore her husband get back from playing craps. Admit her and me 'joyed a good start 'fore you come a-hollering. Admit if I can't finish sporting her, I go be riled with you real big." He tossed me to the ground. Laughter seeped from several cabins. Even the wormy dogs chuckled.

Into the woods to gather bloodroot. To the kitchen house for chimney soot and sulfur match heads. From Antoinette's sewing box I took nine pins, careful to keep them pointed toward where the Captain slept while I crept back to my room.

The wicked travailed to do me wrong; now let his evil hex fall upon his own head.
He dug a pit to trap me, but Holy Ghost I beg, shove his damn self into that abyss.

Since I neither went mad, nor slit my own throat, nor experienced urges to jump into the bayou and drown, my impromptu hex-removal must've worked, but I suffered no delusion this was the end of it. Going head to head with Conquering John, sooner or later, probably sooner, his tricks would out-conjure mine. If he sold countervailing gris-gris to both my stepfather and me, never could I match the buying power of the wealthiest man in the state. I no longer even received an allowance.

I needed help, but it was too risky to draw Mother in deeper. Nat lacked power because of his Negroism. Father Groetsch would have me chanting novenas. Aralee, well, was but a girl and, off on her parents' plantation, possibly not rock solid in her affection for me. Only one person could I think of.

Pedaling three miles to Thibodaux, I primped at a public fountain before going into the courthouse. My heels clicked over the marble floor. Painted onto a door's frosted glass was the name of the man I'd come to see.

His clerk showed me into a courtroom. Though empty, it was easy to imagine it peopled with pleading



defendants, lying witnesses, pitiless jurors. The courthouse possessed an electrical generator, not just for lights but also to turn ceiling fans. As swirling blades created a cooling breeze, I regretted that the Captain was too tradition-bound to install a similar system at Athena. But maybe I underestimated him; he'd embraced hoodoo, hadn't he?

Judge Pike swept in, black robes flowing. "Should I administer you the oath before we discuss whatever's on your mind?"

Turpitude No.55:
From him that would borrow, turn not away.
Matthew 5:42

"I need money."

"Why come to me?" asked Judge Pike.

"You're rich."

He smiled down from his bench, having sat me in the witness box. "I mean why not ask your stepfather, who's even wealthier than I."

"It's to thwart him I need the money."

"You still believe he's trying to harm you?"

"I'm sure of it, your honor. And he's employing the dark arts to do so."

"Well, this is a grave development. You plan to use these funds to flee to Timbuktu or some other hideaway equally exotic?"

I ignored the twinkle in his eye. "Counter-hexes are expensive. I'd pay you back."

"When?"

"Someday."

"Someday' constitutes a troublingly vague repayment schedule. And collateral?" His wisp of a smile infuriated me. "I won't loan you money, especially not to purchase sorcery, which incidentally I don't believe in."

I hadn't expected him to cough up cash without coercion, but I had to try. My next card was risky: "What if I told the world who caused the Waverly Crevasse?"

He didn't answer right away. "Among the precepts of law is the Statute of Limitations. After a prescribed calendar duration, a given crime becomes no longer actionable."

"Your reputation will still be ruined."

"I suspect not."

"I'll stand as witness to your sabotage."

"If you don't mind prosecution for slander."

"It's only slander if it's not true."

"Truth is whatever notion the better class of people can be induced to believe. I'm a respected judge. How easy to sow whispers. 'A spoiled, unstable child.' 'Uncertain parentage.' 'Dabbles in the occult.' Shattering your credibility wouldn't raise a sweat."

He was right. I'd waited too long. Like the potency of a mojo or the flavor of a marmalade, leverage over another deteriorates with time. I started to climb out of the witness box. "Stay where you are," he commanded. "I never said I wouldn't help you. I said I wouldn't give you money to buy voodoo."

"Not voodoo, hoodoo."

"Don't quibble. But in return there's something you must do for me."

Turpitude No.56:
Accept no bribe, for bribes corrupt the innocent.
Exodus 23:8

The Judge toyed with his gavel. "I wish to speak to your Mother."

"You speak to her all the time."

"Not in private. You must arrange a meeting, a secret meeting, a rendezvous."

So that's where this was heading. "I'm not sure she'd be willing."

"Neither am I, which is why you may have to transcend methods you consider ethical."

"In your world, is there even a line between right and wrong?"

"Of course there is. It lies wherever I draw it. What are you now, twelve? Too old for such naiveté. The right and wrong and rules and laws you cherish are flexible concepts. Codified in high-priced darkness. Passed in bold hypocrisy. Adjudicated by men like me. There's a line all right. If you're smart you stay on my side of it." "The world can't be that corrupt."

"I guarantee it is." He banged his gavel. "Guilty!" *Slam*, again. "Innocent!" *Slam!* "Guilty!" *Slam!* "Innocent, guilty, innocent, guilty! Life and death, years in prison, fortunes forfeited, all to suit the convenience of those



who hold the reins of power. Against that, what's a little quiet infidelity?"

"You admit that's what you want?"

"Hasn't time come to speak plainly? The question is what does *she* want? I'd never use force, not physical force, if she pushed me away and meant it. But I don't think she would if we had a chance to chat and touch and not be interrupted. Which, again, is where you come in."

My gut roiled with images of the Judge and Mother and the sweat-soaked goings-on Tante Clo described. You see, I wasn't sure Mother would turn him down. During the half-decade their on-again, off-again, misplaced passion had fouled the air, I'd come to realize that adultery didn't always lead to suicide or even public scandal. Sometimes secrets were kept, and who better to keep them than my enigmatic mother and this devious judge? So who was I to say it shouldn't happen? Maybe time had come to pop the blister.

"If I do this, you'll protect me from the Captain? Now and forever?"

He nodded.

"How?"

"I don't ask *you* to divulge your methods."

I debated whether I could trust him, but *quid pro quos* were the Judge's stock-in-trade. What he'd proposed was to him a routine transaction. "I'll need a lock of your hair," I said.

"Whatever for?"

"It's basic to any Come-To-Me charm." 

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***Glen Pitre**—born in Cut Off, LA, and Harvard-educated—has written for Hollywood studios, broadcast networks, cable, PBS, indie productions, and foreign producers. His screenwriting has been translated into more than 30 languages, and includes dramas, comedy, thrillers, action-adventure, romance, horror, westerns, sit-coms, documentaries, sports films, environmental films, 4D museum experiences, and IMAX. Also a producer, director, novelist, and non-fiction author, Pitre's accolades include a Sundance Writers' Lab fellowship; AFI, NEA, and NEH grants; an honorary doctorate; a Humanities Lifetime Achievement; and a knighthood from France, Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.*



MAKING A SCREENPLAY

WORK

CREATING A BLUEPRINT, EARNING CONNECTIONS

By Rosemary James

My first job on a movie was working as a production assistant on Francis Coppola's One from the Heart. Among other things, I was responsible for sounding the bell to silence the set when the assistant director called places. He'd yell, "And a bell!" I was forever after known by the crew as "Annabel." I didn't mind. I'd been called worse... and I was making connections.

—Mark Evan Schwartz, Screenwriter and Professor of Screenwriting.

Mark Evan Schwartz, who has been a successful screenwriter for many years, currently is writing his first novel and he is enjoying this form of writing.

"This is my first stab at a novel," Mark said in a recent conversation with *The Double Dealer*, "and actually I'm finding it very liberating, less restrictive."

Several years ago, Pulitzer Prize winning author Robert Olen Butler told

The *Double Dealer* that writing for cinema can prove incredibly frustrating to the serious writer. "A novelist gives birth to a concept, characters, dialogue, an epiphany, a great setting and controls the action from beginning to, hopefully, a satisfying conclusion. But the screenwriter has no control over the final directions the story will take, selection of actors to convey the concept, or, indeed, the final piece of art created for release to the public. It's like having a baby and before the baby begins to walk, leaving the baby

on the doorstep to an orphanage."

Mark Evans confirmed this assertion. "In writing a screenplay, you're creating the blueprint for a potential movie. It's not a stand-alone, completed piece of literature. It's not finished until it becomes that movie and, in fact, the final filmed version of the proposed story may bear but passing relationship to the original screenplay."

This road-map for a film is also a vehicle to be used as "a sales document for attracting talent, attracting production funding, getting the movie made. It involves merging creativity with aggressive realities of business and collaboration. Certain requirements really have to be met if the screenplay is to serve all of these useful purposes," he said. "In writing a novel, you can dive into your story, swim around the minds and inner lives of the characters, digress, and have the freedom to pretty much go anywhere your imagination will take you. The novel allows the writer's voice to be heard more vividly, more forcefully."

And Evans does not consider switching from novel to screenplay and back again a problem, as he believes that both forms of storytelling are—to be successful—must be based on the same ingredients.

"I think all great storytelling, whether it's in the form of a movie, play, novel, song, or spoken word, must have compelling elements of human interaction and viable topics, a plot line that escalates, and believable characters.

The great difference between a novel and the screenplay for a film is that in film, visual images must count more than words for audience comprehension of the



story the film-maker is telling. In a novel, the writer must instigate with words the reader's imagination and ability to see the appropriate image through imagination."

It all comes down to imagery, Schwartz said, regardless of whether celluloid images are used to convey thoughts, ideas, and settings or whether the writer's words are used to fire the imagination. "The big difference, I think, is that in screenwriting you have to be very specific and concise; the less words the better. In novels, you can embellish, really explore language, and wallow in it, revel in it.

Schwartz cautions new screenwriters that the most common mistakes the novice screenwriter makes right out of the box are:

- Writing explanation instead of concise descriptive action.

- Not allowing the story to unfold.

- Not understanding that cinematic dialogue functions to communicate to the audience but also to advance the plot, character development, relationships, and themes. "Dialogue, like the action, must be filled with conflict, some times quiet personal or person to person conflict, sometimes explosive conflict."

And, he said, all too often those young, developing novelists who spend all of their time looking at films and television instead of reading good literature, turn in manuscripts that read something like screenplays but do not work as either novels or screenplays they are lacking in imagination-inciting word imagery. "Remember, the screenplay is not yet a film and you have to make someone one love it without the benefit of film imagery. If it is not an effective sales tool, the film will never get made."

Schwartz advises developing screenwriters to "see every movie and play you can, but don't forget to read great books, go to world class museums, live life fully, and write, write, write. Learn to express yourself

visually with the written word. Be the protagonist of your own story. And in this day and age, go to a good film school. They are now the best places to learn the art, craft, and business, land the coveted internships, and make needed connections."

Connections, Schwartz emphasizes are without question important in the Hollywood film world but "you need to know they are not simply handed out on a silver plate, they are not loaned to you, they need to be earned. Go to a good film school. Intern. Attend screenwriting conferences. Enter worthy competitions. Network. That's the way connections are built.

Schwartz believes that an established novelist can bring to the business of film production "possibly a more esoteric sense of story, one that targets a more specific, and less general audience," giving the film's audience in the end the feeling

that here is something "unique," not just another Hollywood potboiler. Others have said that films adapted from novels, good novels with a clear message universally

comprehended, achieve the same end. And certainly his favorite film falls into that category.

"My favorite movie of all time is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as adapted from Harper Lee's novel by screenwriter Horton Foote and directed by Robert Mulligan."

Who could disagree with that choice?

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*The road to hell is paved
with works-in-progress.*

— Philip Roth



BOTTLENOSE BLUES

By Mark Evan Schwartz

Author's Note: In 1970, the summer before college, I ran away from home with my parents' permission and went to work for a traveling dolphin show in Appalachia. Bottleneck Blues, a novel-in-progress, tells the true story of what happened. In this excerpt, picture a rickety flatbed truck, winding its way up the Blue Ridge Parkway, hauling the attraction, wide-eyed 17-year-old me in its cab.

THE LOW SUN CAST LONG SHADOWS across the valley we'd driven into, and the blacktop began to level. Up red dirt turnoffs, smokestack huts and tin roof shacks were clustered in hollers, paths leading to outhouses, weeds strangling trashed appliances and rusted vehicles in scraps of yard. I glimpsed a hollow-cheeked woman, dressed in what my mother would've called rags, sitting on a stump beside a shed, babe on her tit as she kept eye on a half dozen scroungy kids playing with stick dolls. Through a clearing the remnants of a rock chimney rose like a lone tombstone out of a tangle of grey-green brush, surrounded by crumbled foundations and rows of fallen and slanted rotted posts. Ghosts of a farmstead long abandoned.

Farther down the road, concrete block and clapboard houses randomly stood next to trailer parks, within walking distance of the Mountain View Pentecostal Church and T-shaped 1st through 12th grade public school, and just beyond that a gas station/general store. Grizzled old-timers in rocking chairs, scrawny mutts curled at their feet, watched with faint curiosity as our tarp-covered Smiley Dolphin logoed flatbed truck chugged by, Scotty Trailer in tow.

"Salt of the earth" was Luella's assessment. I agreed, surprised to hear her referencing The Rolling Stones. Learned later she was quoting Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

Soon I would be meeting the boss. Anticipation building, determined to make a positive first impression, I rehearsed how-do-you-do, pleasure to meet you, and I'd like to thank you for giving me this opportunity in my head. Should I address him with a courteous sir, considered proper in the South when speaking to someone older or in authority, or informally call him Hack like everyone else? Maybe, I thought, I should begin by calling him Captain Fallon, at least until we were better acquainted. Or was that just something thematically coined for the show? I hadn't thought to ask any of this, and with

Chet checking his map while maneuvering the big rig, Luella straightening her bouffant, and Clover popping another pimple, wasn't the time for random questioning. Using my fingers like a comb, I made sure my long hair was tucked behind my ears.

The road led straight to Main Street, Hatfield; one and two story red brick buildings for the most part; too many, like my hometown, boarded up, out of business. Of those functioning little about them appeared changed since the late forties, early fifties, when there was still the promise of the post-World War Two boom. The uniformity of green awnings in harmony with nearby hills, blanched wood signs promoting services, display windows showing goods, and benches welcoming passersby to sit a spell maintained a semblance of what must have been its small town charm. But this being Sunday, sidewalks were empty, mom and pop drug, grocery, livestock, and hardware stores were closed, shades were drawn on Mabel's Beauty Emporium, and the barber's pole outside Snip's was motionless. The post office and bank were of course darkened, locked tight, yet while the stone court house/mayor's office/sheriff's station had glimmers of light, there was no evidence of life whatsoever past the Hatfield Professional and Medical Center's picket fence. A double bill of **Beneath the Planet of the Apes** and **Beyond the Valley of the Dolls** on the Rialto's cracked placard marquee, Friday and Saturday 7:00pm, seemed the only thing indicating the present.

Just past the curbside Bus Stop, through the Porkpie Diner's half-open door, I glimpsed a solitary man wearing an apron and cook's cap, sweeping. Evening settled, the counter and stools vacant, it dawned on me how hungry I was. All I'd had to eat since breakfast was a quick snack when we stopped to fill with gas and empty our bladders; boiled peanuts and a Cheerwine.

"Prepare to drop anchor." Chet took a turn off Main, glad as the rest of us that the end of the long day's drive was in sight. Appearances of a quaint small town ended, as well.

On an entire track of land that had been cleared, plowed, and scraped gleamed a brand new Woolco Department Store. Through oversized picture windows smiling All-American mannequins modeled Bermuda shorts, Banlon shirts, designer jeans, stylish skirts, and natty blazers for the wholesome family; sporting goods for the fisherman, hunter, and seasonal athlete; washers, dryers, and the latest in kitchenware for the little lady; hardware supplies for the handy daddy; and



console color televisions and big speaker stereos for stay-at-home entertainment. According to bright red signage there was even a food court serving corndogs, burgers, pizza, and yummy fried chicken. Sixty-three thousand square feet of one stop shopping, all on a single floor.

Given the poverty I saw, I couldn't help but wonder where the populace was that would support such a place? If there was a middle class out there, I sure as hell hadn't seen it. But the corporate bigwigs must've known what they were doing. Because more was on the way. Acres were being cleared around and behind the store, for what a billboard proclaimed to be the future mall. A growing trend I supposed. Like back home.

Streetlamps blanketed light across the freshly paved and lined parking lot, buzzing with activity. Work crews scrambled up and down ramps to panel trucks, unloading merchandise stacked top heavy on wobbly dollies, dodging men perched on ladders hanging red, white, and blue Grand Opening! banners above the department store's multiple electronic glass doors. It was all so garishly incongruent with Hatfield and its surroundings you'd swear occupying forces from another world landed. And in a way, I guess they had.

Luella snapped shut her compact: "There's Hack."

From a distance, bowlegged, thickset, and rigid beside his dusty pickup, he could've just as easily passed for a pitbull in dark woolen pants, pressed white shirt, and half-zipped beige windbreaker. As we pulled into the parking lot he checked his watch, and crossed his closefisted arms. The truck's air brakes hissed and groaned; the flatbed's heavy load shifting and swaying. Square jawed, middle-aged, as tightly coiled as his crew cut, Hack stood his ground, smoldering stogie clenched in his teeth.

"Don't worry," Chet said, I assumed in jest, "His bite's far worse than his bark."

"Hush now," was Luella's playful response.

Having ridden shotgun, I was the first one out of the cab. I helped Luella down the way I rehearsed it in my head, knowing I'd be watched, eager to make that good first impression, and then stepped aside, the epitome of chivalry, so she could go to her husband. His eyes softened as she leaned into him, brushing her breasts against his barrel chest, kissing him on the ear. I kept a respectful distance as he whispered something only she could hear, the cigar in his mouth so close to her overly sprayed bouffant I was prepared to dash for the fire extinguisher in the truck. He slapped her on the butt, the pop so loud it must've hurt. But if it did, she didn't let on, instead squealing in a way obviously intended to please him, like something she had seen in movies or read about in *Cosmo*, and he broke free.

He folded his hands behind his back like a commanding officer inspecting his crew, and addressed us one by one, growling "Smooth sailing?" through the scrunched cigar, his clipped cadence showing no

evidence of regional origins.

Chet, on the other hand, liked to play his to the hilt. "Boy howdy," he answered.

"How's it hanging, Clovis?"

"C-Clover," Clover corrected, indicating his trademark flower patterned bellbottoms.

"R-r-right," Hack mocked, before turning toward me with a curious, "Ma'am?"

I smiled uncertainly, smoothed back a long strand of hair.

"Oh, merde! Pardon moi!" Even his fractured French reeked with rancor. "You be the newbie!"

"Yes sir."

"Better a newbie than a nug." He laughed heartily at his little joke.

I had no idea what that meant, but said "Yes sir" again anyway.

"At ease, seaman, just joshing. There's a barber in town. You'll pass for a swinging dick before you know it."

He smirked at the others, as if for approval, then lowered his voice, winked.

"Don't worry, your secret's safe with me."

"I, uh, want to thank you, sir, for this opportunity." What I really wanted was to steer the conversation in a more appropriate direction as quickly as possible.

He gave me a sharp nod and twitch of his cigar, its front tip coming hotly aglow inches from my face. I took it as his way of saying you're welcome, so I reached out to shake hands. He responded in kind. I was painfully pinched. Startled! I glanced down at what I was holding, what was clutching me.

Calloused scar tissue and stitch tracks ran amok over the back and palm of what was left of Hack's right hand. A deep purple crevasse took the place of what was once his little finger, his ring finger barely a stub and his middle finger severed below the center phalanx. Only the thumb and bent index finger were intact, gripping me so hard with jagged nails it drew a speck of blood.

I did my best to mask my discomfort.

There was something sinister about Hack's thinly curled grin: he had gotten the reaction he was used to, the one he had hoped for. He made a chilling performance of it, still gripping me painfully tight with his right while rubbing his square chin with his left; that hand, like the other, a jangled web of scar tissue, crevasses, and stitch tracks, middle and index fingers gnawed off at the knuckle.

"Battling the shark to catch the dolphin has its risks." His cobalt eyes pierced through me. "But then, without competition, where's the fucking sport?"

He paused for my response. I was at a loss for words. He gripped tighter, rolled the cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, his teeth browned by decades of nicotine.

"They circle. Barely cut a wake. Dorsals indistinguishable from the bottlenose. By the time the second fin appears it's too late. Brainless. Insatiable.



Vulgar bastards know nothing but survival. The first law of nature, coupled with the devil's lust for blood. Jaws like ratchets, teeth like razors, they bite clench rip and gnaw. A vicious tug of war, victor goes the dolphin. Wham!" His sudden shout made me flinch. He slugged the air between us with his marred and mangled left fist, clasping me tighter with the grotesquery that was his right. "Wham! Wham!" he roared, pounding the invisible foe again and again, saliva beading on the corners of his mouth.

"Come on, Hack," Luella teased, "You're scaring the boy."

"Him?" drawled Chet, "Scaring the shit out of me."

Hack played into their setup. "Great White, they call them." Then delivered his punchline with a wink and a swagger: "But not as great as Captain Fallon."

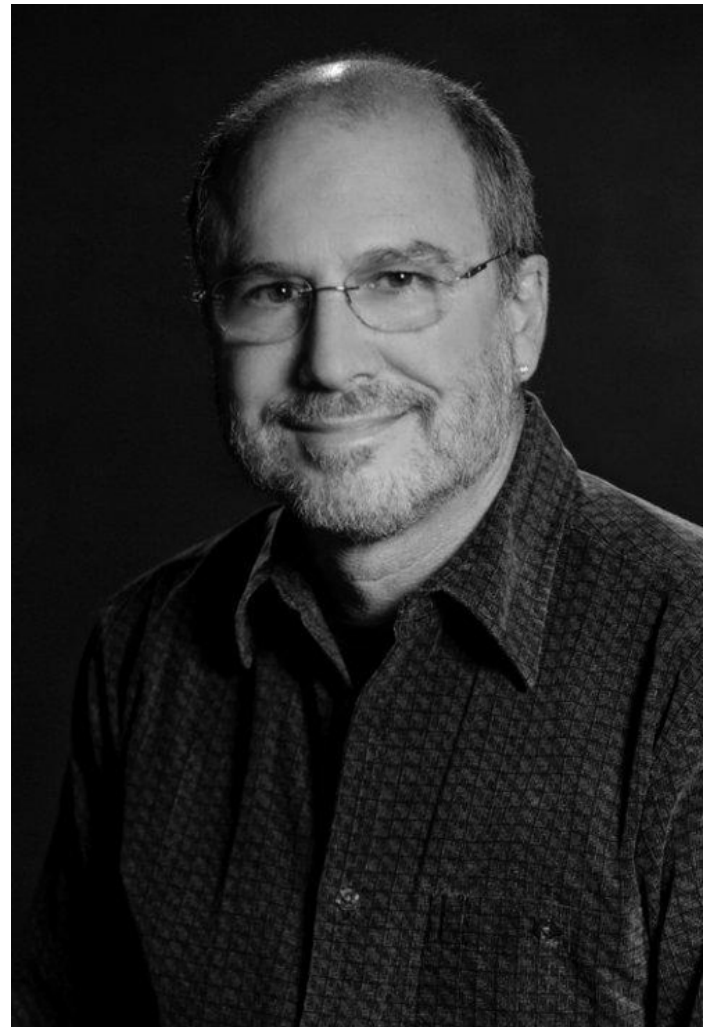
While everyone humored him and laughed, even though they had surely heard it millions of times before, he kept his focus on me, maintained his grip, waited to see if I got the joke.

I couldn't resist: "And not as white?"

He cocked his head, reminding me again of that pitbull, like he couldn't believe I said it. And so did the others.

Uh oh, I thought, feeling myself sinking dead in the water like that imaginary shark. Just arrived and already I'm going to have to find my way home. 🌀

Mark Evan Schwartz is an award winning screenwriter with credits on over a dozen produced feature films, television shows, and TV movies, he started out as a Production Assistant for Francis Coppola, and went on to become a Story Analyst for the David Geffen Company, Story Editor for Galactic Films at MGM, and Head of Story and Development for Nelson Entertainment, international distributor of such blockbusters as *When Harry Met Sally* and Best Picture Oscar winner *The Last Emperor*. His screenwriting credits include *Little Men* (Warner Brothers Family Entertainment) and *Star Quest* (Concorde/New Horizons), produced by the legendary Roger Corman, winner of a Golden Scroll award from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror. He can be seen as a special feature talking head on the 15th Anniversary DVD of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* and the Blu Ray DVD of Lerner and Lowe's classic musical *Camelot*. His format guide, *Good Format Hunting*, is permanently archived on the Script Magazine web site, he is a contributing screenwriter to *Now Write: Screenwriting* (Penguin Press) and sole author of *How to Write: A Screenplay* (Continuum Int'l,



New York & London), currently in its second edition. The first how-to book on screenwriting written in the form of an actual screenplay, it has been cited by the *School Library Journal* as "One of the best books available for aspiring screenwriters." He is currently at work on his first novel. Schwartz is Associate Professor of Screenwriting at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, where he has also served as Associate Dean of the School of Film and Television, and Coordinator of the Screenwriting Department. In 2010 students voted him *Crimson and Blue SFTV Professor of the Year*. He holds an MFA in *Directing (Theater)* from Boston University College of Fine Arts. Born in Minneapolis, he grew up in the booming metropolis of Gastonia, NC, Mark lives with his wife in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, where they have raised their three children and a cuddly cockapoo. When he was 12 he had a pet alligator.



RESEARCH AND WRITING

HOWARD BAHR, CURIOSITY'S CATS, AND THE LIBERATING EFFECT OF THE ARCHIVE

By Steve Yates

Howard Bahr and I have been serendipitously thrown together many times now. Rosemary James and Joseph DeSalvo of the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society at Faulkner House Books were first intercessors, when they invited me to join a discussion Howard led during *Words & Music, 2010*. The discussion was related to that year's overall theme for the festival: **The Literature of War and Collateral Damage**. The topic I was assigned to was *The Dehumanizing Effects of the Civil War on Southern Society*

In addition to Howard, a veteran of the Vietnam War and author of three critically acclaimed war protest novels set in the era of the Civil War—**The Black Flower**, **The Year of Jubilo**, and **The Judas Field**, as well as **Pelican Road**, a novel of the railroads—the panelists included **Alecia P. Long, Ph.D.**, who teaches Louisiana history and the history of sexuality at Louisiana State University and had just published book, **Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation and the American Civil War**, and **Roy Blount, Jr.**, author of the Penguin series book **Robert E. Lee**, an excellent short biography by this accomplished author of 19 non-fiction books, who had done a truly brilliant job of breathing new life into a worn-out subject. a good job of outlining Lee's life and career. I was invited because my novel of the Civil War, **Morkan's Quarry**, which is an examination of how war disrupts the fabric of society and destroys the lives of those who are the very fabric of society, the hard working man and his family.

Participation in this event and meeting Howard Bahr are among the milestone memories of my literary career.

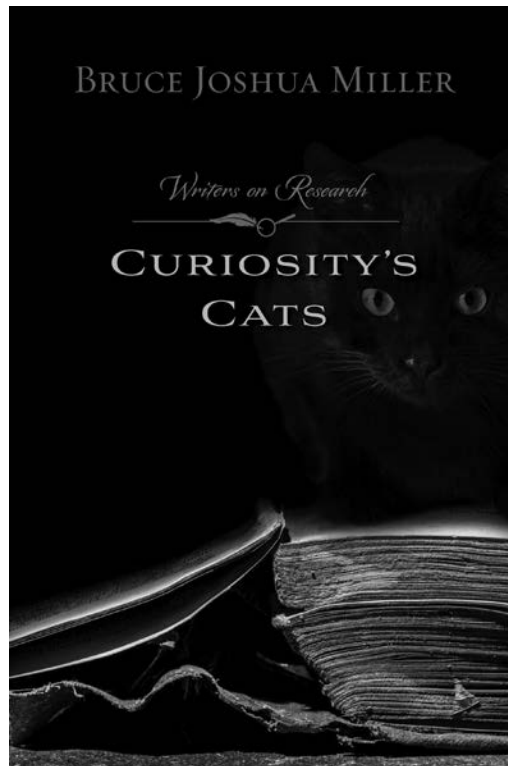
Occasionally I have been able to return something to the friendship whic began at that memorable *Words &*

Music festival, which featured National Book Award winner **Tim O'Brien**, whose novel, **The Things They Carried**, is so moving as to be unforgettable. This summer I was really keen to introduce Howard to a new book, **Curiosity's Cats: Writers on Research**, edited by another friend of mine, Bruce Joshua Miller.

Turns out, Howard, who teaches at Belhaven University in Jackson, MS, was about to design a class in *Research and Writing*. Soon after our discussion, Howard told me that not only did the book fit, but he would like me to come speak to his class at Belhaven University. As often happens to writers, I believe, I have learned a lot about craft by preparing a presentation for students who are learning to write. These moments are especially valuable to me—I do not teach writing for a living, but work 50-odd hours per week marketing the 200 author creations published each year at University Press of Mississippi. As a rule I almost never talk about my writing; there is simply too much good work by other authors to discuss.

Poets at the University of Arkansas Program in Creative Writing, where I studied, would often say that, "Form frees." Howard's students and their incisive questions showed me that archival research frees writers in many ways as well.

In August of 2013, searching for what to write next, I recalled that one of my hometown's untold stories is that of *The Albino Farm*. I had already written of Springfield, Missouri's Civil War experiences in the novel, **Morkan's Quarry**. I had adapted the twisted tale of Springfield's Ether Eddie as a short story in my short fiction collection **Some Kinds of Love Stories**, which subsequently won the Juniper Prize. And I have advanced my made-up Springfield to its nadir, a





and farm that, to the lasting sorrow of its owners and heirs, acquired a nonsensical legend marring all memory of its glory days. The estate became known and is still known, if it is remembered at all, as The Albino Farm

To make fiction of the archival, I gave the Sheedys a new name, *Sheehy*, and gave them a fictional heir, Hettienne, **The Last Sheehy**, which is the working title of the novel, now in its fourth draft with an editor and publisher I much admire.

In December of 2013, my wife and I were able to go home to Springfield for a visit. This afforded me time in the Springfield-Greene County Library Center's local history and genealogy department. Research there led me in turn to the Greene County Archives. On several snowy days, with archivists Robert Neumann and Steve Haberman assisting, I uncovered a novel's worth of documents.

When Helen Sheedy (the last Sheedy to live on the farm) died, there were no subsequent descendants with the name Sheedy. The estate went into probate. Those due to inherit went to the extraordinary measure of hiring a firm to catalog *every* item in the 12-room Sheedy Mansion.

Gold mine.

I brought my copy of Helen's will to Howard's class along with pictures of the farm. Sometimes it takes only one nugget to allow the writer entry into the heartwood. And there on the inventory was the emotional key—"Six handmade quilts, never used." This single item inspired an entirely new line of thinking about my writing plan for the novel.

To demonstrate for Howard's class, I read this excerpt which appears near the end of my novel manuscript:

The hallways even upstairs were designed for the wider dresses and bustles of long ago and now felt like rooms unto themselves. When she was a child here Hettienne had not even conceived of the huge rectangles as hallways, but saw the whole house as a honeycomb of adjoined rooms. Hettienne knelt now on a spent, rose-colored rug and examined a green vinyl-covered hamper, modern, clean. Who bought this and why? A platform rocker with a slipcover, an electric fan. Sleepless, alone, one of the aunts may well have used the hallway like a room. Ah, even a sewing machine waited there in the corner with a piano stool before it. So this hallway had become a workroom. With all the doors and windows open, fall air lifted the rafters, and the ancient house crackled, like the bones of an elderly horse arising. Orange and brown and yellow from oak and hickory and sassafras blazed upon the ceiling of Helen's bedroom, and Hettienne thought of her poor aunt, comatose. Margaret, Agnes, Simon, Mary, Old Michael Sheehy, all had died here in the home. And sleepless as a child, she had overheard in the dark of the night aunts and

1906 Easter Lynching in **The Teeth of the Souls**, my new novel forthcoming in March, 2015.

Growing up, I frequently heard *The Albino Farm* story on nights of mischief. No one told a "definitive" version. Yet this odd tale of albinos trapped and suffering or vindictively guarding an old farm persisted and drew a legion of rampaging thrill-seekers to the property even before barbarians at last torched the 12-room mansion there in 1979. The lore usually was snipe-hunt nonsense, a whisper spoken to scare younger cousins or siblings or a date.

Noodling around on the internet revealed a gold mine of information about the story. Sarah Overstreet, a solid, respected journalist (we worked in the same newsroom at the *Springfield News-Leader* in the late 1980s), while researching the story in 2006, discovered that once the farm was held by a large Irish Catholic family, the Sheedys. Those who finally inherited and sold the estate were all descended from Kate Sheedy, one of Mike Sheedy's many offspring.

Not one of the devisees—there were eight—would speak to Overstreet. The hurtful legend had so obscured what was an idyllic farmstead and the family that owned it that, decades later, even descendants who did not carry the name Sheedy refused to speak. What a curse!

And so I began:

On the northern border of Springfield, Missouri, there once was a great house surrounded by emerald woods, lake, and meadow, a home place



uncles whisper the prayer to one another for the Happy Death, meaning not in hospital. Now poor Helen was dying just that way. And the Connelly's were wearing themselves out tidying the vast old house, and visiting the hospital in the afternoons and evenings.

A trunk with a lock, but wait, it slips open to her surprise, a lock that no one fastened. With the lid fully raised comes the slight whiff of moth balls long ago evaporated, then warm but dry leather, brass, and cedar. **James Sheehy** is burned on a fragrant cedar block nailed inside the lid; he made this trunk, then. Inside—she spreads her long fingers upon them—quilts. Stacked, handmade quilts, folded perfectly with sheets of crepe inserted between each one. Carpenter's Star, Summer Cascade, Chevron, Amethyst Labyrinth, Indian Hatchet, Dawn's Light in emerald and gold, Star-Crossed Nine. So long ago, Agnes had taught her the names of patterns, and on many sodden summer days Hettienne had helped Margaret and Agnes piece quilts, like maps of galaxies the two women hatched in their minds. These, untouched. Months, years of lonely labor, of loving plans gone to naught. Such love, and yet no children called for that warming comfort. Nine of them, never before used. One for each young cousin. One Sheehy, eight Ormond's.

I hope Howard's students enjoyed seeing **Curiosity's Cats: Writers on Research** put to practice. It is hard to imagine giving enough back to match the value of Howard's friendship and the wonder of his marvelous novels. But if I did repay, I hope it is this:

While it is our job as fiction writers is to make it up, in the truth of stuff, there is tremendous inspiration. 🌸

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Steve Yates's novella **Sandy and Wayne**, which was runner-up in the 2013 William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition, also was chosen by acclaimed novelist and short story writer Lauren Groff as the inaugural winner of the Knickerbocker Prize and now has been published in *Big Fiction Magazine* in hand-set type on a letterpress. Born and reared in Springfield, MO, Yates is an MFA graduate of the creative writing program at the University of Arkansas. In Fayetteville, he worked three summers for the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department as a construction inspector and surveyor. **Sandy and Wayne** is set amidst the interstate construction jobs as the highway was built through the Boston Mountains from Fayetteville to Fort Smith. Yates is the winner of the Juniper Prize in Fiction and in April 2013, University of Massachusetts Press published his collection **Some Kinds of Love: Stories**. He has published short stories in *TriQuarterly*, *Southwest Review*, *Turnstile*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Valley Voices*, and other journals. In *Best American Short Stories 2010*, Richard Russo named one of Yates's works among the "Distinguished Stories of 2009." In 2010 Moon City Press published his novel, **Morkan's Quarry**. Portions of **Morkan's Quarry** first appeared in *Missouri Review*, *Ontario Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. A novella-length excerpt was also a finalist for the Faulkner-Wisdom Award for the Best Novella. He is assistant director of marketing director at University Press of Mississippi in Jackson, and lives in Flowood with his wife, Tammy.



2014

➡ COMPETITION ➡





CONGRATULATIONS!

We are pleased to announce the winners and finalists of the 2014 *William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition*.

We received hundreds of entries from all over the country as well as several foreign countries. It was not easy to choose the best works from among so many great stories, poems, novels, and more.

We offer our winners gold medals and travel to the Faulkner Society's annual fall festival, *Words & Music, a Literary Feast in New Orleans*, and publication in *The Double Dealer*.

We encourage writers of all genres to submit their work! Details can be found at: |[http://www/ wordsandmusic.org](http://www/wordsandmusic.org).

Congratulations to 2014's winners--we loved reading your work! We offer our congratulations to the winners of the 2015 competition as well. Their work will be published in the 2015 - 2016 Edition next year.

-Rosemary James

Co-founder, Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society



GOLDEN BANTAM

By J. Ryan Stradal

*An excerpt from the winning novel, **Kitchens of the Great Midwest**, for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Novel in the Willam Faulkner-William Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.*

WHILE PARKED DOWN the street from her boyfriend Mitch's town house, waiting for his wife's car to pull out of the garage and leave for work, Octavia Kincade stared at the plastic pink flamingoes sticking out of the snow in his neighbor's yard and had what her former therapist would've called a moment of clarity. It was all Eva Thorvald's fault, she realized.

All of it. Not just the fact that she was freezing to death in a godawful Pontiac Aztek with a busted heater, but her frustrating lack of commitment from former Bar Garroxta executive chef Mitch Diego, her two kids with Adam Snelling, her marriage to Adam Snelling, the breakup of the Sunday Night Dinner Party, even what happened to Lacey Dietsch—Eva's presence had set all of this in motion. As she awaited the text from Mitch's second cell phone, which he used just for her, she looked through her frosty windshield at the snow falling for the second time that April and, like those stupid, ironic flamingoes, felt imprisoned by the cruelty of circumstances beyond her control.

It wasn't any colder outside the car, so she figured she would maybe wait outside, maybe even lie down in the snow by the flamingoes without her jacket on. Was it possible to die of hypothermia in April? Probably, if there was still snow on the ground. Maybe she would be the first. As she lay down in the clammy snow, and felt it soak the back of her jeans and wool sweater and recently-styled hair, she was sure that whether she survived or not, it would send that bastard a message: look at what you drove me to do.

Six years ago, Octavia knew better. For starters, she should've known not to extend a warm, welcoming hand to a helpless creature like Eva Thorvald. But Octavia was a nice person with a big, generous heart who felt sorry for outsiders and tried to help them. And people like her never get any thanks for their selflessness. They are not the ones with the hardness to make others wait; they are the ones left waiting, until their souls are broken like old bread and scattered in the snow for the birds. They can go right ahead and aspire to the stars, but the only chance they'll ever have to fly is in a thousand pieces, melting in the hot guts of

something predatory.

It was the last July weekend of 2009, in the deep sticky bulge of summer, and Robbe was having some people over at the house near Lake Calhoun that he'd bought on a short sale and then exhaustively modernized. The kitchen was outfitted with marble countertops, a center island, two recessed refrigerators—each with a glass door—a hatch in the floor that led to the basement wine cellar, and a painfully tasteful version of every necessary or desired piece of kitchen hardware.

Octavia, who was twenty-six at the time, didn't know anyone else around her age with such a pimped-out kitchen, but Robbe Kramer was unusual among her friends. He was twenty-nine, shaved his face every day, and had graduated from Carleton back in 2002; the perfect time to join a mortgage loan firm and start slinging sub-primés to the masses like pancakes at a charity breakfast. She didn't know him back then, and had a hard time believing that the collection of Châteuneuf-du-Papes beneath her feet were purchased on the backs of foreclosed blue-collar families and fixed-income seniors. She asked him about it once, in those terms. He just replied, "Were you there?" and looked at her as if she'd just flipped off a mall Santa in front of the children.

By 2009, that revenue model no longer existed, of course, but Robbe had already cashed out. While he watched his bosses get taken to court, he got a realtor's license, took cooking classes, and sold the treatment for a memoir called "An ARM and a Leg: One Young Man's Ride on the Bubble."

Robbe's life and home were truly impressive, but she wasn't going to embarrass herself gushing over every little magnetic knife rack or hobnailed sand iron tetsubin. When Octavia first walked into the kitchen, Robbe was literally explaining a pressure cooker to a young, gawky tower of a girl, and she was acting shamelessly super-interested, as if she'd never ever seen a pressure cooker before and Robbe was the genius who invented it. Women look their stupidest when they have a crush on a guy who's out of their league, and Octavia suspected that's what she was seeing.



“Hi, I’m Eva,” the tall girl said when she noticed Octavia watching her. Upon closer inspection, Eva was big, in both the right and wrong places—not fat, per se, but proportionately large, awkwardly assembled on a towering frame. She was outfitted indecisively, in a white t-shirt and cargo pants, bright red lipstick and nail polish, and had messy long hair that vaguely evoked something feminine. She reminded Octavia of a Greek statue in progress, before all the extra marble had been chipped away.

“Hi, I’m Octavia,” she said, arm outstretched as she angled around the center island. Octavia liked to be the prettiest woman in the room whenever possible, and it was no contest here. Especially when Octavia was wearing her canary yellow Betsey Johnson swing dress (she was one of the few women she knew who could truly pull off canary yellow), her gold & lapis lazuli earrings, an ethnic-inspired, chunky coiled snake bracelet, and two big, show-stopping lapis lazuli cocktail rings, one on each middle finger.

Robbe asserted himself between them. “Octavia’s a fixture at the Sunday dinners I was telling you about.”

“Cool beans!” Eva said. That kind of enthusiasm was grating, but Eva was probably still young enough to get it corrected. “What do you make?”

“Oh, nothing crazy, a little of this, a little of that,” Octavia said.

“She’s dissembling,” Robbe said. “She makes, let’s call them, sexy versions of old-school comfort food. Remind me what they were, I don’t remember.”

Octavia said, “Black truffle oil mac & cheese with bacon and smoked gouda. Gnocchi gratin with pecorino cheese. Walleye casserole with homemade cream of mushroom soup.”

“Real cool,” Eva said.

Robbe looked at Octavia as he nudged Eva with his elbow. “This one works in the kitchen at Bar Garrotxa.”

Octavia was actually impressed. BG, as everyone called it, was the hottest tapas bar in the Cities. Anderson Cooper had recently been spotted eating there. Joe Biden brought his party there after an afternoon fundraiser in 2008. And several of the most influential local food blogs had ranked it among the best in Minneapolis / Minnesota / the Midwest. All of this conspired to make its dashing executive chef into a budding star, and what this gawky work-in-progress was doing there made Octavia mighty curious.

“You work for Mitch Diego?” she asked Eva.

“With him, yes.”

“And how old are you, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I just turned twenty.”

“Wow, you’re just a baby,” Octavia said. That explained a lot. Now Octavia wondered if she should

just feel sorry for her. “What exactly do you do there?”

“I’m a sous chef. For now.”

For now. Octavia couldn’t believe the little ingénue. Like anyone her age could possibly do better. “Well, what an impressive place to work,” she said. “What’s he like as a person?”

“Mitch? He’s OK.”

“That’s all? He’s OK?”

Eva shrugged. “When he’s in the kitchen, he just kind of puts the finishing touches on everything. I don’t talk to him that much.”

“But to work with his food every day. You must love everything on the menu.”

“Given the ingredients, it’s all right. I do my best to help it along.”

Wow. Given the ingredients, it’s all right? If she’d said that in front of Mitch, Octavia believed, Eva would never even boil pasta in this town again. Baby girl needed to get spanked, big time. “Well,” Octavia said, “I’m sure he appreciates whatever it is you do.”

Octavia sat in Robbe’s lush backyard, in a Crate & Barrel deck chair next to Robbe’s Honeycrisp apple tree, while her bitchy, judgmental ex-roommate Maureen O’Brien smoked a cigarette and ashed it onto the lawn. Christ, Octavia thought. Why did Robbe still invite Maureen to his parties? Because she worked at a cool restaurant? Because he wanted his parties to look busier? It couldn’t be because he actually liked her. She even held her cigarettes down at waist-level, palm downward, like a dude, instead of arching her elbow and wrist, palm towards the sky, cigarette tip pointed downwards, like a woman of a refined caste.

“So what’s your friend’s deal?” Octavia asked. “She’s inside forcing Robbe to explain every single item in his kitchen. I hope to God she doesn’t like him.”

“Eva’s awesome,” Maureen said, not looking at Octavia. “Leave her alone.”

“How’d you meet someone so young and relevant?”

“We worked together at the Steamboat before it closed,” Maureen said.

“Why’d they close? Breaking child labor laws?”

Maureen sucked on her cigarette and blew its plume toward the ground. “That chick’s got the most sophisticated palate I’ve ever seen.”

“But can she cook?”

Maureen looked down at Octavia and extinguished her cigarette against the side of the apple tree. “Like you wouldn’t believe.” 🌿

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If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot.

There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut. -Stephen King



Judge Jeff Kleinman's Comments:

Engaging, interesting characters and premise. I stayed up late to finish reading because I didn't want to put it down. The interweaving of characters felt slightly too obvious at times, but the voice is terrific and the premise is wonderful. A very amusing, appealing voice and good narrative urgency – it's fun to read. The characters tend to come out best in the sections where their love of food, and for others through food, is fully apparent. Highly likable characters and lovely

descriptions of food and cooking. The strong narrative voice hooks the reader from the beginning. Quirky, humorous, and has a strong sense of atmosphere.

*J. Ryan Stradal's writing has appeared in **Hobart**, **The Rattling Wall**, **The Rumpus**, **Joyland**, and the **Los Angeles Review of Books**, among other places. He's the editor of the **2014 California Prose Directory** anthology, associate editor at **Trop Magazine**, and co-fiction editor at **The Nervous Breakdown**. Since*



***Jude Swenson**, shown in the center of the photo at left with family and friends at **Faulkner for All**, 2012, is a New Orleans social activist who has been a long time patron and board member of the **Faulkner Society**.*

*The 2014 Prize for Novel was made possible by a gift from Mrs. Swenson, who underwrites the prize annually in memory of her late husband, New Orleans businessman and dedicated reader and writer, **James Swenson***



THE LAST WOMAN

By Ladee Hubbard

*An excerpt from the second place novel, **The Talented Tenth**, for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Novel in the Willam Faulkner-William Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.*

Author's note: *The following is taken from the first chapter of my novel, **The Talented Tenth**, which tells the story of Johnny Ribkins, a seventy-two year old African-American antiques dealer who lives in Boston. Each member of the Ribkins family has a unique, yet highly ambiguous talent. Johnny can make perfect maps of any space he walks through. His father could see in the dark. Before dying of a drug overdose, Johnny's half-brother, Franklin, could scale any wall. As the Ribkins have no clear idea of what to do with their talents, their unique abilities often assume the form of idiosyncratic compulsions.*

When the novel begins Johnny has been given thirty days to pay off a debt to Melvin Marks, a disgraced former attorney who has been paying Johnny to draw up blue prints of buildings he burglarizes. Johnny must drive across the south, digging up bags of money he buried in the ground at various points during his past. His first stop is to his half-brother's childhood home where he finds Meredith Case, Franklin's last girlfriend, living with Eloise, the twelve-year old niece Johnny did not know he had. Eloise's uncanny ability to catch anything that is thrown at her confirms her identity as a Ribkins. Thereafter, in an effort to teach his niece to appreciate her own gifts, Johnny takes Eloise to visit four of Johnny's cousins, all of whom were members of The Justice Committee, a political organization that Johnny founded in the late 1960s. The group has long since disbanded but Johnny hopes that meeting these gifted individuals will inspire Eloise. He also has money buried near each of their homes and each stop is part of his continuing effort to raise the funds to pay off his debt.

HE ONLY CAME BACK because he needed to dig up a box of money he'd buried in his brother's yard some thirty years before. But it was complicated because his brother's last woman was still living in the house and of course he didn't want her knowing what he was after. So he made something up.

"A tool box," Johnny Ribkins said, standing on the splintered porch of a wood frame two-story while hard slats of Florida sunshine bore down on his back and the last woman squinted from behind the screen door.

"A tool box?" She said, gray grates covering her face like a veil. "Why you got a tool box buried in the yard?"

"Oh, it's always been there. Ever since we tore down the shed to build the basketball court." He nodded towards a weed-covered rectangle of cracked cement at the far corner of the yard. "Just seemed like the safest place to put it at the time."

A truck came barreling down the interstate on the other side of the fence, roar of exhaust merging with the mechanical drone of laughter coming from a TV playing inside the house. Johnny removed his hat, swatted at the moisture pooling across his brow and stared at a rose tattoo winding its way around the

woman's neck. He'd only met her once and that was years ago but he had to admit she looked better than he remembered. The halter-top, miniskirt and thigh-high boots were gone, replaced by a t-shirt, sweatpants and white flip-flops. Her once gaunt cheekbones were now fleshy and jowly and her hair, deprived of the bright red wig she'd been sporting the night they were introduced, was cut short and entirely gray. He figured she must have been in her mid-forties, about the same age his baby brother had been when he died.

Johnny Ribkins smiled. "They old tools, see? Like for turning screws so old they don't even make them anymore. Truth is I all but forgot about them until a couple weeks ago, when I got a delivery of antique watches down at the shop."

He pulled a handkerchief from the pocket of his shirt and scratched at a line of sweat tickling his left ear. It was hot out there and he could hear how lazy and exhausted his lies sounded. Luckily the last woman was none too bright.

"They valuable?"

"Only if you a broken watch."

A hearty "amen" and the sound of applause came from inside the house. His eyes darted past the woman and into the living room where he realized she was



using his old drafting table as a TV stand.

“Tools aren’t valuable,” Johnny said. “The watches are, but only if they’re fixed. And really it’s more a matter of the fact that they don’t make them anymore. Now I’ve looked everywhere, even tried contacting the original manufacturer to see if I could get a hold of the blueprints of the designs to have copies made and—”

Where was this going? Why was he, at seventy-two years of age, standing there sweating on the front porch of a house he’d helped his brother build trying to explain himself to some raggedy piece of interloping woman who didn’t even have sense enough to invite him inside and out of the heat which would have been simple courtesy and—

“So, what, Johnny Ribkins, you some kind of junk man now?”

“Ain’t no fucking junkman.” It just kind of popped out.

But when he looked up the woman was smiling. Her lip curled back and he stared at the gold fillings etched against her front teeth.

“I just thought because of the watches...you said they were old.”

“They’re antiques.”

He reached for his wallet, felt his wedding ring snag against a loose thread at the bottom of his pants pocket and brought it out slowly, not wanting to make a hole. His hands were shaking as he pulled back the screen door and handed her his business card: *Jonathan Ribkins, acquisitions and repairs. Ribkins Antiques.*

“Family business. Two generations.... Didn’t Franklin ever mention it? He worked with me for almost ten years.”

“No, we never discussed such things.”

Johnny watched the woman stare down at the card and then look back at him. For a moment he thought he saw something crafty in her eyes, some form of coherency that hadn’t been there when he met her all those years ago, else he would have remembered it. Then the TV let out another hearty “amen” and he decided she must have found Jesus and gotten off the crack.

She handed him back his card. “You sure that’s all you want, Johnny Ribkins?”

“That’s all.”

She sighed, “All you Ribkins are so peculiar,” then stopped because there wasn’t much more to say.

She nodded her consent and he picked up his shovel and that was pretty much that. And he was glad of it but also a little sad just from thinking about how different his brother’s last woman was from the first.

She shuffled down the dark hall. He waited until she was in the living room then positioned himself at the center of the bottom step and started walking straight ahead, towards the interstate. As he walked he couldn’t help but think about his brother’s first woman and the long ago year the three of them had lived in that house. And then again about how smooth and open-

ended the future still seemed the night she finally left, when Franklin sat on the couch, shrugged and said, “Good riddance.” Franklin couldn’t have been more than twenty-five at the time. Johnny remembered standing in the doorway, smiling to himself as he considered how young his brother looked— his half-brother, some twenty years his junior, whose existence he hadn’t even known about until his father slipped up one night at a party and confessed there was another son “out in the sticks,” and Johnny had been the one to go find him— while that first woman screamed and raged around the house, snatching things off the shelves and claiming them as hers before she stuffed them into her suitcase. Johnny remembered her yelling for Franklin to *look* at her, the territorial sound of her voice calling his name, even as she cursed it. As if she didn’t really believe she was going anywhere because Franklin was bound to realize he’d made the wrong choice and come running after her. But that wasn’t how things turned out.

When he’d walked twenty paces Johnny cocked his head to the left and started moving diagonally towards a large oak tree at the far corner of the yard. The truth was that first woman had been right about some things. Franklin did party too much, just like he laughed too loud, just like he scaled walls and maybe Johnny was leading him down a path he couldn’t handle. But how could anyone have known that at the time? Because Franklin was already a thief and a hustler by the time his big brother came to fetch him. It worked out all right because, as it turned out, Johnny was those things too. Johnny drew up blueprints and Franklin scaled walls and for the next ten years they sold the things they found on the other side of those walls right there in the antique shop Johnny inherited from their father. So when they argued it was always about other things.

“You gonna fill it back up?”

The woman was watching him from the living room window. “I mean when you finished.”

“Of course,” Johnny smiled. He was still smiling as she disappeared back into the shadows of a house built for someone else entirely.

He picked up his shovel. The first and the last, Johnny thought. In the end those were the ones that stuck to you, the ones you seemed somehow accountable for. In between there’d been many women; before Johnny met his own last woman – his wife, Analise – he’d had more than enough women of his own to worry about, just like he’d had his own life. Stopped paying attention to who Franklin had his arm draped over, hadn’t realized there was any need. So it might have been any one of them who wound up shuffling around Judy’s house, watching him dig up that hole. If Franklin had held out for another year he might have wound up in another house, in another city all together. Maybe even with a woman who, when she realized he was unconscious, would have had sense enough to pick up a phone and dial 9-1-1.



But that wasn't how things turned out. He sighed. A good woman might have saved his brother. Sometimes you just had to hold on long enough until one of them found you. Johnny was almost sixty by the time he met his wife and he knew for a fact that Analise's love was what finally gave him the strength to leave his brother behind. Made him stop the drinking, stop the thieving, start trying to remember what it meant to be a decent man. They'd had seven good years together before she got sick, which maybe didn't seem like a lot but were the most contented Johnny had ever known. Whatever giving up that wild, reckless life he'd led with his brother may have cost him, it had left him with no regrets.

Just a lot of debt. He looked down at his empty hole, aware that something didn't feel right. He had a near-photographic memory which was useful for drawing up blueprints of buildings he'd only walked through once or seen pictures of, but less so when it came to relatively small spaces he'd tramped through a thousand times. And he'd stood on every inch of that yard, watched it from every conceivable angle. Making it difficult to recall with any precision where exactly he'd stood when he first dug the hole he was looking for now.

But somewhere in the back of his mind he heard a voice call out, *Too late to punk out now.*

"Why you digging up that tree, old man?"

A girl in a pair of blue jeans and red t-shirt was watching him from the other side of the fence.

"What do you want?"

"I don't want nothing."

Johnny reached into his pocket. He pulled out a handful of coins, fished out the shiniest and tossed it over the fence. The girl caught it with her left hand.

"Now go on home."

"I am home," the girl said.

She pushed through the gate, walked up the front step and passed through the screen door. Johnny shook his head and wondered yet again why his brother's last woman had had to be such a trifling mess. 🌸

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Judge Jeff Kleinman's Comments:

Compelling premise that is both emotionally wrought and fast-paced. Solid narrative urgency, plot details unfold with nice pacing. The story has a very good voice and premise, in fact a very compelling premise. The stakes are high for its characters and the descriptions of people and settings are heartfelt. A novel with a unique perspective, overall a very entertaining story.

Ladee Hubbard is a writer living in Champaign, IL with her husband, Christopher Dunn, and two children, Isa and Joaquin. She grew up in St. Thomas, USVI and

St. Petersburg FL. She received a BA in English from Princeton University, a PhD in Folklore and Mythology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her MFA from the University of Wisconsin. A former visiting professor in the African and African Diaspora Studies program at Tulane University, her fiction and poetry have been published by Rosebud, The Crab Orchard Review, The MacGuffin, and Rhino Poetry. The 2009 Rhino poetry anthology featured her poem Colossus. In 2007 she was a finalist for the Glimmer Train Short Story Award for New Writers and in 2008 she won the Faulkner Society's gold medal for best short story.





THE INVENTION OF VIOLET: WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BE ABOUT FASHION

An essay by Amy Boutell

My novel about vintage fashion isn't really about fashion; it's about the past, our imagining of the past, whether that involves (for my cast of characters) conjuring and perhaps glamourizing a past that pre-dates our brief existence, or fashioning our recollections of a remembered past in a way that suits our particular needs in a particular moment, whether consciously or unconsciously, whether glossing over painful chapters, or romanticizing moments that time lends a brighter hue.

Vintage fashion, then, becomes a way of making meaning—perhaps a meaning based on the external, or our relationship to something external, which can also become a way of appearing, or seeming, and perhaps not-quite-being; this discrepancy between appearance and reality has always fascinated me, so it's no surprise that authenticity has become one of the thematic concerns of my novel. Vintage fashion also involves fantasy and play, which is another theme of this three-hundred-page Word document that will hopefully evolve into a book.

When I'm asked what my novel is about, my go-to answer is that it's "set in the world of vintage fashion in contemporary Los Angeles"—so of course, it has to do with fashion in some capacity. But vintage fashion seems very different from fashion to me; the kind of character to be fascinated by vintage clothing, whether scouring flea markets, Etsy, or vintage boutiques, is quite different from the sort who reads up on the latest trends and seeks out a fashion-forward item that is so of the moment.

The kind of character interested in vintage fashion (and of course, some characters may be interested in both fashion today and fashion from the past) is inherently interested in history. Chances are that she tolerates imperfection, for just as decades-old garments may glimmer with possibility and invite the imagination (where was this Twenties beaded frock worn, and with whom?), these treasures often show wear and tear, and may require considerable mending. Am I saying that there is more meaning involved in vintage fashion than plain old fashion? Perhaps more layers of meaning, or the kind of layers that interest me.

Occasionally someone will ask how I started writing

this particular novel, and there are a few different answers, all of which are true. One, I grew up with a mother who owned vintage clothing shops, so it's a world that I am quite familiar with; if she restored antique clocks, or collected rare vintage baseball cards, it's possible that I would be writing a different sort of book entirely (although one also very much concerned with time, so perhaps not that different after all). Two, in a way this novel evolved from a poem I wrote in graduate school about my closet full of vintage dresses; each stanza detailed a vintage dress that encapsulated a romantic relationship. For years I wondered how to expand that poem into a novel. Which brings me to my third answer: that the novel was born after spending a few hours with the owner of a vintage boutique in Los Angeles; I immediately went home and typed up a scene on my private blog (what's the point of a blog without readers? It's a really great way to store writing, and to start a novel, as it happens).

My process has involved equal parts research and spontaneous free-writing. I have met with curators at LACMA and FIDM's Museum; I have gone undercover at numerous boutiques in Los Angeles. I have read dozens of books about fashion from the Twenties through Forties; I have watched tutorials on YouTube on carbon dating and all sorts of scientific textile conservation processes. I sometimes forget that I don't actually have a background as a vintage fashion curator. And when I start looking into Master's programs in Costume Studies, I know that my research has gone just a bit too far.

As for how I write, I write longhand; I write on a blog; I write on notecards. I write in a notebook while waiting at the doctor's office; I write on the back of envelopes (on occasion, and I don't recommend this) when I have an idea and I'm driving to work. I dictate scenes into my iPhone, then get flustered with my virtual assistant, Siri, when I go back and correct her many errors. I write at home, I write at coffee shops, I write on the bus. I write on the weekends, I write during the evenings, I write at lunch; I write on vacation and holidays, and occasionally, I take a break and don't write much at all. (Although even during novel breaks, I am writing short stories and jotting down novel revision notes.)



When I started writing this piece, I said that my novel isn't about fashion in part because it's about more than fashion, and in part because I see vintage fashion as something very different from high fashion. But my intention is not to apologize for writing about a subject that some may find trivial. For I am aware that to be a woman writing about women's relationship to "fashion" is to risk being relegated to one category or another. But then writing is always a risk.

So maybe my novel about vintage fashion both is and isn't about fashion; it's about fantasy, memory, authenticity, the state of being, or "frock consciousness" (to use Virginia Woolf's term), as characters perform different versions of themselves as they dress and undress.

It's about how we imagine our past and our future, and how we envision what we want in the moment. Or something like that.



*Amy Boutell has an MFA from the Michener Center for Writers and has published short stories and nonfiction in Post Road, New Letters, Nimrod, Other Voices, Delirious Hem, The Coachella Review's arts and culture blog, and the **California Prose Directory**. Her work has received recognition from the Ragdale Foundation, the Norman Mailer Writers Colony, and Summer Literary Seminars. She lives in Santa Barbara, CA and works as an instructor at the University of California, Santa Barbara Writing Lab.*

I would advise anyone who aspires to a writing career that before developing his talent he would be wise to develop a thick hide.

-Harper Lee



THE INVENTION OF VIOLET

By Amy Boutell

*An excerpt from the third place novel, **The Invention of Violet**, for the 2014 Novel category in the Willam Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.*

THE EXHIBITION AT LACMA was called “Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail from 1700-1915.” The museum had just acquired a major collection of European garments—“from the boudoir to the royal court.”

I’d put on a peach satin cut-on-the-bias gown from the Thirties with flower appliqués at the bust, which made me look like I’d spent the day lying around on a lily pad. I accessorized with a gold and bronze silk Lily Dache turban, several sparkly rhinestone celluloid bangles, and my favorite pink and black floral beaded flapper handbag. The accessories were all items from the I’m-so-excited-I-get-to-vote-after-doing-my-part-in-the-war-effort-that-I’m-going-to-tape-down-my-breasts-and-dress-like-a-garconne era.

There were people gathered in small groups over on the concourse: tall reedy women wearing asymmetrical cocktail dresses by Rodarte and Proenza Schouler, their heels revealing red soles of Christian Louboutins; and scruffy fair-skinned men wearing closely fitting jackets and aviator glasses a tad too late in the day.

Penelope Goodyear wore a long silver shimmery backless dress that I’d seen in the window of Evolution, the vintage boutique on Melrose, while her twin sister Poppy was encased in a light bondage Vivienne Westwood gown. The Goodyear sisters, who had just launched their own fashion line, Bonne Annee, were chatting with the owner of Evolution, Calvin Armstrong, a very handsome gay man with sideburns and a widow’s peak who wore a seersucker suit and alligator shoes. There was Rosanna Arquette in a sexy black tuxedo dress, an alligator clutch, gladiator heels, and big gold paisley-shaped earrings that brought to mind “Desperately Seeking Susan.” She was flanked by two men in their 50s—a media mogul in high-top sneakers and a Dodgers baseball cap, and a tall lanky man in a red suit and pinstriped socks who resembled the Grinch and was either a film director and/or mystery writer, I wasn’t sure which since they looked exactly like (and may in fact be the same person). I recognized the strangely glamorous director of the Page Museum, who was chatting with a scruffy guy in a fedora. She was wearing a black eyelet Betsey Johnson baby doll dress from the late 90s that I once owned in high school (which made me feel old or young or just weird).

As I approached the Smoke sculpture in the atrium of the Ahmanson wing, I could’ve sworn I saw my old flame, Sebastian Ward, the British cultural theorist, with his long black dreads, seersucker jacket, and slight limp due to a soccer (or rather *football*) injury. I ducked inside the labyrinthine sculpture to hide so he didn’t see me. He seemed to be alone, as always, like a modern day *flaneur*. He really was such a dandy; all he needed was a top hat and a flower in his lapel. I suppose his Armani suit and Dolce & Gabbana “trousers” (British for briefs, not boxers) were the modern-day dandy equivalent. All I knew was that I was relieved that he no longer texted me photos of himself from his transatlantic travels. Still, it unnerved me to see him on my turf, i.e.: in Los Angeles, or in the United States for that matter, no doubt trolling the museum for women to have sex with and/or have proofread his obscure academic tomes that four people in the world would actually read.

After the coast was clear and he was out of sight, I hurried to the Resnick Pavilion and looked at a few portraits by the European masters in the lobby: lush dreamy depictions of fair-skinned blushing women. Then I grabbed a glass of champagne from a waiter dashing past with a tray, and people-watched for a few minutes before locating Nina and Tabitha Sterling.

The Sterling sisters were standing in front of the display that described the evolution of the silhouette through the 18th and 19th centuries, from wide-hooped silhouettes worn at court to the modern narrow silhouette still in favor today. Tabitha was resplendent in an emerald green peacock Thierry Mugler gown, and Nina looked fierce in her crisp black suit and snaky Judith Lieber jewelry. 🌸

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Judge Jeff Kleinman's Comments:

The novel has a good premise, the story features a likeable protagonist and the descriptions of the clothes are well done with vibrant descriptions.



SUNRISE FOR ASPHODEL

By Dan Turtel

*An excerpt from the fourth place novel, **Sunrise for Asphodel**, for the 2014 Novel category in the Willam Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.*

***Author's Note:** Three years after killing his brother in a drunk driving accident, Casey Larkin drives west with the intention of bringing his mother home from an asylum in California. Accompanying Casey is Max Gallatin, a childhood friend with a habit of stealing diaries and adopting their authors' maladies as his own. Casey's other companion is the ghost of his brother, who appears to him in hallucinations that are catalyzed and encouraged by frequent substance abuse and intentional sleep deprivation. In these deliria, the ghost tends to appear as half-human, half-beast, and as the novel progresses, Casey's deteriorating mental state allows the visions to spin themselves into his reality. The following excerpt is one of the more concrete examples of when these worlds collide. It takes place as Casey and Max spend the day with an old and estranged friend of theirs who lives in Eureka, only a day's drive from the asylum.*

LEANED BACK INTO the grass. Its soft bristles tickled my skin. Some time passed and I became aware of an easy wind trotting through the trees and brushing slightly up against my sky-turned body. Everything was laughing. The birds slowed down. The birds slowed down and left imprints of their images behind them like the double white lines in wake of jet planes. I raised my arms and let them fall, enjoyed the bending and singing of the blades of grass that clung like velcro to the hair of my arms.

I lost the day. At some point we were naked and dancing in the shallow stream. One girl whose name I never learned had red-brown hair in a small triangle just above her sex and the water clung there in small clean beads. She had petite breasts that hardened in the stream and she pressed these up against my chest and brought her lips over my ear and I breathed deeply. The stream was cold but not unpleasant. The red-brown girl went over to Max. Margot came and jumped on my shoulders and I held her legs below the knees and spun in circles with her clinging to my neck. We collapsed in the grass and she trickled her fingers down my spine. The birds slowed down and were almost still. They left imprints of their images behind them. I lost the day.

The sky was growing dark when it all calmed down. I felt we were leaving Eden. We covered our nakedness and walked back down to the house. We went in through the sliding screen door as to not engage in conversation with Margot's father. We were clothed and Eden was lost. The childlike boy said goodbye and left with one of the girls. We broke off onto separate couches which seemed like separate worlds. Margot sat with me; Max sat with the other two. We heard nothing of each other's conversations, but there was

giggling from Max's side of the room and the three of them disappeared onto the floor space behind the couch and articles of clothing were occasionally draped over the sofa's back.

Margot and I talked for a long time. She was very interested in God. I told her about Omaha. I told her that if she believed in free will she believed in God. It was the type of talk where you could use such phrases without feeling pretentious. I told her that if she believed in free will it meant she believed that if she could intercept my consciousness she could choose to do differently than I would. I told her that was a soul, and she nodded. I told her that to believe in a soul you had to believe in God, and that if you didn't then you couldn't really blame people for anything, because it was all only chemicals and the way they reacted to sound and light and violence. She asked me which way I thought it was and I said I did not know. She nodded.

She brought her lips to mine and sunk one knee into the couch on either side of me so that our chests, our hips were touching. She took a blanket from beside us and unfolded it and draped it around herself like a cape and wrapped us into a cocoon. I kissed her neck and pulled the loose collar of her shirt down beneath her breast and kissed her there as well. She pulled my shirt over my head and cast it to the side. She put her fingers gently down my chest and unbuckled my belt and reached her hand down. There was nothing for it. If it had worked just then I never would have left. I would have married her right there and never left the basement of that house.

But it didn't. It didn't and she sighed and smiled kindly and said it was alright. She kissed me on the cheek and came off of me and sat sweetly there with



her head against my shoulder. I could feel my heart beating fast and wondered if it bothered her. I could still hear Max and his two girls giggling and breathing. Margot kissed me on the cheek and rose and went behind the couch with Max and the other two girls. There were three pink circles on her spine just above her waste. I know those scars, I thought, pink and pale round spots along your vertebrae, crawling in the notches of your spine. I see you bare and on your back, the sheen of a yellow gymnasium floor beneath you and your breasts shaking you can almost hear the flesh echo in the vast emptiness of it. It could be any floor beneath you, beneath anyone. I know those scars, common as lungs. Anyone could have given them and so everyone did. Every goddamn one, Margot.

I felt hot and couldn't breathe. I walked out of the screen door and into the darkness and up towards the jeep. I found a pack of Max's cigarettes and a lighter and put them in my pocket. I sat on the soft wooden railing of the front porch and smoked and idly dragged my feet through the puddles of dried pine needles. After some time the door to the kitchen swung open and Margot came out in a white bathrobe. In the light of the house it was almost transparent and you could see the shadow of her naked body in the thin fabric. She stepped into the darkness and her shadow disappeared from within the robe. I wouldn't look at her. She came between my legs and put her face right in mine and I turned my head so that I didn't have to look at her.

"Are you alright?" she asked. She handed me a glass of water.

I refused it and said nothing.

"He needs it you know. To get over everything. Otherwise I wouldn't have."

"To get over what? What the hell does he have to get over?"

She looked at me, confused. "The whole mess with his brother. Don't you know?"

I felt my heart stop and move to my head and to my temples where the blood was pounding and pounding and pounding and "what whole thing with his brother" I heard my tongue say and in my ears I heard "the accident they got into when Max had been drinking. He hadn't been drinking very much but...his brother's spine cracked and he passed away right there. I thought you knew. How couldn't you know after coming across the whole country? Don't tell him I told you if you didn't know..."

I lost sight and I lost balance and fell and hit my head against the railing and did not feel the skin split and landed with a heavy thud on the wooden planks of the porch and spread the pine needles with my fingers and looked up. Margot gasped and ran inside to get help.

I stood up and walked off the porch and *there he sat, feebly lying in a puddle of his own blood. His bare torso was covered in scars and fresh wounds and the beautiful white skin of his face was torn apart and patches of flesh*

were raw or missing. The white fur of his legs, once spotted and pristine, were brown and filthy and the fur was depressed and matted with blood. I ran and kicked him and he whimpered. Leave me alone, I screamed, go to hell. Go somewhere.

"My legs carry me faster than my arms," he whined. "I fall. I roll forward under the power of my legs. My back is always hunched. I can feel my spine pulling. I can feel the burning where my torso ends."

"Shut the hell up," I screamed. "Go to hell, go somewhere." I kicked him again and he whimpered. I lifted him by the scruff of his neck and he yelped and I opened the trunk of the jeep and threw him inside and slammed the door and caught his paw and he yelped and howled and I opened the door again and hit him and pushed him so he was fully inside and slammed the door.

I ran around the house to the basement's screen door and slid it fiercely open. It stuck in the tracks and I ripped it from the doorway. Margot was standing saying something to Max and he had stood up and put on his underwear and saw me in the doorway and raised his hands defensively and I ran at him and balled my fist and drove it into his head again and again until Margot tried to pull me off and I swatted her staying arm and struck Max another savage blow to the jaw, which had split open again along the seams of his stitches.

He was barely conscious. I grabbed him by the ankle and dragged him from the house. He tried to hold onto the sliding door. I kicked him in the ribs and in the head and picked him up and threw him over my shoulder. I threw him into the trunk of the car with that sad creature and turned the keys in the ignition. I drove furiously west. I didn't know where I was going but I was going west.

The Pacific loomed before us and a line of white moonlight, like the spine of the earth, lay broken by ripples and waves across the endless surface of the water. The car hit a curb and the front tires landed in soft sand. I collected my entourage and ran out towards the sound of breaking waves. I dragged them in through the wet sand and through the shallows where the foam of broken waves crept up onto the continent and then receded back into the sea. I dragged them into the surf and the rough waves, which crashed and held us under.

The cold water broke over me and I felt I was breathing for the first time in years. The night was clear and cold. I was in the Pacific. In my palm was the vial of ashes. I tried to pull the cork from the vial but the cold had contracted the glass and it was in too tight so I hit it with my fist. The glass shattered and my knuckles bled. There was ash in the wound and it stung. I thrust my hand into the icy water where a shallow cloud of ash like silt hovered around me. A wave crashed over us and the ashes disappeared.

Max was floating beside me, sputtering and coughing. I put him on my shoulder and carried him from the ocean. We were knocked over twice by waves



Judge Jeff Kleinman's Comments:

The narrator is likable despite his depravity, creating a complex engagement with the reader. Some beautiful writing with a compellingly flawed narrator. Stunning poetic imagery throughout. The novel has an interesting voice and a good sense of rhythm.



*Daniel Turtel is a fiction writer from New York City. After growing up in Asbury Park, Daniel attended Duke University, graduating in 2013 with a degree in Mathematics and a minor in creative writing. **Sunrise for Asphodel** is his first full-length novel, and he is currently working on two more; **For Every Man, A Country** is a finalist in this year's Novel-in-Progress category and **Of Light and Violence** is included on the short list for finalists in the William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.*

Recommended Reading: Barn Burning by William Faulkner

Barn Burning is a story about justice and injustice, retribution, economic inequality, and fathers and sons. We see justice—and one's reaction to injustice—less in the opening cheese-smelling courtroom scene, presided over by the Justice of the Peace, than we do in the actions of Abner Snopes, a sharecropper who is forced to move his family for the 12th time in ten years. Abner is a man of “wolflike independence,” “courage,” and “ferocious conviction.” His habit is building small fires, neat and easy to control, but, in response to injustice, he shares the flame with the landowner's barn and other property. Faulkner reveals through the thoughts of Abner's son, Colonel Sartoris “Sarty” Snopes, that:

...the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

When the Snopes family arrives at their dilapidated tenant house, Abner goes to speak to the man who will “begin tomorrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months.” He takes Sarty with him through a grove of oaks and cedars to a fence of honeysuckles and Cherokee roses enclosing the landowner's brick-pillared home. Inside, Abner ruins a hundred-dollar imported rug by stomping horse manure on it and, thus, becomes further indebted to the landowner. Yet again, Sarty must decide among competing senses of justice—justice under the law or justice for blood, that of his father.

-Alex Johnson



OTHER FINALISTS

Finalists

Advice for the Wicked, Glen Pitre, New Orleans, LA
A Stone for Bread, Miriam Herin, Greensboro, NC
Mask of Sanity, Jacob Appel, New York, NY
Scoop the Loop, Charles Holdefer, Brussels, Belgium
The Lenin Plot, Barnes Carr, Houston, TX
The Truth Project, Tad Bartlett, New Orleans, LA
 and J. Ed Marston, Chattanooga, TN

Short list

And That's Called Sad, Bálint Hancz, London, UK
A Gathering Place, Vicki Salloum, New Orleans, LA
A Perfect Day for an Expat Exit, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malasia
A Stone for Bread, Miriam Herin, Greensboro, NC
Awakened Women, Helen Archeris, Newark, NJ
Baltimore, 1894, James Miller, New Orleans, LA
Bad of Country, Tadzio Koelb, New York, NY
Because of One Lie, Rachel Gillett, Houston, TX
Blue Yonder, Stephen Pett, Ames, IA
Body 571, Jeanette Hacker, Highland, IN
Bully Club Escapades, William J. Jackson, New Orleans, LA
Cane Press, Nancy Brock, Columbia, SC
Daughter of Man, Erica Obey, New York, NY
Dueling in Death's Back Yard, Thomas J. Berger, Miami, FL
El Centro, Andrew Valencia, Columbia, SC
Fine Fellows of the Center, Tim Knowles, Brewster, NY
Garapaima, Mark Spitzer, Conway, AR
Hang Me The Moon, Kate Bullard Adams, Charleston, SC
Island of Cards, Lori Yarotsky, New York, NY
Jellyfish Dreaming, D. K. McCutchen, Shelburne Falls, MA
Jessie Lost Her Wobble, Jerri Schlenker, Olive Hill, KY
La Doña and The Superhero, Bruce Douglas Reeves, Berkley, CA
Life is Big, Kiki Denis, New York, NY
Little Miss Chaos, Paula Hilton, Fleming Island, FL
Prism, Marie Browne, Henrico, VA
Schrapnel, Andrew M. Swanson, Chestnut Hill, MA
Red Sky At Morning, Ben Keller, Baton Rouge, LA
Resurgius: A Sex Comedy, E. M. Schorb, Mooresville, NC
Rustling of a Wing, Mal King, Santa Paula, CA
Retail, Emily Beck Cogburn and Jon Cogburn, Baton Rouge, LA
Same Pants, Joan Frank, Santa Rosa, CA

Sisters of Circumstance, Julie Weary, Vero Beach, FL
Somerset, S. K. Kalsi, Napa, CA
Somewhere Else, Someone Else, Paul Byall, Savannah, GA
Spirit Lamp, Gerry Wilson, Jackson, MS
Swimming on Highway N, Mary Troy, Sunn'd City, Matthew Minson, Spring, TX
SYN 11, Melody Riggins, Aiken, SC
Talking in Layers, Susie Slosberg, Bronxville, NY
Thanksgiving, Mary Arno, Clarence Center, NY
Thanatology, Jonathan Rosen, Burlington, CT
The Complete Illustrated Encyclopedia of God, George Geier, St. Charles, IL
The Gentle Art of Vitriol, Michael Sumner, Richmond, VA
The Golden Ford, Angus Woodward, Baton Rouge, LA
The Griffin Murders, Jon Gegenheimer, Gretna, LA
The Killer Who Hated Soup, Bill Brier, Thousand Oaks, CA
The Lonely Affair, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
The Look Thief, Elizabeth Harris, Austin, TX
The Man in Our Lives, Xu Xi, Hong Kong, China
The Night Was So Young, Kirk Curnutt, Montgomery, AL
The Orange Crush, Christopher David Rosales, Denver, CO
The Sea Change Years, David Blum, Washington, DC
The Sound of Trumpets, Lou Dischler, Spartanburg, SC
The Swan keeper, Milan Marsenic, Polson, MT
The Trouble With Secrets, Amy Martinez Bilger, New Orleans, LA
The Unattended Moment, Marcia Peck, Minnetonka, MN
The Way It Was for Ruby, Marie Parkins, Heathmont, Victoria, Australia
The Winter of Barren Dreams, Thom Brucie, Vidalia, GA
The World Next Door, Jennifer Itell, Arvada, CO
This Life, My Movie, Marion Barnwell, Jackson, MS
Traces of Veronica, Joseph Semien, New Orleans, LA
Trapped, Charles Craig, Decatur, GA
Wilderness, Irene Tervo, Simpsonville, SC
Write, She Said, Gay Walley, New York, NY

Semi-Finalists

A Confusion of Senses, Stephen Thomas Roberts, Lagrangeville, NY
A Dream Lives On, Alfred Stella, Aurora, CO



All the Valiant Brothers, James Gilliam, II, Warwick, NY
A Quiet Comes After, Michael Sumner, Arlington, VA
Amateurs and Radios, Mary Rowen, Arlington, MA
An Unexpected Gift from a Growling Fool, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
A Perfect Wife, Carlton King, Roslindale, MA
A Thousand Ships, Maureen McGranaghan, Pittsburg, PA
Awakening of the Summer, Yukihisa Yorker Kageyama, New York, NY
Awake The God of Day, Glen Wood, Hixon, TN
Bitters in the Honey, Marjorie Robertson, Irvine, CA
Bitter Root, Jenny Williams, Ridgeway, CO
Besotted, Melissa Duclos-Yourdon, Vancouver, WA
Black Sugar, Bernard Smith, Mandeville, LA
Bloodlines, Katharine Woodruff, Cat Island, Bahamas
Camp Happiness, Sharon Solwitz,
Cities of the Dead, Sue McMahan, New Orleans, LA
Dance and Turn, Kent Dixon, Springfield, OH
Dodging and Burning, Kate Baldus, Brooklyn, NY
Double Strand, Julia Franks,
Epiphany, Jan Breen, Glassboro, NJ
Even Bearing Gifts, Amina Lolita Gautier, Chicago, IL
Everyman, Shelly Conner, Chicago, IL
From Mirror After Mirror, Sean Cahill, Cincinnati, OH
From the Love of Strangers, Ellen Michaelson, Portland, OR
From Where They Left Off, Rodney Nelsestuen, Woodbury, MN
Gentle, April Ford, Oneonta, NY
Gift House, Denise Bogard, St. Louis, MO
Glimpse, Melissa Campbell, Madbury, NH
Goldberg Variations, Jonathan Arnowitz, San Francisco, CA
Gold River, Beth Castrodale, Jamaica Plain, MA
Here With the Saints, Paula Younger, Denver, CO
Homes, Derek Kamal, Marietta, GA
Just Kate, Ellen McKnight, Riverwood, IL
King Satan's Realm, Janet Taylor-Perry, Ridgeland, MS
Land of the Gypsy, Mary Lou Northern, Louisville, KY
Last Rodeo, Teddy Jones, Friona, TX
Lovers Across Time, Jennifer Sault, Sarasota, FL
Mansion of High Ghosts, James McAllister,
Marking the Division, Jacqueline Guidry, Kansas City, MO
Molly and Me, Tom Welsh,
None Shall Sleep, T. D. Arkenberg, Brussels, Belgium
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!, Gary Harvey, Russellville, AR
Only One Paris, Cindy Corpier, Irving, TX
Ophelia Untold, Alison McLennon, North Ogden, UT
Outta Here, Christine, Fadden, Tenino, WA

Paper Fields, Kelly Gusich, San Diego, CA
Preciosa, Amina Lolita Gautier, Chicago, IL
Purgatorio, Paul A. Barra, Reidville, SC
Pursued by Happiness, Paul M. Burkiewitz, Sacramento, CA
Redneck, Clayton Williamson, Raleigh, NC
Relative Truths, Tena Russ, Riverwoods, IL
Resurrecting the Night, D. Travis Bland, Cayce, SC
Resurrection of a Bagpipe Man, Steve Kash, Terre Haute, IN
Salet's Secrets, Lottie Brent Boggan, Jackson, MS
San Francisco Gold, Mark Mitchell, Taylors, SC
Sear, Julia Franks,
Slava, Lily Ounekeo, Richardson, TX
Soil, Candace Chambliss, Dallas, TX
Sol Seekers, Marie Browne, Henrico, VA
Sugarland Road, Robert Brown Butler, Gainesville, FL
Sunrise Unfolding, Liz Severn, Fargo, ND
The Black Madonna, Karen Nakamur,
The Bloody Bodkins, Paul McNulty, Dublin, Ireland
The Bronx Kill, Philip Cioffari, Fort Lee, NJ
The Circe Spell, Joe Andriano, Lafayette, LA
The Devil's Back, Marie Parsons, Prestonburgh, KY
The Doctor's Tale, Claire Applewhite, St. Louis, MO
The Divorce Diet, George Geier, St. Charles, IL
The Girl in the Bathtub, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
The Girl Petrona, Ingrid Rojas Contreras, San Francisco, CA
The God of Mumbai Train, Jay Thumar
The Grinding Season, Trisha Hukins, Larose, LA
The Killer Who Wasn't There, Bill Brier, Thousand Oaks, CA
The Long Trample, Robert Morgan Fisher, Woodland Hills, CA
The Lupin Gene, Matthew Minson, Spring, TX
The Offering, Lisa E. Melilli, Brooklyn, NY
The Other Side of the Shadow, Matt Fabius, Phoenixville, PA
The Promise of Water, A. Crossley Spencer, Summerfield, NC
The Quickness of Life, Melissa Crytzer Fry, Mammoth, AZ
The Resurrection of Jonathan Brady, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
The Road to Sturgis, George Geier, St. Charles, IL
The SADM Project, James Gilliam, II, Warwick, NY
The Sweet Not Enough, Anne Randolph, Denver, CO
The Swinging Urinal, M. A. Schaffner, Arlington, VA
The Two of Them, Delores May Dahl, Los Angeles, CA
The Walk of Life, Douglas John Moore, Los Angeles, CA
The Wounded, Cully Perlman, Mapleton, GA
Thin Country, Stan Kempton, New Orleans, LA
Tropic of Murder, James McEnteer, Las Vegas, NV
Two Worlds of Lilli Deville, Edward Greer, New York, NY



Urram Hill, Christian Fennell, Oakville,
Ontario, Canada
Waiting for Fidel, Thomas Sabino,
Wanted, Caren Gallimore. Christiansburg, VA
Wedding Scam, Ania Savage, Denver, CO
When the Hunters Came, Amber Godwin,
Conroe, TX

Where the Foxes Say Goodnight, Wendy Roberts,
Tucson, AZ
Where the West Ends, Peter Bergquist,
White Roses, Ellen Greenfield, Brooklyn, NY
Wild Horses, Julia Monroe Martin, Yarmouth, ME
Womb, Mary Hutchins Reed, Chicago, IL

Ramblings in the Rambler

Samuel Johnson believed that “a man may write at any time if he set himself doggedly to it.” And in 1750 he did just that, agreeing to write two “Rambler” essays each week while he was also composing his Dictionary of the English Language. The son of a bookseller, a voracious and thoughtful reader, and a close observer of life around him, Johnson was well-prepared for the task. From his active mind, fertile memory and his uncommon common sense come many of the ideas and subjects he clothed in an extraordinary flow of precise language, always balanced and often poetic. (Later in life he thought he was a failed poet. Not so; he smuggled poetry into his writing, as you will soon see.)

Boswell also reveals that Johnson kept a small book with notes and jottings, topics ready for further development. A few examples:

Youth to be taught the piety of age—age to retain the honour of youth.

Every great work, the work of one man.

In his first essay, March 20, 1750, he explained that it is his “...hope not much to tire those I shall not happen to please, and if I am not commended for the beauty of my works, to be at least pardoned for their brevity.” In March 1752, exhausted from the deadlines and the work, he writes, “Nothing is ended with honour which does not conclude better than it began. He that is himself weary will soon weary the public. Let him, therefore, not obstinately infest the stage until the general hiss demands him to depart.”

In Johnson’s 208 “Rambler” essays may be found timeless observations, sound wisdom, and excellent advice. Here are some brief excerpts:

He that would pass the latter part of his life with honour and decency must, when he is young, consider that he shall one day be old and remember when he is old that he had once been young.

A wise man is never surprised.

Whom does not constant flattery intoxicate?

He whose fortune is endangered by litigation will not refuse to augment the wealth of his lawyer.

Most authors are forgotten because they never deserved to be remembered.

Love only can soften life.

There are countless more. Years ago my plan was to assemble enough for a small book, to be titled, *Rambling in the Rambler: The Wit and Wisdom of Samuel Johnson*. Then came the bookstore, and there went time.

Good reading to you.

-Joe DeSalvo, owner, Faulkner House Books



GIVE ME YOU

By Kay Sloan

An excerpt from the winning novella for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Novella in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

PEEING ON HER SON'S SOFA would leave an indelible stain, Hilda knew that. She had listened to her daughter-in-law prattle on about her trip to Marrakech too long to suffer without retaliation. Parked on the leather sofa by the fireplace, she felt her bladder tempt her.

Really! All this foolish travel talk, just when she'd got going about the cost of her prescriptions. They were draining her savings, all eleven of those drugs, from heart to thyroid to an expensive anti-depressant. Why was she taking that, anyway? How could those white pills cheer her up when she worried how in hell she'd pay for them?

The guests, a neighborhood couple, looked incredulous over how the pharmacy cut her off for complaining they'd cheated on her Celebrex count. How many calls did she make before they forked over the two missing pills? "Twelve times?" the neighbor's wife asked, disbelief on her face. "Twelve!" she'd held up ten fingers, then two, a nice V for victory. Dammit, they'd been interested. Didn't her daughter-in-law know how hard it was to find someone at the retirement village who listened?

She'd given them the blow-by-blow on only three prescriptions when her daughter-in-law pulled out a Moroccan prayer rug, shifting the conversation from Medicare to Marrakech. Her own son Gabriel fetched scissors to clip the twine, unfurling dust along with their souvenir. No one ever humored *her* like that. He'd let his wife spend a fortune on a rug that didn't even belong in a contemporary house. They got what they deserved for trying to out-bargain an Arab.

"What's keeping Jason?" she asked. "I won't even recognize my own grandson."

The daughter-in-law flushed. "You saw him last week. Remember?"

Hilda looked at her blankly. What the hell was the name of Gabriel's wife? Colleen? Christine? It seemed like a trick they played, changing it back and forth, probably laughing later about how they'd fooled her. It was some goy name from the fifties, kids spoiled rotten. Anti-war, free love, marches? They thought they invented it all. Hell. She'd known young Brooklyn men who shipped themselves off to fight Franco, not parading around with protest signs or pushing daisies

into soldiers' rifles. Always posing for some camera, those kids.

Dammit, in her time, they took real action. Try smuggling *The Daily Worker* onto newsstands after the War ended. A friend of Seymour's did that until he was nearly beaten to death by thugs. Two black eyes swollen shut, a broken nose. Not a pretty sight. She downed her warm tap water with lemon, gulping, by the look the daughter-in-law threw her.

It was then that she let her bladder loose, a few comforting drops, the best revenge she could muster. A stain on their sofa? Her own performance art.

The warmth permeated her pants, reminding her of summers in the Brooklyn pool when peeing in the water took her back to infancy with the comfort of her own fluids. So soothing when one's bathing suit cut into the mid-thighs. Her mother had threatened to destroy the suit with the shears belonging to her father, the best tailor in Flatbush until his eyesight failed. Not even a skirt to hide her thighs! "You want the white slavers should take you?" Hilda laughed and won that battle, one of many. She'd taught her own mother English, taught her how to set a proper table, with forks and knives at each plate, not tossed like a glinting arsenal in the middle, up for grabs.

The pressure in her bladder grew. Again, she let go, relaxing into the private liquid pooling into the button-tufts.

"Have a good time, honey?" When did Jason come in? "I love you." All the time, 'I love you,' her daughter-in-law said, in that door-bell-chime voice. She never heard her own mother say those words. No one needed to, it was all there in the hard work they did for one another.

"Hi." Jason brushed his cheek against hers and turned, but she could see his hand against his flared nostrils. What the hell did they have against rose perfume?

"You still don't know how to give a proper kiss?" She stuck her index finger in her cheek, but he was gone, tugging at his jeans. "What's this?" she called to his back. "Your underwear's showing. Your tush'll be next. You want I should see your bare tush?" Someone had to criticize him. All he ever heard was praise.

"My, he's tall." It was the neighbor, the woman.



“And still growing! New shoes every month.” Everyone chuckled along with the daughter-in-law. What’s the humor? On the Lower East Side, before her father moved them to Brooklyn, she’d worn shoes so small they blistered her delicate feet. Soles thin as paper! Who had money for shoes? She was a tiny thing, sick so often that, though the oldest, she remained the family runt. It took her a long time to recuperate from being born. When the tenement grew cold, she’d bundle up and walk to the library to curl up with Dickens or head to the Met. “Venus and the Lute Player.” She’d sit for hours, memorizing Titian’s painting like one of the Vachel Lindsey poems assigned at school. Red velvet you could practically reach into the canvas and stroke. Beautiful Venus, wearing nothing but a pearl necklace and crown of jewels bestowed by Cupid himself. And the handsome lute player, oh so in love with her! At night, when her fingers drifted down to explore the pleasures in the crevice between her legs, she imagined stroking the gold velvet of his sleeve while he held her, lute laid aside while he kissed her neck, whispering he loved her more than Venus. Her mother would have whipped her with her biggest wooden spoon if she’d known.

Titian. There was a great painter. And now a Moroccan floor rag, they call art.

There was rattling in the kitchen, the sound of a carbonated drink being opened. Jason. “Again, he’s drinking the soda? All the time, soda.”

“Ma, the hearing aids are working fine.” Gabriel was staring at her, amazed.

“Should I cancel the audiologist?” It was Colleen, relieved.

What did they know? She wasn’t wearing them. Too deep in her ears, whistling if she used the telephone, squealing when the nurse combed her hair.

Gabriel still stared. “God, Ma. Your hearing’s better than mine.”

“Here, Nana.” Jason held out a glass.

She waved it away. “What’s with the ice?”

He set it down anyway. What, he thought she’d wait until it melted? “Mom got you sodas.”

“I thought you’d like them.” Colleen had that concerned look, the frown with a smile. “It’s soda you said Dr. Brown’s used to make. A phosphate? I got a case for you.”

“What would I do with a case of that stuff?”

“You could offer it to friends at Oak Manor,” said Colleen. “Old-fashioned cream soda.”

Old-fashioned? Who the hell did they think she was?

If only they could see her with Seymour in the Adirondacks at Crystal Lake in the thirties. Nude swimming, socialist speakers, orgasms against a horse’s pounding saddle, Seymour giving a talk on their trip to Russia. Seymour, having an affair with a pretty singer named Rose barely out of her teens, whose husband believed in free love. Whose husband was a kinky lover, reeking of smoke from the Raleighs he would

carefully extricate from his shirt pocket before he peeled off his clothes, always his pants before his shirt, as if no one ever taught him the proper way to undress. Jake O’Brien. She liked to call him by his full name, a teasing reminder that he was the only Catholic there, and he’d laugh in that easy way of his. Linen pants with pleats, she remembered those, the way he would slide them over his fanny along with his underpants. Then an uncircumcised schlong, with nuts as bald as two spaldeens. The first time she’d seen him without his pants, she understood why the Italian girls called it a hose. Those wild things Jake did! He’d pull her over his knee and the fun would begin. When Seymour noticed the pink blush on her rear, she had to tell Jake they couldn’t play like that again. What had she told Seymour? Nude sunbathing, that was it, and he believed her. Unexposed areas always reddened first.

With his clothes on, though, Jake was insufferable, telling the same repertoire of jokes as if they were brand-new. He repeated them so often that after a while, he’d say the punch line and expect them to laugh. What was that joke about super sex? His favorite.

She couldn’t blame Rose for wanting her Seymour.

Later, Rose wanted her, too. Her, little Hilda Goldfrank from the Lower East Side! Rose made love better than her husband, with her soft skin, the mysteriously petalled entry between her legs, forested with curly hair. Rose’s contours amazed her. Had it been Titian’s Venus she’d desired, not the silly musician with his velvet sleeves and turned-up nose? She and beautiful Rose, a confused tangle of legs and hips in a deliciously secret meadow. They were wild angels, set loose in the summer mountains.

“Ma?” Gabriel brandished a photo. “Want to see this one, too?”

Had there been an earlier one? She slanted it toward the lamp with its bulb as dim as the daughter-in-law. It was a rug, held at the corners by her son and some mustachioed man with a grim smile slitting his face. A Moroccan.

“That’s the one we almost bought,” the daughter-in-law said.

“The one that got away? How big was it?” She handed it back.

The neighbor laughed and she liked him immediately. “Hey, that’s pretty good. She’s funny,” he told Gabriel. “Sharp mind.” Why did they talk about her as if she weren’t there? Jackasses!

She didn’t suffer fools gladly. At the retirement village, she always passed three men clustered at the same breakfast table, the sort who’d never have passed muster at Crystal Lake. So few of them, and they had to hunker down like trained chimps to slurp their oatmeal? Once, she stopped to twit them. “What? You’re afraid women bite?” Roy, the one whose bald head she’d love to stroke, gave her that perfect-white-denture smile of his. “But none of you women have teeth,” he said. She was quick, as usual. “May you be so



lucky. May teeth be the only hard part you're missing!" "Ah, you're up on the wrong side of the bed again, Hilda. Go back to sleep." Roy waved his spoon at her as if batting at a fly.

Sleep? Forget about it. Just another bottle of pills. She would take one and lie wide-awake, wondering if taking another would kill her. She'd led a one-woman strike against the pharmacy by refusing her co-pay. Rose would have been proud!

Where was Rose now? Surely she'd made it into old age in tip-top shape, not even a bunion or chin hair. That Rose, damn her. Oh, to be with her at Crystal Lake again in 1939, that glorious summer before the world exploded and splintered their lives. What she would give to hear that voice of Rose's!

"Roses?" Colleen gave her a quizzical look.

"You're talking to yourself again, Ma," said Gabriel.

"And what's wrong with that?" she asked. "My best conversations are with myself."

"Ha! Did you hear what she said?" The neighbor turned to his wife. "Some of her best . . ."

"How do you give a ninety-year old man something he doesn't have?"

"Did you say something, Ma?" Gabe leaned toward her.

She tilted her chin at the neighbors. "I have a joke your friends would like to hear."

His face froze. She knew that expression, like he was on the verge of having one of his sneezing fits in synagogue. Trapped. He looked at the guests and dutifully caught their attention. "My mother has a story to tell."

"A joke," she added, and they perked up like surprised rabbits.

Colleen swooped in from the kitchen. "Would anyone like coffee?"

"Ma's telling a joke." Gabriel's smile spread like a ghastly crack.

Colleen opened her mouth and took a second before speaking. "Jason, put some coffee on."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"How do you buy a ninety-year old man a birthday present he doesn't have?"

"I don't know how to measure it."

Colleen shot Jason a sharp look. "Get in the kitchen and I'll show you."

Half the audience, gone! She tilted her chin higher

to show it didn't matter.

"Go ahead, Ma. What do you give a ninety year old man?"

"Ah, she has a boyfriend!" The neighbor woman eyed Gabriel playfully. "Do you have a boyfriend, Hilda?"

"If I did, he wouldn't be ninety."

"Okay, Ma. We're listening."

Now she wasn't sure how the joke continued. Stupid interruptions. Oy! How did it go? "His friends want a special gift. He's ninety, he deserves it."

"I'll say! He must lead a healthy life." The neighbor woman beamed to feign interest.

Shut the fuck up, she wanted to say. "Cake? Too ordinary. They want to surprise him."

"And give the poor man a heart attack!"

"Shut up and listen." Hilda savored the woman's gasp. "They hire a hooker."

"A what?" Now the man was interrupting, but at least he had a real question. His head dipped to the side as if he couldn't believe what he'd heard.

"A *whore*," she said, louder. "She bursts into his room, high heels, short skirt. A whip." This was better than Jake's version. "She's got breasts like watermelons. She says, 'You want super sex?'" Hilda paused, giving the joke its proper suspense. "What does he say? 'Give me soup!'" She lifted her chin, triumphant.

Silence hung for a second before the neighbor slapped his knee. "Hah! That's actually funny." He turned to his wife. "You get it?"

She re-crossed her legs, stone-faced. "Of course I got it," she said coldly. 🌸

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Judge Moira Crone's Comments:

An evocative exploration of the lives of four members of the "greatest generation" who are more than willing to reveal their sins, furies, and many detours from greatness—as each in her or his turn contemplates their shared, and scandalous history. The piece tells the story of two couples who were wild and politically radical as young adults in the 30s, and how their indiscretions colored everything else that followed. But it becomes an evocation of how time adjusts all wounds, and attitudes, and how even identity and ego and "who we are" wear away—the hardship of this fact, and also the beauty of it.



Bertie Deming Smith with her late husband, Joe Smith, a much loved Louisiana newspaper publisher, at a Words & Music event. The 2014 Novella Prize was made possible by a grant from Mrs. Smith and the Deming Foundation.



*Kay Sloan grew up in south Jackson and left Mississippi for Santa Cruz, where she graduated from the University of California. Her first publication was a poem she wrote to her mother in an effort to explain how a Southern Baptist daughter could become a hippie. Southern Exposure was kind enough to print it. Sloan went on to publish two novels, **Worry Beads** and **The Patron Saint of Red Chevys**. Respectively, they received the Ohioana Award for Fiction and distinction as a Barnes and Noble “Discover Great New Writers” book. Her poetry chapbook, **The Birds Are On Fire**, won the New Women’s Voices prize at Finishing Line Press. Her essays, poetry and stories have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Southern Review*, *Fiction*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Nimrod*, among other venues. An Ohio Arts Council Award supported the writing of her current novella, **Give Me You**, written as writer-in-residence at Provincetown’s Fine Arts Work Center. With a doctorate in American Studies, Sloan has written three books on American cultural history. **The Loud Silents: The Origins of the Social Problem Film**, and a documentary, **Suffragettes in the Silent Cinema**, distributed by WomenMakeMovies, have been called groundbreaking work in silent film history. Her first book, co-authored with William H. Goetzmann, **Looking Far North: The Harriman Expedition to Alaska, 1899**, catalyzed the PBS documentary **The Harriman Expedition: Re-Traced**. She is now working on a book on white Southerners who rejected their dominant culture to join the Civil Rights Movement. Sloan earned her advanced degrees in American Studies from the University of Texas and now teaches literature and cultural history at Miami University of Ohio.*

Who Makes the Competition Go?

It’s people who make our competition a success, starting with **Jude Swenson**, who for several years has helped ensure the competition by sponsoring the big ticket Novel Prize and then buttonholing others to support the prize fund. She has been assisted enormously by **Bertie Deming Smith** and **Theodosia Nolan**, two sisters who not only have helped with the competition but who have funded other projects such as *Words & Music, a Literary Feast in New Orleans* and *Juleps in June*. Then, there **Rosemary James** and **Joe DeSalvo**, co-founders; the **Mary Freeman Wisdom Foundation** and **Nancy & Hartwig Moss, III**, all of whom have funded the competition since it began; and **David Speights**, who is an annual sponsor.

And, then, of course, it’s you, the writers who entered your work in the competition, the reason we exist.

We thank you all most sincerely!





TICKFAW TO SHONGALOO

By Dixon Hearne

An excerpt from the runner up for the 2014 Novella category in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

IF YOU WANT THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH, they sent you to the right place. Come on in and sit down there in the parlor. I can tell you the whole damn thing: the fat little Catholic postmaster, the Bible thumper and the towhead, the cathouse, the popsicle woman, the postmaster law suit and kangaroo court, and Bert's 84-year-old mama doing a swan dive off a Gulfport pier—every bit of it.

Folks know I mind my own business and don't speak a word against nobody, but to tell you the truth, Bert Dilly is seven kinds of crazy. Did you ever see one of them little pug dogs? Ugly as can be till you get to know one personally. That's Bert Dilly up and down. Not one redeeming feature, and yet there's something kind of fascinating when you look him square in the face. Not ugly so much as odd. Goes right along with his personality. That man goes through life either excited or surprised. I can't tell the difference sometimes—he wakes up in a new world every day. Ain't got good sense on Monday, and come Tuesday morning he can quote you the **King James Bible** chapter and verse. Got it from his daddy, Vesper Dilly, some folks say, but he ain't around to verify it. He died years ago when he got hit by a truck crossing the street downtown. Doctor said it broke every bone in his body. Knocked him 50 yards—somebody paced it off—and wrapped him around a pole right in front of the Two Moon Café. Not one drop of blood—but the look on that man's face still haunts some folks to this day.

Anyway, his mama, Lulu Dilly, is still alive and living at the rest home. Nearly dropped dead away herself when she picked up the paper one morning and found Bert's picture on the front page under the headline: "Postmaster Shipped Out Special D." Poor thing fell slap off her rocker and into a flower bed. Bert really takes after her side of the family, the Pitchers.

Old man Pitcher, Lulu's daddy, lived way out the Jonesboro Highway, damn near to Chatham. His family's been squatting on that land for four generations—won it in a poker game they say. But there's always been a dispute over it, whether or not his great-great-granddaddy won it by cheating. By the time anybody came forward with a formal complaint, the property had changed hands and the Pitchers

had moved in lock, stock, and barrel—the whole clan. And wasn't a lawyer in the state who'd touch it, since gambling was as illegal as any other gentleman's agreement. I'm talking the very land Bert still owns out there—the last of the Pitcher clan with any legitimate claim to it.

But with so many Pitchers buried on that property, who in hell would want to fight him over a cemetery? They strew them bodies out all over the place, like they needed a lot of elbow room. Ain't none of them even got markers or headstones anymore. Back in the 1920's, one of the brothers got mad at the others and plowed up the property from fence to fencepost, and they lost all track of who and where everybody was laid to rest. Damndest mess the parish ever heard of. And Bert stuck right in the middle of that one, too.

Bert's the kind that wouldn't deliberately hurt a cockroach, then turns right around and causes people misery. He's about your size, only rounder in the middle and walks pigeon-towed. No, I take that back. Bert Dilly ain't never *walked* nowhere—he's either trotting or galloping, that bushy shock of hair bounce-bounce-bouncing as he goes. Ain't got time to get it cut, he says, with all his work at the post office. And always humming. Lord, sometimes I'd like to take a broom handle and knock his hummer into the next town. Miss Hannah—that's his sister—she got tired of it one time and stuck a hot pepper in his meatloaf sandwich and that shut him up for a pretty good while. You'd never know from that little packrat house of his, but he's a clean man.

Right out of high school, Bert's daddy asks him if he wants to go to college down in Baton Rouge, and he tells his daddy no. And the very next day, he gets hisself a job at the packing plant with that K-Billy Bingham—his real name's Kingston Wilbert Bingham, so you can see why he shortened it. I tell you, them two should have been surgically separated back in grammar school. Bert can stay here, but I ain't got a Christian way to tell you where that damn K-Billy can go. You can't miss him, though—Bert, that is—him and that big-tooth smile and sky-blue eyes. Never cared a lick about anything but other people's business.

That's how the whole damn post office mess and law



suits started. He does in fact seem to know everybody's business in town. Not that he would ever think about forcing open their mail, but he's found a fair amount of it poorly sealed through the years. And, of course, he took it upon himself to personally inspect such items: love letters, divorce papers, deeds of trust, eviction notices, girlie magazines, Hollywood lingerie, men's trusses—whatever looked too good to just stick in a postal box or on the truck without a pinch or squeeze or a good shaking. And if the contents accidentally fell out—which they often did—he made sure they were secured when they left his counter. After all, he was the postmaster, he reminded folks, and responsible for every last piece of mail that shows up at his door—coming or going.

They would've reported him long ago, except that might perjure themselves for urging him on, asking who got what, who's doing what, and so on. Used to be, he just kept everybody up to date from postcards that came across his counter. But then it got much worse. Before long, he could tell you the contents of every last parcel that passed through the post office. Then somehow a regional postmaster got wind of the situation and came calling one day—without warning.

Soon as the Bunn sisters shuffle out the door, the man slaps a lock on it and posts an **OUT TO LUNCH** sign. We all know Bert Dilly brings his lunch to work every single day. Sits right there and eats it between inspecting parcels. That pitiful soul must've done some squirming and wiggling. Ten or twelve people pawed at the door and left their nose prints on the glass trying to see what was up. The only thing they could report though was a lot of finger wagging and hand wringing. And when the door finally pops open again an hour later, the visitor just smiles pleasantly at folks waiting at the door, positions his postmaster hat and charges off down the block to his government car.

By this time Nita Rae is back from lunch and wants to know what happened. There in the back room sits poor old Bert, white as a number 10 envelope, babbling and fanning himself. When he's finally able to put two words together, he reaches out for Nita's arm and pulls her close. "I'm fired." is all he says. No need to ask why, she already knew. And though she never said a word, the whole town knew about it before closing time. We find out later that Crete Waller had dragged it out of that district postmaster down at Peabow's filling station; and everybody knows there's only one man in town snoopier than Bert, and that's Crete Waller. Shut off his pumps and called every last soul he knew with the news. Lord, folks was talking about it from Tickfaw to Shongaloo.

This might be a good place to tell you about how the Bible thumpers got mixed up in the middle of all this. I know for a fact they wish they'd minded their own damn business. But like every other do-gooder reformist, they thought the Good Lord must have sent them here for a purpose. Funniest-looking couple

you ever saw, the so-called preacher a tall, gap-tooth, skinny man with crow-black hair parted in the middle. And with him is this squirrely little towheaded man in a yellow pin-stripe suit. They just wandered onto Bert Dilly's property one morning and made camp.

The very next day, here comes the preacher and the towhead charging up Main Street like they was bringing news of the Second Coming. I almost crossed the street to avoid them. And Lordie, they have a mouthful to tell. Seems old Bert came out to greet them and they end up giving him the third degree. Yessir! Now you'd think the old fool would run them off with his shotgun, being so pushy and nose-y. But, no! He escorts them right into his parlor and tells them the whole story—at least his version of it anyway. "Trumped up charges!" he tells them. "Harmless little thing," he says. And they believe every word, naturally. But what can you expect when you get three idiots together with only one brain between them.

So anyway, the two Bible thumpers take it to the street, and before the clock over at Homestead Savings strikes noon, that story has made its way from one end of town to the other. And it's damn surprising, let me tell you, to find out that Bert had been forced at gunpoint to open all them packages and letters under the direction of the Bunn sisters—please don't ask, it'd take too long to explain. Just know that their daddy owned most of this town at one time, and they think they still do. Folks just naturally hop when they say to.

Years ago, my Aunt Effie used to work out at the slaughterhouse with Bert's mama. Back in the Teens, before she ever married and moved to town. Laziest man you ever saw, Uncle Tweet. Oh that wasn't his real name, just something that stuck to him when somebody at the mill told the lazy lump he better learn to *tweet* for his pay. Bert's mama, Lulu, was kind of sweet on him and found out he'd been courting Aunt Effie. There was a big ruckus one day, and Miss Lulu threw a rump roast at Aunt Effie and knocked her plumb cock-eyed. So Effie don't do nothing but lock her in the cold storage closet for a couple of hours. And when they come and let her out, Effie tells them the door must have a faulty lock. Needless to say, that was the end of the little feud. Except that Bert's mama did everything she could to discourage him from courting me. She could have saved her breath and her blood pressure, too. I turned him down flat every time he asked me out. Let him court the old Bunn sisters, I said to myself.

Anyway, the Bible thumper and the towhead decide they've got work to do here, so they pitch camp at the edge of town and come trotting in every damn day to sell their Bibles and preach forgiveness and salvation on the street corner. Bert and K-Billy visit them out at their little camp site in the evenings, and before we know it they're thick as thieves. I guess old Bert thinks these two fools can pray him back into the post office.

I see we're both out of tea. Got a fresh pitcher out in the kitchen—I think better with a glass of tea in my



hand. And *mercy*, there's so much tell. ☁

© Copyright, 2014, Dixon Hearne, Excerpt from the Novella, **Tickfaw to Shongaloo**, forthcoming in 2015 from the University of Southeast Missouri State University Press, published here with permission of the author.

Judge Moira Crone's Comments:

This novella is what would happen if **Eudora Welty's *Why I Live at the PO*** grew up and had nine children, and stuffed them all in one village. It has many of the same elements—enough eccentrics to start five freak shows, a very nosy postmaster, a town that rallies to defend their crazies, and to top it off, three days of testimony in a Baton Rouge courthouse meant to keep everybody in one small town in everyone else's business until the end of time. Good, funny writing, and quirky characters.

*Dixon Hearne teaches and writes in Mississippi and Louisiana. Much of his writing draws greatly from the rich images in his daily life growing up along the graceful river traces and bayous in West Monroe, LA. After many years of university teaching and writing for research journals, his interests turned toward fiction and poetry—and the challenge of writing in a different voice. He is the author of several recent books, including **Native Voices, Native Lands and Plantatia: High-toned and Lowdown Stories of the South**—nominee for the Hemingway Foundation/PEN award and winner of the Creative Spirit Award-Platinum for best general fiction book. His work has been twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has received numerous other honors including the Spur Award. He is editor of several recent anthologies, including **A Quilt of Holidays**. His work can be found in magazines, journals, and anthologies, including: Oxford American, New Orleans Review, Louisiana Literature, Big Muddy, Cream City Review, Wisconsin Review, Post Road, New Plains Review, Weber-Contemporary West, Mature Living, Woodstock Revisited, **The Southern Poetry Anthology: IV-Louisiana**, and forthcoming in **Down the Dark River** (Southeast Louisiana University Press). Dixon's new novella, **Tickfaw to Shongaloo**, is forthcoming from Southeast Missouri State University Press. He is currently at work on new short story and poetry collections. He is a frequent presenter and an invited speaker at the Louisiana Book*

Festival and other events.



When you re-read a classic you do not see in the book more than you did before. You see more in you than there was before.

-Clifton Fadiman



OTHER FINALISTS

Other Finalists:

A Different Life, Philip Erickson, St. Paul, MN
Cold War, Farah Halime, Brooklyn, NY
Further, Deborah Jannerson, New Orleans, LA
Juanita, Kent Dixon, Springfield, OH
Not the Usual Sleep, Tim Knowles, Brewster, NY
Resistance, Amina Gautier, Chicago, IL
Tansy, William Thrift, Columbia, SC
The Act of Theft, Robert Raymer, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
The Little Girls, Lori Fennell, Lake in the Hills, IL
The Year We Froze, Stan Kempton, New Orleans, LA
Witness, Melanie Naphine, Frankston, Victoria, Australia
Yankees Angels, Robert H. Cox, New York, NY

Short List:

A Troubadour's Tale and Other Sad Siren Songs, Elissa Huang, Hoboken, NY
Diorama, Eleanor Verbicky-Todd, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Downfall of Paris, Joe Dwyer, Sacramento, CA
Immaculate Mulch, Raul Palma, Lincoln, NE
La Vie et La Mort de Pierre Doucet, Perry Glasser, Haverhill, MA
Newborn, Agustín Maes, Oakland, CA
Picaflores, Gail Waldstein, Denver, CO
The Drowned Phoenician Vintner, Harley Mazuk, Boyds, Maryland
The Jane, Mary Hutchins Reed, Chicago, IL
Revolution, Mike Palacek, Saginaw, MI

Semi-Finalists:

A Walk in Her Shoes, Jan Bryson, Westford, MA
Cold Storage, Sarah Cedeño, Brockport, NY
Cursed, M. L. Dunser, Columbus, MS
Dream Openings, Darrell Henderson, Opp, AL
Griffin Tames a Bully, Ken Mask, Lafayette, LA
In What Distant Deep Skies, Shelly Drancik, Chicago, IL
Love Forever Thine, Sylvia Veronica Scott, The Yak and the Yeti, Firecat Hat, Irvine, CA
This is the Story that God Wanted Me to Write, Billy Cosby, Versailles, KY
We of the Grid, Sean Green, San Jose, CA



SHAKESPEARE'S ROYAL BASTARD

By Lawrence Wells

An excerpt from the runner up for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Nonfiction book in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

*Editor's Note: In this excerpt from the winning manuscript, **Shakespeare's Royal Bastard**, the year is 1987. The author, Lawrence Wells, has been hired by the University of Mississippi to ghost-write a book for Mrs. Ford, a wealthy widow in Jackson, MS. The book is to be about the theory that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, was Shakespeare. She gives him a tour of her home. They circle each other, trying to create rapport but also establish boundaries.*

WAITING FOR MRS. F. TO POP the question—Who do you think Shakespeare was?—reminds me of my first teaching interview. It's 1966. I'm 25, fresh out of grad school, the ink not dry on my M.A. degree. The president of Murray State University is telling me his life's story. He coached basketball at a rural high school. After he was promoted to principal, he continued coaching the team.

"Why should the school hire another coach? Did you play basketball? Well, no matter. How much did the department chairman offer you? Is it \$650 a month?" He leans over the desk. "I'm gonna make that \$655." And this was a respectable job.

Take the ghost-writing gig, support your family, pay the college tuition.

Exiting the boudoir she takes me into the sitting room. Like the rest of the house it is unheated. I'm shivering in my sports coat. On the table is a stack of papers neatly arranged: my resumé, clippings of reviews, samples of magazine articles. A picture on a book jacket gazes at me in reproach. I was youthful and cocksure then.

"I have emphysema," she says. "Did Jane tell you?" She coughs and hacks.

"Sorry to hear it." There's no putting off the other debilitating issue. "So who do we think was Shakespeare?"

"It sure as hell wasn't the man from Stratford!" She coughs up phlegm, spits into a handkerchief, and launches into a history of Edward de Vere. Born in 1550, he was the son of Henry de Vere. He earned a bachelor degree at Oxford University, a master's at Cambridge, a law degree at Gray's Inn; began writing poetry and drama, a Renaissance Man who composed plays, poetry, music, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Great Chamberlain in charge of staging entertainments at

court. His family crest featured a lion shaking a spear. His contemporaries called him "Spear-Shaker."

Like cannon balls she stacks the names of authors opposed to the orthodox view. Charles Dickens, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, John Galsworthy, and Ralph Waldo Emerson had doubts about the actor and playwright, Will Shaksper (she spells it Shaxper; I spell it Shaksper). Henry James considered Shaksper one of the greatest hoaxes ever perpetuated on an unsuspecting public. Mark Twain said, "Shall I set down the rest of the Conjectures which constitute the giant Biography of William Shakespeare? It would strain the Unabridged Dictionary to hold them. He is a Brontosaur: nine bones and 600 barrels of plaster of paris."

She explodes in mirthless laughter, then continues, "It was Sigmund Freud who said, 'The name William Shakespeare is most probably a pseudonym behind which there lies concealed a great unknown.'"

She has the whole of it by heart. Elizabeth the First was head over heels in love with Edward de Vere until he began writing poetry that she considered treasonous. "Naturally he wanted credit for his work but Queen Bess wouldn't allow it. She was prob'ly the one who came up with the pseudonym, 'Shakespeare.' She couldn't risk de Vere signing his own name to the sonnets, because after Shakespeare dedicated *The Rape of Lucrece* to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, everybody knew Henry was their son."

The proverbial light goes on: 1) Southampton was the 'Fair Youth' of the sonnets; 2) Shakespeare wrote sonnets which hinted that the Fair Youth was Elizabeth's illegitimate son and unacknowledged heir; 3) denied his birthright, Southampton joined the Essex Rebellion and tried to seize the throne by force.

"*Sonnet One-Twenty-Seven*," says Mrs. F., in her fervor no longer short of breath, "tells of a child born



in the shadows, a black prince who does not bear Beauty's name. The poet demands that "Beauty," or Queen Bess, acknowledge their son." With a hand to her chest, she rasps:

*In the old age black was not counted fair,
If it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame.*

Then she launches into an oration about **The Book of Babies**, a list of royal bastards circulated among the crown heads of Europe. She also is fascinated with a Shakespearean scholar named Percy Allen, who held a séance and claimed that the ghost of Edward de Vere confirmed that he was Shakespeare, and that Queen Elizabeth secretly gave birth to their son, Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton.

Out of the blue, a blazing non sequitur. "I've picked out a title!" She flashes a neon-bright smile. "**Shakespeare's Royal Bastard**. How do you like it?"

I scribble SRB dutifully in my note pad and hear myself saying, as if from a tape recorder with bad batteries, "Uhhh, it miiightwoorrk."

"Does the world need another book about Edward de Vere?" I can't believe I said this. My impertinence has her gasping for breath, spittle flying, long red nails stabbing the air. Seeking a familiar target, she rails about her failed stage play, **Shakespeare and Elizabeth Unmasked**, having been ignored by the Oxford "in-crowd." She didn't expect praise, didn't aim that high, but they could have given her an A for effort. What had any of them done besides write a monograph? "Goddamn prima donnas!" I scribble on my pad: Who are the prima donnas? She shoves a self-published playbook across the coffee table. It is inscribed to me. The meaning is clear. We're going to send the prima donnas to hell.

Anonymity is looking pretty good to me. Otherwise, some wag seeing our self-published volume gathering dust might be tempted to write "R.B." after my name. What if I used a pseudonym? Ronald Bragg, Ralph Boozer, Richard Blunder. I make a note to read the small print in my contract.

None of Mrs. F.'s material is original. She read J. Thomas Looney's "**Shake-speare**" **Identified** and stole his playbook. The real story I perceive now, sitting in her cold, dusty house, is one of loneliness, longing, and thwarted desire. She is King Lear's fourth daughter, the one born in secret. To her, Edward de Vere not only is Shakespeare but abides in this house, this room, wherever she goes. As Satan says in **Paradise Lost**, "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell." De Vere could be standing beside the coffee table, a gold toothpick in his mouth, casting a sardonic eye on this rich dilettante eager to shuffle off the coils of anonymity, and me, her hireling, a middle-aged writer gambling his career on a theory about which he knows very little. What would de Vere say? Go forth, sweet

fanatics, and tell the world that I am he who wrote the sonnets and plays, not that other with "little Latin and less Greek."

Mrs. F. falls on the Danish sofa. Not being able to breathe makes her furious. With faltering hand she indicates the clippings. Stabbing them with a stiff index finger she makes a da-da-da-da sound until I say, "You read my reviews?" She nods, silently raging. In a flash of irony I realize that these overly generous reviews are what damned me.

She heaves air into her lungs. "Good reviews don't guarantee a bestseller. I want our book to be as lascivious as can be!"

Make Shakespeare a stud? I was expecting different marching orders. Take the hill, give no quarter, drown the prima donnas in their own blood. My wife, who knows about the perils of a literary career, is 150 miles away just then and waiting to hear about this meeting. When I get home, I'll ask her about the degrees of lasciviousness. Should we start quietly and build up (I mean, me and Mrs. F.), or pile on sex from the get-go? If Dean doesn't know, she'll have an informed opinion. With any luck, the book will be rejected by first-tier readers at Doubleday and Random House. There's no shame in writing an un-publishable manuscript. Fitzgerald and Faulkner hacked out Hollywood scripts never made into movies.

My job is to hotwire a plot without being electrocuted. When she invoked her husband's nicotine presence and gave me a peek at her diamonds, she was saying I am Elizabeth Rex. You are Edward de Vere. My husband is dead. Let's get it on. She is all the heat this house needs, a built-in furnace, a hottie that refuses to yield to age, a pink fortress on a blue-chip mountain. Was Edward de Vere really Shakespeare? I don't know but if in the weeks and months to come, de Vere comes creaking and clanking to life on my typewriter, no one will be more surprised than I. In a way we're brothers in the bond, twin sons of Mrs. Frankenstein.

"He was a virgin!" Her eyes are like rapier points. "Excuse me?"

"Edward de Vere, whoja think!" My forward understanding makes her furious. I struggle to catch her drift. "I mean," she says after she calms down, "he was a virgin when Elizabeth seduced him."

"She seduced him and not the other way around?" "She's the queen. He lives to satisfy her."

We're all virgins in the early going, but Edward de Vere a virgin? Sex is the jet fuel of all creative endeavor. Think Mozart, Byron, Elvis, Warhol. Shakespeare had balls and wrote with compassion. What girl could have kept her hands off him? Life was short, maidens rolling in the hay at 12. Back then, 14 was pushing it. The skeptic in me can't keep from asking, "So, you think he'd still be a virgin after attending Oxford, Cambridge, and Gray's Inn? Maids being handy, so to speak."

She writhes in agony, heaves to get her breath, thwarted, obstructed, constricted by my lack of



understanding. “He had to be careful of his seed!” Would an earl descended from Plantagenets waste sperm on a milk maid? No, he kept himself pure for a woman of stature. Meanwhile, young Edward read poetry, practiced swordsmanship and falconry, and bided his time. “That’s why he was still a virgin. Okay?” She bites into an Oreo, black eyes burning into me, waiting for me to capitulate. Sometimes the waiting can be long. Shadows grow deep. Rip Van Winkle knew this feeling. Bears and hippopotamuses know it.

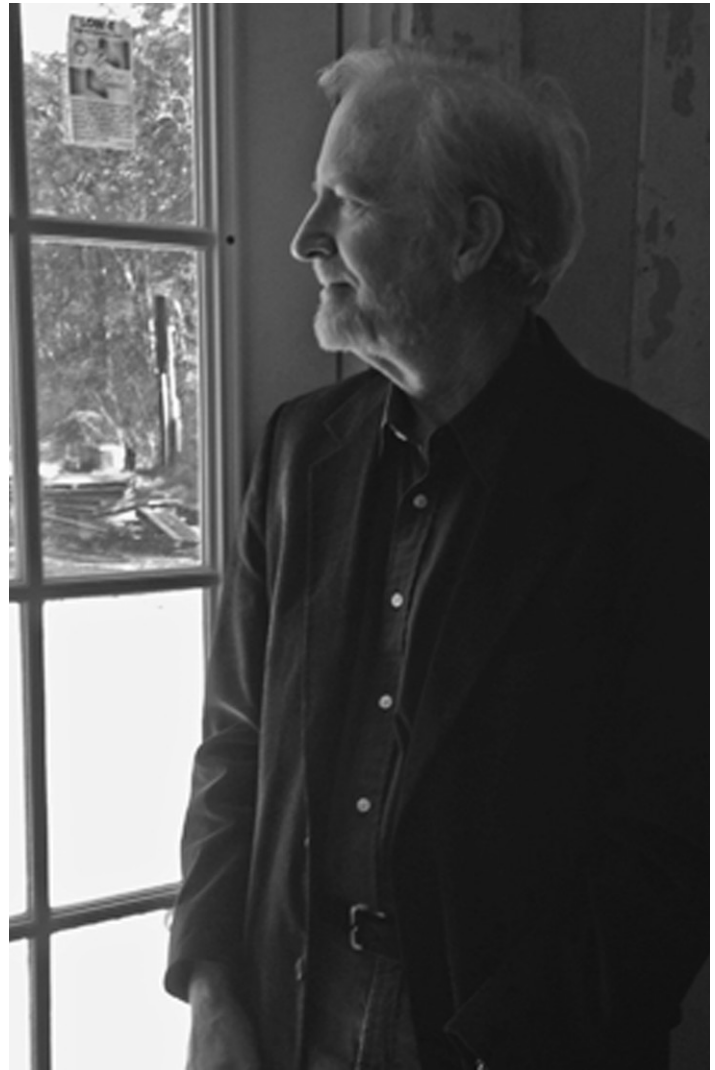
Nobody dances the old dance like a southern belle. She rummages through a Holinshed’s **Chronicle of Sex**. Where did Oxford and Elizabeth first make love? Forget a grassy meadow under blue sky, forget balmy breezes and birdsong, forget shall-I-compare-thee-to-a-summer’s-day. Imagine instead a wintry night in March, the water frozen in the wash basin, the castle so cold you want pull the blanket over your lover and wolf around. The Elizabethan ice age was pneumonia hell but ideal for breeding. Did the Spirit of the Renaissance just swoosh by my ear? She has no problem finding breath for her favorite fantasy. A royal progress arrives at a castle. A cloud of vapor hovers over the procession. The chattering, belching, farting throng of lords and ladies and their entourage come to a halt. Litter bearers set down their burdens. The men pee in the moat, lords and vassals alike. Ladies in waiting form a protective screen for the queen to pee. She glances up and sees Oxford shaking off his epistle, a golden mist rising from the moat. “How do you like it so far?” I stare at my note pad in disbelief. Did she actually say “shaking off his epistle” or did I make it up? Where is she going? Is peeing foreplay?

She fights through a paroxysm of impatience. “All right, Smarty Pants. Let’s see you do bettah.” 🌸

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Judge Deborah Grosvenor's Comments:

Part memoir, part literary mystery, part an examination of what constitutes fiction vs reality, this is the charming, often humorous account of a writer hired by the University of Mississippi to help a wealthy elderly woman write a book proving Shakespeare’s true identity in exchange for her large donation to the school. The author seamlessly weaves together several stories in this book: his evolving relationship with his eccentric patron and his own family, his search for the “real” Shakespeare, and the bawdy Elizabethan narrative he writes for his benefactor. The stories all work together and keep one turning the pages until the surprising but satisfying conclusion of this tender memoir.



*Lawrence Wells had his first novel, **Rommel and the Rebel**, published by Doubleday and Company in 1986. He studied writing under Hudson Strode at the University of Alabama, and Evans Harrington at the University of Mississippi. Wells has written three novels and edited six non-fiction books including **William Faulkner: The Cofield Collection**. With his wife Dean Faulkner Wells (1936–2011), he operated Yoknapatawpha Press, an independent press in Oxford, MS, and co-published a quarterly journal, *The Faulkner Newsletter*. Co-founder of the Faux Faulkner Contest, he also scripted an Emmy-winning PBS regional documentary, **Return to the River**. He has been a frequent contributor to *American Way* and *Southwest Spirit* magazines and the *New York Times* Syndicate. He earned his B.A. and M.A. in English at University of Alabama and his Ph.D. at the University of Mississippi. He and Dean were married for 38 years. He lives in Oxford, MS.*



STRONGER

By Mary Bradshaw

An excerpt from a runner up for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Nonfiction Book category in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

Author's Note: This excerpt deals with the trip to New Orleans for my daughter Jen's first inpatient stay for anorexia treatment.

A flock of geese swept overhead and I watched them until they were gone, sipping my Big Gulp and zipping my jacket. A penetrating chill in the air and a low growl of thunder made me wish I was home in bed.

Balancing a spiral notebook on one knee and an open math book on the other in the CRV's front passenger seat, Jen guzzled a 32-ounce water bottle between problems. Even with her eating disorder diversions, she still maintained her straight A's, but I couldn't help but wonder what she could accomplish if she could just stop this crazy calorie obsession. I have no idea how she managed to pass as normal in school, to fulfill her duties as class president, except that other people were generally caught up in their own lives and seldom noticed despair in others if those despairing made an effort to disguise the pain.

The opening door jolted me upright. Dr. Hartman grinned and I shouted to Jen, "Let's go." Climbing out of the front seat with math book in hand, she ambled up the sidewalk, collarbones like miniature oars piercing her soft pink sweater.

In the office, Jen changed into a blue print hospital gown and stepped backwards onto the Toledo scales. Dr. Hartman narrowed her eyes as she moved the sliding bar horizontally and jotted numbers down on a yellow-lined pad. "Okay, Jen. You're maintaining." I grimaced and a groan escaped my lips. Dr. Hartman sent me a puzzled look.

Thirty minutes later, Jen breezed through the door with a hollow downcast gaze. I stood. "Dr. Hartman, can I talk to you for a second?"

Malapert and cheeky, Jen glanced at the clock on the wall and then at me. "I've got a class meeting in twenty minutes."

"I'll just be a minute," I threw my purse over my shoulder and followed the blue scrubs.

In the office, words spewed out as soon as the door closed behind us. "Are you sure of her weight? I can look at her and tell she's still losing."

Dr. Hartman looked into space, thinking about my words and scratched a place under her eye with one manicured fingernail. "She's under-weight, but I'm

happy with the maintenance for now. How is she doing at home?"

"No outbursts lately but she won't go out with friends anymore, just hangs around with me." I dropped my gaze, and noticed the unsteadiness of my hands. "That's just not normal for a sixteen-year old girl."

The next morning, after I dropped Jen off at school, a nagging sense that Jen was deceiving us led me to turn the car south. At home, I flung my glance wide around her room. I thrashed drawers, mauled pockets, scoured shoes. Nothing. With a long heavy breath, I looked at the ceiling and spread my fingers through my hair. And then I saw it. On the top shelf of her closet—a white glossy Bath and Body Works bag, almost hidden by her softball glove. From under a mass of white tissue paper, I lifted a pair of frayed panties. A neoprene weight fell from the loose stitching in the crotch. An angry meandering chill crawled up my back and my breaths came in audible spurts as though they were being sucked into a giant vacuum cleaner. Lily watched me from between her paws, resting her head on a dirty tube sock. I punched numbers into the phone and when Dr. Hartman came on the line, I exhaled. "She's padding. I found the weights."

Only silence on the line. "Bring her in with the weights tomorrow." A long pause. "Mary, I think it's time we consider in-patient treatment. I'll call you back later."

The house phone started ringing almost as soon as I closed the garage door behind me. I dropped my purse on the console table and ran to the kitchen for the call, Lily trotting after me. I flicked on the kitchen light and stretched the cord to take a seat at the island. My hand tightened on the receiver when I heard Dr. Hartman's voice. "There's a waiting list at Laureate in Tulsa, so I've talked to River Oaks Hospital in New Orleans."

"That's 600 miles away."

"It's a good program and I've arranged for Jennifer to be admitted next week. I'm sending her records over tomorrow." She didn't say anything more.



The back of my wrist touched at my wet cheeks, my face jerking each time I breathed. I swallowed to ease the tightness in my throat, but whispered, "Okay." After hanging up the phone, I walked to Jen's room, dropped onto her bed. Chipper Jones peered down at me from a poster over a row of softball trophies. I stared through the window spotted with rain, my eyes slightly out of focus with fatigue and hopelessness and now resignation that I had failed as a mother.

Jen's journal entry:

My life is a chaotic mess. I feel so alone in this war. But I know there is help. I have friends, family, and somewhat of a faith. I just wish I had enough strength to reach out. I am genuinely tired of living with an eating disorder. I hate it!!! And still, it is so DAMN frustrating that I keep turning to it. Life is just so overwhelming and I can't handle it. It's easier for me to sink into the E.D. world. But by repetitively "escaping to the eating disorder," my life just gets even more overwhelming. So I am in a bind. The only relief from the eating disorder is escaping to the eating disorder—man this sucks. God, please give me the strength and courage to battle and conquer my eating disorder. Please, please, please guide me towards the path of recovery. Help me to make the right decisions so I can recover.

Our neighborhood was quiet and peaceful, too early for leaf-blowers and lawnmowers when we left for River Oaks Hospital in New Orleans on Monday. The road was so flat and straight, I barely touched the wheel, doing seventy-eight with cruise-control on I-35 south towards Dallas. Jen fell asleep soon after we left Moore, but the dragon awoke by the time we reached Chickasha, and she was breathing fire. Looking at me, her eyes were heated with resentment, eyes that deemed me as the source of her rage against the universe. Hitting the dashboard with her fists, kicking it with her Keds, she scowled at me with an angry whisper, "I hate you." Easing off the accelerator, I did my best to keep the CRV on the road, but Jen was relentless, supercilious and condescending, almost savage, screaming, "I hate you, I hate you" until she was hoarse. "I'm not going. I'll just run away." She opened the door. Cool wind gushed in. Never taking my eyes off the road, I clasped her forearm with my free hand and pulled her toward me. I twisted my neck so that I could look into her eyes and read the malevolence in them, her breath reaching out and touching my cheek. She glared into my face, her nostrils flaring with a visceral hatred of me and the authority I represented.

A big rig blocked us into the fast lane for a full mile before I could lane change to take the Falls Creek Camp exit with a consuming fear that she would bail from the car as we hurtled at 50 mph off an exit ramp

designed for 30 mph. When the car stopped in the Fried Pies parking lot without incident, I drew a deep, shuddering breath. I jumped out of the car, adrenaline pumping so hard I was shaking. I expected Jen to run, but she sat in the passenger seat, staring at the floor, clutching her beloved furry Fred. I saw nothing but sorrow in her eyes and the tears dribbling down her face melted my fear and anger away. I wanted to reach in and tell her, "Everything's going to be ok." Instead, I ate a warm coconut cream fried pie, peering at her through the lettered store window. I wasn't the one who could comfort her. That would have to come from within.

The next morning was gray and dreary. We drove down Williams Boulevard past frame houses with broken shutters and screened porches full of children and trailer-houses with dogs on couches in yards. Stands of tall pines threw down deep shade along the block that housed River Oaks and I looked up in a sign of appreciation. The March winds remained blustery, never gaining any warmth and pine needles swirled over the grass where unimpressive one-story brick buildings formed a semi-circle and inside was a lush almost tropical courtyard with budding camellias and azaleas. An expressionless man in his mid-thirties slouched in an old weathered Adirondack chair between a dogwood tree and stone birdbath, a cross-wood puzzle book with dogged ears face-down on his knee. Jen's frail and hunched frame shuffled through the entrance door toward a sagging brown sofa in the corner of the lobby, her sad, pouting face obscured by shadows, battered Fred, wedged in the crook of her arm. We settled in stony silence, then followed the admitting nurse with a cornbread accent to her office where my trembling hands printed Jen's medical history in block letters.

Paperwork completed, I led Jen outside to an old white washed rocking chair. Her frail hand in mine had no more density than that of a bird's wing. I was determined not to cry, to give her that be-strong attitude. As I listened to the sounds of the city, cars driving by with horns honking, a plane flying overhead, a couple arguing in the parking lot, I rocked my baby and held her tight, enjoying the warmth of her in my arms, the creaking of the chair. Neither one of us spoke in our oasis of wicker and ferns.

The nurse's aide was nervous in her quick slow steps toward us. Her thick black hair and heavy straight bangs over a pierced brow, was a sharp contrast to her khaki Dockers and white polo shirt. She smiled and an even row of perfectly white teeth gleamed between two brick red lips.

"It's time for Jennifer to go to the unit," I recoiled just a bit when she spoke and she gave my shoulder a sympathetic squeeze. Her Southern accent was like a warm murmuring breeze in the cool afternoon that broke over my face with the smell of spearmint. "It's time to say goodbye." The creaking in the rocker died away. Jen had gone to sleep and so had my arm which



was under her head. I slid it out and opened and closed my fingers. Jen's face was flushed, and her fingers were trembling on the arm of the wicker chair. She shut and opened her eyes, as though she were riding in an airplane that just hit an air pocket, and then she placed one hand on the arm of the chair and pushed herself erect.

We walked up the embankment toward the lobby in silence, an odor of honeysuckle trailing around us. Jen leaned against me and I took my crumbling child in my arms. I stepped back and looked into her vacant eyes, "I love you Jennifer. You can do this." The breeze blew a stand of hair down on her forehead. She brushed it back into place and stared at me, but said nothing, then walked with the aide toward the unit door where the distant smile on her face was replaced with an expectant fear. The door closed on my last chance to say or kiss her good-bye. I'm afraid if I had that chance, if I saw her eyes meet mine again, I would collapse into a blubbing mess and take her home with me. 🌸

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Judge Deborah Grosvenor's Comments:

Told in the strong voice of a mother who is finally forced to recognize her daughter's anorexia—a disease from which she herself had suffered—this book offers a compelling narrative of a family's battle against a disease that is far more serious than most realize, how it nearly destroys them, and how they ultimately surmount it together.

Mary Bradshaw, who lives with her daughter Jen in Flowood, MS, spent hours in unsuccessful searches in the shelves of bookstores and libraries for help in dealing with the tumultuous years of her daughter's anorexia, a disease she had suffered from herself. Finally, she sat down and wrote the book she needed. She is a previous finalist in the William Faulkner- William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition's Essay Category.



*The 2014 Prize for the Best Narrative Non-Fiction Book was made possible by a gift from the late **Theodosia Nolan** and her family.*



THE RED-HEADED JEWESS OF OXFORD ROAD



DIARIES & LETTERS OF SOUTHERN JEWISH GRANDE DAME

JOSEPHINE JOEL HEYMAN

1901-1993

By Cindy Lou Levee

An excerpt from a runner up for the 2014 Gold Medal for the Nonfiction Book category in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

Author's Note: This excerpt follows the Introduction: Ring the Changes, where I discover that I need to leave California to return home to gather stories of Jewish girls and women in the South-ern region of the United States where I was born and bred.

CHAPTER ONE: MEETING JOSEPHINE

AS I DROVE AROUND THE CITY of Atlanta—the New York City of the South—lacy branches of dogwood hung over the boulevards and emitted a fairy tale beauty. The day's light was falling away as I searched for one particular Friday night Sabbath service that was to begin at eight o'clock.

I kept glancing down at the hand written address on a manila file folder on the front seat of my car. But I couldn't match it with any building that looked like a temple. I drove up and down Peachtree Street. I kept passing what looked like a huge, plantation-style United States Post Office, with its row of fat white columns, lit up from beneath like giant Christmas trees in that Southern majestic way. Once more I glanced down at the file folder beside me. To my surprise, the "post office" with the large green lawn and circular driveway matched the address. I steered the car in.

As I got closer, I could see that this Southern-style building was an established Reform synagogue. Typical of Classical Reform Jewish life in the South, it blended right into the South-ern landscape. It had even fooled me.

Finally I made it inside The Temple, home of the city's oldest Jewish congregation, and entered the silent and stunning white vaulted sanctuary. Even though I had missed the Friday *Shabbat*, or Sabbath, service,

my gaze lifted to the elaborate white frieze encircling heaven—I mean encircling the domed ceiling. I recognized the David's harp, a nod to King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, as well as hands forming the priestly blessing, which were repeated with other intricately carved medallions around a golden chandelier. I'd never prayed under such elaborate, classical arches like those that framed this room.

I curbed my gusto for the carefully designed style and approached the noisy conversation coming from inside of an adjoining reception hall, built as an outer courtyard, another echo of King Solomon's temple. The perpetual talking was something I was very used to after religious services. I greeted the assistant rabbi over the chocolate chip cookies that tasted as sweet as the ones I grew up with. The assistant rabbi knew I was a graduate student at Louisiana State University getting my Masters in Creative Writing. As a part of my folklore research I was interviewing Southern Jewish women. "Let me introduce you to Mrs. Heyman," she offered instantly. "I'm sure you'll want to interview her."

When I'd called long distance from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to ask the head rabbi if anyone would be willing to talk to me for my research, he too had been certain I'd want to meet Mrs. Heyman. Now the assistant rabbi, who clearly had the same thought, instinctively guided me towards this same individual.

Several little old ladies hovered over the brownie tray, and the assistant rabbi brought me straight to Mrs. Heyman, who wore a silk shirtwaist dress with a string of pearls around her neck. In the Jewish community, the name *Heyman*, sometimes written *Hyman*, was a common name that some suggested came from the Hebrew word *chayim*, meaning, *life*.

At 88 years old, Mrs. Heyman's blue eyes, delicate nose, and high cheekbones were still striking. Her



soft white curls still had traces of her distinctive red hair. As soon as the rabbi explained my project, Mrs. Heyman launched into a story. She was an articulate and perceptive storyteller, skillfully capturing the way Jewish families kept their traditions while assimilating into the dominant Christian culture of the South.

Leaning into her metal walker, she offered an anecdote in her gentle Georgian drawl. “When I was growing up, Hanukkah was a minor holiday. We lit the Hanukkah candles but we also had Santa Claus, and hung up our stockings on Christmas Eve. We had several fireplaces and so we believed he came down the chimney. But there was no thought of Jesus or Christ in connection with Santa Claus.”

Josephine Joel Heyman quickly captured my imagination—and my heart—as she brought me back to her youth, surrounded by family and friends. I couldn’t get enough of her solid, loving point of view and I let her tell me more about her early life.

“I had two brothers, younger than I am. They’re both dead now. I had a cousin, Helene, who lived next door, and she would sleep with us. And we’d get up around five o’clock in the morning.”

There was something exciting about Mrs. Heyman’s upbeat way of honoring her Jewish girlhood in the South. I recalled that Einstein said “the most important decision we make is whether we believe we live in a friendly or hostile universe.” Mrs. Heyman came from the friendly universe camp, and after all these years, I wanted that more positive attitude for myself. She spoke with a clarity and simplicity that my heart ached for. Though we’d been total strangers until tonight, I felt as though I’d made a true connection, one that I had driven cross country to find back home in the South. She might have been born a half century earlier than I, but her life sounded much like my own with its blend of cultures and the large family, and she was giving me more awareness so I could be free of shackles of my past and make peace with history. I wondered if life had always been this easy for her.

The more she talked about her past, the more I felt washed in a kind of sacred holiness. It was as if Mrs. Heyman had magically appeared to guide me in a new era of my life. She exuded an affirming, cosmic optimism; I was capable of feeling positive and happy sometimes, but beneath the surface festered a negation and pessimism, exactly the opposite of what Mrs. Heyman radiated. Rationally, psychologically, it could have been because I had failed to develop a healthy bond with my own mother, or because my big sister had died when I was 14 years old, leaving me without older mentors—particularly female—to learn from. I only knew that I wanted more of this perfect, wonderful blend of so much that I needed in my life. I wanted to be as peaceful and content as she appeared to be; I wanted my life to be as full and settled as hers had been.

As The Temple crowd began to thin out, Mrs. Heyman hesitated. Another elderly woman beckoned

her to the door, beyond which a Chrysler with an African-American driver waited to take them home. The scene reminded me of the 1989 Academy-Award winning movie **Driving Miss Daisy**, about an elderly Jewish woman and her chauffeur. Mrs. Heyman gave me one more bright smile and said goodbye, before turning her walker in the direction of the exit.

Still clutching my paper, pen, and tape recorder, my heart sank. I yearned for more of the deep reassurance and well-being Mrs. Heyman imparted to me. How could I lose this promising connection now? The only thing I knew was that I needed to hear more from her. It was only later that I would learn that she was a master of culture that had been marginalized in the mainstream Jewish world, Southern world, and women’s world, and I needed to get her story out to whoever else needed it besides me.

Then, with her signature grace and hospitality, Mrs. Heyman looked back and invited me to continue our interview. “Won’t you come over to my house for a visit next week?”

With those words, my fear and sense of loss instantly vanished. Mrs. Heyman’s offer threw open a door to a whole new world, and I knew tonight was only the beginning of our journey together. I felt as if I’d won a prize, and an old phase I hadn’t used since I was a girl growing up down South suddenly leapt into my head. *Bull’s-eye Bingo!* 🌸

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Judge Deborah Grosvenor's Comments: *In this illuminating book, the author uses the life and letters of a prominent Southern Jewish matriarch as a way to offer social commentary on what it is like to be a Jewish woman in the South and how Jewish women have contributed enormously to our country's social and political development.*



Cindy Levee is a native of Louisiana. Many seasons before Katrina she changed her last name from Levy to Levee in honor of the embankments built to hold back the waters of the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain from the land she grew up on. Spring floods deposit silt along the rivers, creating natural levees, the high land along the waterways. Levees support the growth of hardwood forests and provide land dry enough for cultivation and habitation. Cindy also publishes under the name Dr. Cynthia Levy. With her husband of 25 years and their hilarious 22-year-old son, along with other macrobiotic souls, she camps in the wilderness and cooks all meals outdoors over wooden fires. "I am thrilled to be living with grace as I age and to have lived long enough now to develop decades long writing projects for publication." She credits her current peace of mind to the amazing people she's met in places like Deena Metzger's Healing Intensive, Lynn Woodland's Miracles Course, Martha Beck's Coming Home to Your Spirit, plus her decades-long friendship with poet Mona Lisa Saloy. "I can't do this alone," Cindy says. "I'm standing on the shoulders of oodles of ancestors and other sentient beings. Xxoo."



OTHER FINALISTS

Other Finalists

Against the Wind, Frances Haysman, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Hummingbird, Kenneth Neil Rubenstein, Hove, England, UK

Life as a Personal Trainer: Bad Music, Creepy Perverts, and Cottage Cheese, Ken Kashubara, Bloomfield Hills, MI

Short List for Finalists

Behind Lace Curtains, Dorothy Burston Brown, San Jose, CA

Dragged Away by the Hair, Annie Caulfield, London, UK

Gutshot, Anne Webster, Atlanta, GA

Leaving Vanilla, Anita Crocus, Bellevue, WA

Moving Sam, Ann B. Kovara, Pasadena, CA

Sounds of Letting Go, Vicki Siska, Fort Collins, CO

What Goes by the Name of Love, Gail Hovey, Haverstraw, NY

Semi-Finalists

A Friend named Hope: A Memoir And Expedition Through Sovereignty, Heather McLain Harris, Metairie, LA

Ever-Fixed Mark, Charla Lewis, Guymon, OK
Holding On To Right Side Up, Pat Gallant, New York, NY

My Unsentimental Education, Debra Monroe, Austin, TX

My War and You're Welcome To It, Michael Fryd, Philadelphia, PA

Stealing Christmas, Leslie Daniels, Thorold, Ontario, Canada

Streetlight, Steve Kash, Terre Haute, IN

Yossarian Was Right, Archibald Hovanesian, Jr., New Orleans, LA



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OMEER'S MANGOES

By N. West Moss

The Winner of the 2014 Gold Medal for the Short Story in the Willam Faulkner-Wisdom|Creative Writing Competition.

IN THE DECADES that Omeer had lived and worked across from Bryant Park, everything had changed for them both, for the park and for him. Omeer had married and had a son, and the marriage had devolved from love to disappointment to peace, finally settling into something that could be described most charitably as a kind of permanent calm. And the park. Well.

It had always officially been called Bryant Park, but when Omeer first arrived in New York City, the park was dangerous, avoided. His first friend, Angelo, who had been hired to polish the brass in the lobby of Omeer's building, told him that some people called it "Needle Park." Angelo was wise, and waved his filterless cigarette knowingly at homeless people sleeping in the park. "He *lives* there." He pointed with the burning end of his cigarette. "He washes in the fountain and uses the bushes as a toilet. You can smell it from here. And some of them push needles in their arms and when they nod off, the needles fall on the ground. It's a park that grows needles, see?" He laughed, two plumes of smoke pouring from his nostrils like a dragon.

Omeer, a doorman in a building that looked out on the park, watched from across the street as the prostitutes in stretchy, sparkling dresses came at night and walked on high heels up behind the hedges. He could see their knees grind into the asphalt beneath the boxwoods. It was a dark place in those years, a wasteland.

But none of it upset Omeer, who, as a young man was full of hope, all forward-momentum and open arms. New York City, even the park with the dirty condoms and sad women, thrilled him. He had a job and a uniform too, brown with brass buttons, and his *tenants* did not sleep in the park. His tenants back then were celebrities and artists, nice people who brought him coffee in the morning and seemed embarrassed to have the door held open for them. The building, his building, was beautiful, so elegant with its wide marble staircase and brass elevator doors, polished every month by Angelo and his father. It did not matter that Needle Park was across the street. Omeer's building was an oasis of kindness and beauty that shamed the park, not the other way around.

The people in the building in those early decades

were like Omeer's family. He knew which one expected a grandchild, which one was contemplating divorce. One tenant was a radio personality, another was an artist who always had paint in his hair, and one wrote music for the movies. Imagine that! They thanked him constantly and gave him tips at Christmas.

Omeer used to stand on the top step of the stoop at dawn and watch the park for rats beneath the boxwoods. He knew they were boxwoods because he had asked Mrs. Dennis from the 12th floor. She had been so beautiful then, too, a model for Clairol. Her hair had been blond and her face had been so sweet and pretty that Omeer turned away when she said hello. The Dennises were older than Omeer, and he thought of them with respect, as the stars who would play his parents in the movie version of his life, which would be set in New York City, not Iran, where he had been born.

Omeer's real father had once been a businessman, before they all left Iran and scattered. At first Omeer told him the truth about his work, about the building, the uniform, the clusters of grapes carved above the doorways in the lobby. His father seemed proud, thought it was a good beginning for his son. Omeer imagined his father telling his friends in England, where he had settled, that his son lived in New York City, that his son was a doorman who wore a uniform with polished brass buttons. His father offered Omeer advice on the phone the first Thursday of every month, about saving money and meeting Iranian girls in New York.

After Omeer's mother died, and it became clear that his father would never come to America, not even to visit, Omeer began to lie to him. His father wanted more for him than a doorman job, which had been fine for a few years, but was no longer enough. When Omeer told him he was looking for a new job, his father said. "Good man! You must always strive to better yourself," and Omeer remembered then how nice it was to be far away from his father's knack for success.

Omeer made up stories that his father could share with friends over cards, but Omeer's honest heart made him an unimaginative and nervous liar. He



fabricated interviews he was going on, and outfits the interviewers wore, and because he wanted his father to think kindly of America, Omeer said that some of the interviewers expressed interest in Iran, and one even asked about Omeer's father, supposedly, which of course, no one would ever have done.

This false interview period stretched to months, and in an attempt to keep the stories interesting, Omeer moved the interviews to restaurants, although Omeer had never eaten in a restaurant, other than the pizza place on the corner. He described one interview for his father, saying, "I ordered a steak and it came with three different kinds of potatoes and a bowl of apricots for dessert." He hesitated. "And pots of tea. Pots of hot, sweet tea." This was how Omeer thought someone in England by way of Iran might picture an American meal, different in the potatoes, but similar in the apricots and pots of tea.

He saved his money, ironing his own shirts, making cheese sandwiches in his tiny kitchen and eating them standing up with the TV on. He wanted a family, he told his father, and himself. Yes, he would love to have enough money one day to have a wife.

Finally, Omeer felt he had to tell his father that he had gotten a new job from all of these interviews he had gone on. He couldn't pretend to go on interviews forever, so he said that he had been hired at a bank, even though Omeer knew nothing about finance or banks or what kind of job he'd even get in one. Angelo said, "Tell him it's in public relations. Everyone works in public relations. Call it 'PR,'" which Omeer's father seemed to understand, even if Omeer did not. That was early still, in his first decade in New York, when Omeer made it a habit to sweep the sidewalk in front of the building very early, before his tenants even woke up, without even being asked.

It was after Omeer became a make-believe public relations agent at a bank, that the park across the street began to change in earnest. It got roped off with police tape, and in rumbled cranes and dump trucks, dumpsters and jack-hammers. Omeer and Angelo kept track of the tearing down and the carting away, and then watched as the park was rebuilt. For four entire years the park was a noisy mess. Omeer and the other doormen swept and mopped every day to keep the dust from polluting their marble lobby.

Omeer read about the renovations in the paper. They were planning on lowering the park to ground-level. Astonishing. Impossible. The papers said it was dangerous to have a park up higher than the street, because good people were too scared to go in. "If it's not at eye-level," Angelo explained to him, "the police can't look in. It's like a secret world where all sorts of things can happen. You don't want to know." Angelo shook his head, took off his work hat and rubbed his hands through his hair to show how bad it was in there.

When Angelo's father retired, Angelo was put in charge of the family business, polishing the elevator

doors, the brass bannisters that looped up the grand marble staircase, the handles on the front doors. He and Omeer stood outside so that Angelo could smoke, and later, after Angelo left, Omeer would sweep up the filter-less cigarette butts and matches he'd left on the ground.

Omeer read to Angelo from the newspaper about the park, while Angelo commented. "People hide in the park," said Angelo.

"Right," said Omeer, "the addicts and the hookers." He tried to sound disdainful, but it didn't work and he was embarrassed that he had said the word "hooker" out loud. Angelo had disdain for specific things: for sloppy carpentry, and for people who ate pizza while they walked down the street, but Omeer couldn't muster genuine disdain. It simply was not in his nature, although he tried.

When the construction was finally done and the dust was hosed off of the block, when the park had been successfully lowered, Omeer called it a work of art. "It's magnificent," he would murmur to his tenants as he held the front door for them and swept his hand across the vista, the marble hand-rails, the full flower beds. He realized he was bragging as though the park were his, and he blushed over and over again, but he couldn't stop paying compliments to it.

Men in green jumpsuits came next and put in more plants, thousands of them along with full-grown London plane trees. Stone-masons came too and fixed the paths and stone walls. Old statues were polished and new statues went in. Now, years later, gardeners were in the park every day in the spring and summer, and even into the fall, planting begonias and digging up daffodils that had just finished blooming, slipping hoses into each pot of flowers until the water ran over the top and soaked the slate beneath. There was a man in a green uniform who Omeer knew by sight. He walked all day long pushing a garbage can on wheels. If someone let a napkin fall to the ground, the man was there, seconds later, to put it in his pail. If a leaf fell from a tree, he caught it.

The park became a testament to progress, to how things got steadily better over time. It made Omeer tremendously hopeful, about the park, about his life, about humanity, like the opposite of entropy, where he had read that things naturally fall apart. What they had done to the park was a triumph over entropy. He said that to Angelo who shrugged.

Omeer got married the year the restaurant went into the park. What a shock it had been to his tenants to learn that there would be a place to have lunch and dinner right there, steps from their front door, butting up against the back of the New York Public Library. Mrs. Dennis from the twelfth floor said, "It's like living at Versailles," which Omeer had heard of. It made everyone in the building stand up a little straighter to have a park so lovely.

On Thursday nights the restaurant hosted a singles night, where skinny men and women in their tight



business clothes came in waves. Omeer could see them through the glass of the front door, laughing with their mouths wide open, leaning in to one another, talking into their phones when their dates went to the restroom, always busy and important.

He walked over and studied the menu that hung in the window, and saw a bottle of wine for sale for forty-seven dollars. He felt rich just seeing that, proud that they thought so highly of themselves.

The neighborhood had become as special as Omeer's beautiful, marble and brass building, as if the building had finally succeeded in making the park behave. He cut out newspaper articles about the park and sent them to his father, telling him that he went to the restaurant there for business lunches, that the bank let him put it on his expense account. He wished he hadn't lied to his father about being a banker, because he wanted to tell him how he had just been promoted to superintendent of the building, a big step up. His father would probably have been proud, would have congratulated him. When he got the promotion, Omeer had his doorman uniform cleaned professionally. He hung it in its dry cleaning bag in the back of his closet in case he ever needed it again.

Omeer's wife was American, with Persian blood back in her family history. She was younger than he was, and shy when they first met. She moved into his apartment with him, the little one bedroom he had bought on the top floor when prices had been dirt-cheap. She bought paint the color of bricks and pomegranates and painted the walls. She put out a vase of fake flowers that looked real. To Omeer, she had the eye of an artist. He encouraged her in all of her early tentativeness. He took her to the park on his day off and showed her the menu hanging in the restaurant window, pointed at the forty-seven dollar bottle of wine listed there, and they turned to each other and made shocked faces.

One day, a carousel appeared in the park, and reporters wrote stories about it, which Omeer cut out. But by then, his father had died and Omeer put the clippings from the newspapers in the bottom of his sock drawer with a heavy heart. It was the same year that his wife, grown less shy by this time, gave birth to their son. Progress, as it always had for Omeer, outweighed the set-backs. He had a son now. He had a family of his own.

And then, soon after that, at no particular moment, without being definite or clear, at a time seen only in retrospect as a moment, a year later or maybe two or three after the birth of his son, the pendulum of Omeer's life which had been swinging steadily forward along with the good fortune of Bryant Park, halted, stuttered, and began, ever so slowly, to swing backwards, as every life does eventually. As his up-hill resolved itself eventually into a downslope, the pendulum of the park continued its seemingly unstoppable upward trajectory.

As he grew older, Omeer began to worry about his

graying hair. He became afraid of closed spaces, and in his late forties began to sleep with the blinds open to let in the street-light, fearful of the coffin-feeling of waking up swallowed by darkness. It annoyed his wife who liked to sleep without interruptions from light or noise, or by then, from a hand reaching out for her in the night.

Omeer, unlike his wife, found sweetness in interruptions. Everything else was just a list of chores that repeated with the days of the week. Interruptions were the music. Omeer wanted to please his wife, and this made him worry about eating too much salt, and drinking too much caffeine. He worried about his blood pressure because she told him to. "We're getting old," she said, filing down the nail on her index finger, although she did not look old. He had seen her gray hairs one morning over breakfast, but by that night, her hair was black again. "It's time you began to take care of yourself, Omeer." He liked it when she said his name.

Omeer was aware of his age. His tooth ached. His knee ached, but still he was surprised, over and over again, by his reflection in the glass front-door of the building. He expected to see his shiny black hair, his eyes smiling back at him, but was forced instead to ask, "Who is that old man?" followed by, "Ah, this is who I've become."

All of New York City had changed too as Omeer grew older. Mid-town had been "cleaned up," but the park, its transformation had been unimaginable, breathtaking, and Omeer had quietly borne witness as they began to offer free yoga classes in the park, and French lessons. They held poetry readings and chess tournaments there. In summer they showed movies and offered free juggling classes. Juggling classes!

One winter it was announced that the park would house a skating rink. His wife didn't believe him at first. "They can't fit a skating rink in that little park," she said. So he brought her there, with their boy who was still in her arms then. They were both stunned, but there it was. "Visionaries," Omeer said. He and his wife, clutched their son, making a fragile little family unit. They watched the people wheeling around the rink, bundled in their new clothes from the GAP, spot-lights shining down on them as if they were gods. Omeer and his wife looked at each other and laughed then. It was not just a dream, Omeer knew, because the next year the rink came back and brought with it a Christmas tree as tall as a skyscraper. It took a truck with a ladder on it to hang the star on the tree's top.

As the park and the neighborhood blossomed, the kindness of the people seemed pushed to the side, as though kindness was the price that had to be paid for progress. Omeer, then, looked back on those early years, before the park had been renovated, with some nostalgia. Some of his good tenants moved out and new, driven ones moved in. The new ones wore ties and never looked up, and became annoyed quickly. Some of the old tenants remained, and as they aged, he cared



for them like he would have cared for his own father, helping them into cabs, carrying their mail upstairs for them. Bowing a tiny bit when they came in.

Mr. Dennis, for example, used to ride his bicycle all over Manhattan. He had been famous then on the radio, and Omeer told people, "He is an excellent man, a perfect man." But Mr. Dennis had grown old and slow like everyone else, and had, finally, collapsed in the lobby, nearly killing Omeer with shame and worry. He knelt next to him, murmuring, "Oh Mr. Dennis, Mr. Dennis, I'm so sorry," too shy to take the man's hand. The people he admired disintegrated like everyone else, and it broke Omeer's heart. No one was immune.

Filling the park with flowers and trees and folding chairs, making it so beautiful brought smart, angry tenants to Omeer's building - lawyers and traders from Wall Street. The new board president wore blue ties that were tied too tightly around his fat neck. His face was always red, strangled by his own ties, like a balloon about to pop. He looked at Omeer with suspicion, as though Omeer wasn't working hard enough, which caused Omeer to feel confused and apologetic. He took such pride in his work. Angelo told him only to sweep up when tenants were watching so they could see how hard he worked. It wasn't terrible advice.

A hotel went in next door to Omeer's building, and a magazine shop on the other side, next to a French coffee shop that sold pepper grinders and extra virgin olive oil. The tenants got fancier too, wanted more things, had more packages delivered and cleaning women and guests arriving. People moved in and out more frequently.

Angelo still came, but they refused to raise his fee when they required him to polish the marble floor in addition to his other jobs, and so he was always in a rush too, like everyone else. The board president with the red face and tight neckties told Omeer that they were letting go of one of the other doormen, "to cut costs." Omeer would have to do his superintendent work during the day now, and get his uniform out of the closet again to work occasional over-nights, "share the burden" as the board president told him, not making eye contact with Omeer. They didn't care that Omeer had a little boy. Times were hard. If he wanted to stay, to keep his apartment, this is what he'd have to do. Omeer considered it a demotion.

By the time Omeer's boy could make his own bowl of cereal in the morning without spilling the milk, Omeer's wife had lost her reticence entirely. Omeer became aware that his wife and son pitied him, and sometimes were angry at him for making them pity him, back and forth, pity, anger.

Omeer's hair had begun to come in gray by his temples, and his wife was bored at home, now that their boy didn't need much from her. She had friends too, American friends, and she told Omeer that she wanted to go back to school. So Omeer smiled, nodded and mortgaged the apartment, the one that he

had paid off completely, and he sent his wife to design school at Parsons. She took his hands in hers. "Thank you, Omeer." He loved it when she said his name. He had made her happy.

She studied hard and came home exhilarated. He was glad for her as if she were his growing daughter. When she graduated, he and their son went to the ceremony. At the coffee shop afterwards, with her much younger school friends, one of them said, "The economy is not good for designers just starting out." His wife had shrugged.

She got a new hairstyle, even made her clothes for a bit on a sewing machine Omeer bought for her, but soon after she graduated and found the reality of getting a job to be quite different from the dream, she became disenchanted by the fashion shows that were still held in the park then.

"Oh!" she said, "The *beep beep* of those trucks backing up! How do they expect people to live here?"

After being demoted, Omeer went three years without a raise. Their bills went up, though, and they had a mortgage now. His wife was forced to take a part-time job at a dry cleaner's downtown, to her great dismay. He knew that her failure was his failure.

The board president with the blue ties and red face explained that they couldn't give raises, and not to expect one any time soon, either. "There are plenty of people who'd be happy to do your job for half of what you make," he told Omeer, which struck Omeer as probably true. He worked hard, though, and loyalty should count for something. Shouldn't it?

As his financial strains intensified, Omeer made sure to remain kind. It was not his wife's fault that she had married a man who would remain a doorman forever. When she came home with new lipstick, he told her how pretty she was. He did not want anything to make him like the board president with the tight ties. Being kind made him feel better. He loved how smart his wife was, how much she seemed to know. He liked her new long nails, and the way she tapped them gently against her coffee cup in the morning as she read the paper.

He felt guilty about his own graying hair, imagined that it embarrassed her and their boy. He asked her if she wanted him to dye it black and she laughed. "Why bother?" she said. He felt her recoil from her own comment, and she added, "You look distinguished like this." Omeer knew that she gave him the compliment because she didn't love him anymore. It wasn't her fault. Love just grew or failed, and her love for him had stalled out.

One day, his son came to him with a flyer from middle school that read, "Summer Music Camp." He had been studying the saxophone, which caused Omeer distress. He didn't want the boy to practice when it would disturb tenants. But now this. He didn't have the \$500 for music camp, but wanted to say yes to the boy. He said, "Money's tight this year," and he saw the boy's eyes get small and suspicious.



"Mom gets to go out all the time," the boy said.
"Yes?" said Omeer.

"You are just a cheap-skate," the boy said, and Omeer recognized the term as something his wife used.

Omeer was so ashamed that he went to the bank the next morning and took the five hundred dollars out of his almost-empty savings account. He told his son that he could go, that he had found the money. The boy shrugged, not believing him. "No," said Omeer, "I mean it. I am not a cheap steak." He knew immediately that he'd said it wrong. He made mistakes when he was nervous. He had pictured the conversation going so much better, had imagined that his boy would smile and thank him for his generosity, but now Omeer felt frantic and hopeless and embarrassed. The boy rolled his eyes and sighed derisively, and something came up out of Omeer's stomach and into his throat that he couldn't control. He didn't realize what he was doing until after he had slapped the boy *BAM!* across his cheek.

They stared at each other while the slap reverberated. Omeer knew it had happened because his hand stung, and because the boy's cheek bloomed pink. He wanted to apologize, wanted to beg the boy not to tell his mother, but instead Omeer took the elevator to the basement and hid in the dark near the incinerator, catching his breath, keeping the tears that gathered inside his eyes.

It was the summer of the slap that someone hired pianists to play music during lunch hour at Omeer's end of the park. The piano was on wheels so it could be moved around. Pianists came every weekday, a new one each week, and sat down at the piano with a flourish, playing show tunes and jazz and sometimes classical to entertain the crowds. Omeer took his lunch there almost every day. He listened right until the end, even if there was an encore, and then he'd rush across the street, up to the 12th floor, change into his doorman's uniform and be at the front desk for the three o'clock shift.

Omeer recognized the park employees who cleaned the fountain who would sometimes stop and listen to the music too, leaning on their brooms. Their uniforms were green, like the color of the leaves, as though they grew there in the park, the workers.

He became aware of a woman who visited the park every Tuesday. She dragged a suitcase wrapped entirely in Saran Wrap, and several purses, all wrapped in cellophane too. She wore a rain-hat tied under her chin, and her lipstick went outside of the lines on her lips up to her nose almost. She would settle in by the piano and arrange her purses on separate chairs. Then she would unwrap a sandwich from a piece of tin foil and eat it.

She never made a sound, never caused a disturbance, always cleaned up after herself. She and Omeer were companions of sorts on Tuesdays that summer. As Omeer would be getting up to leave at the end of each

Tuesday concert, she would be stacking her purses back on her suitcase and wheeling off toward home, her plastic kerchief tied tightly under her chin. She even pushed the chairs back in.

Omeer looked forward to that hour, rain or shine. It became his club, his piece of the park where he was better off than some, and not as well off as others. Even though he never spoke to people there, outside of a polite nod, he felt they were his friends, a kind of family that might have existed given better circumstances. How much they would like him if they knew him, he thought. How kind he'd be to them, laughing at their jokes. They wouldn't know that he was a disappointment, because he wouldn't tell them. He would not divulge how much money he owed, how he owed more on the apartment than it was worth, that his wife worked part time at a dry cleaner's. They would not know about him slapping his son, or hiding in the basement afterward. They would know the Omeer that he wished to be – kind, generous, loyal, appreciated.

He had a favorite table in the shade – close enough to hear the music but far enough away to watch the people, who came in colored scarves and high heeled shoes and danced with their children under the pale green branches of the plane trees. They all spoke different languages, and like chips of glass in a kaleidoscope, whatever way they happened to fall, Omeer found beautiful – like his wife and son when they didn't know he was watching them.

When the long, hot month of August came, it brought a new woman to the piano concerts. She came barreling in one day, her shiny black hair pulled into a ponytail. Her clothes were runner's clothes, skin-tight and lime-green. Her enormous fat rolls spilled out from underneath her shirt, smooth and round as a wet otter. Omeer was charmed. Her cheeks were round and glossy, and she shone, as though she had rubbed her skin with oil. She seemed quite alive. When Omeer pointed her out to Angelo one day, Angelo said, "She looks like a Samoan. I've read about them. They paddle canoes in the Arctic." Omeer looked up "Samoan" on his son's computer, and was astonished at how wrong Angelo had been, but from then on, Omeer thought of her as 'the Samoan' anyway.

She came after that every so often, and Omeer was glad when she showed up, like a mountain had rolled in to keep the wind and sun off of his back. One day early on, she had a tight, lemon-yellow shirt on that did not cover her belly, a strip of which was revealed, the color of polished teak. She put her belongings on one of the round tables and stood next to it, doing stretching exercises. Every time she reached up, her belly, hanging over her pants was exposed, rich and coffee-colored. She looked like a warrior to Omeer, or a fertility goddess.

She sat then and pulled a plastic, see-through container full of sliced mangoes out of a bag. She burst with vitality, eating fruit for lunch, doing stretching



exercises, her new sneakers a glowing talisman for physical fitness. It all seemed very Samoan to Omeer. She ate the mango with her fingers, licking them after each slice. She took a Wet-Nap out of her purse when she was done and carefully wiped her hands. Fastidious. Natural.

Each time she arrived, she stretched until her belly button was exposed. And when she stopped reaching, the shirt stayed up while she sat and ate her mangoes. Omeer was giddy over how unselfconscious she was, how brave and relaxed and accepting of her own self. He was so much the opposite that he used mouthwash every morning, every night, after every meal, and still his wife pulled away. But his Samoan, she left her fat belly exposed in the middle of the park and he was sure that everyone who saw her must love her for her abandon.

One day she looked up from a dripping mango slice and caught Omeer's eye. She hesitated and then smiled wide to show all of her top teeth. He felt he had been caught staring at her, and he stood up, walking directly out of the park and up to his building, where he saw his reflection in the front door of his building. He was shocked, as though he had just seen himself for the first time in decades. How his eyelids drooped. How tight his pants were around his waist. He remembered a photograph of himself when he had been the Samoan's age, with a full head of shiny black hair. He had been handsome then, he now realized. His daydreams had allowed him to be mistaken about who he had become. Omeer had thought himself the man who might have known this girl once, been friends with her, if things had been different, if he had not married and accidentally grown old.

The next morning, Omeer went to the deli and bought himself a little container of sliced mangoes, and the cashier gave him a plastic fork. He hadn't eaten a mango since he was a little boy, and he ate them now for lunch by the piano, one at a time. The mango was strange, fibrous and sweet, and full of vague, echo-y memories from what felt like a life that once belonged to someone else, someone who had lived a hundred years ago. It was not enough food for him and he knew he'd be hungry that night behind the front desk, and he was disappointed that the Samoan woman wasn't there to see him.

The next day, at the same deli, Omeer bought himself a box of men's hair dye, the kind that promised to subtly cover only *some* of the gray, to make him look just a bit younger. He hid the box in the drawer by his bed and dyed his hair when his wife and son had gone out. Some of the dye splattered on the wall by the light switch. He scrubbed it with his toothbrush and got the spot off, but the toothbrush was ruined.

When Omeer took the towel off of his head, he wasn't certain, but he sensed he looked different, very subtly so. It made his eyes look more blue, he thought, turning his head from side to side in front of the mirror. It left some of the gray, maybe almost all of it,

he couldn't tell, which he found tasteful. He had been worried that the change would be alarming, too severe, but it wasn't. How could anyone accuse him of dying his hair when there were patches of gray still in it?

He wrapped his toothbrush and the box from the hair dye in a plastic bag, and instead of throwing it down the garbage chute by the elevator, he carried it down and put it in a garbage can on the street. He went back to the deli to get mango for lunch again. Yes, he had been hungry the night before, but perhaps it was not the end of the world to be a bit hungry. He could stand to lose a few pounds, and mangoes were delicious, he had decided. They tasted the way perfume smelled.

To his delight, the Samoan girl was already there when Omeer took his seat. The pianist was playing something that sounded like a show-tune, and a little girl was twirling to the music. A faint chill was in the air, which reminded Omeer that yet another fall was coming. He waited for his Samoan to see him, wondering if she would notice his hair. When she did finally look, he held up his plastic container of mango like a prize to show her, and she smiled and held her container of mango up too, like a toast. He purposefully did not look in her direction again, so that she would know he was not trying to be intrusive, filled with reigned-in joy as he was.

Omeer was working the door when his son came in that evening. The boy was carrying his saxophone case in one hand, said, "Hi," and lingered. The lobby was quiet and the sun was still up, but weakly.

"How was camp today?" Omeer asked.

"OK," the boy said, not looking at him.

"Would you like to eat your dinner down here behind the desk with me?" He hadn't asked him to do that since the slap, over a month ago. He hadn't apologized either although he was beside-himself with complicated regret.

"OK," said the boy, "but I have to practice first," and it was agreed that he'd bring his plate down with him after practicing and they would sit together, hidden behind the marble front desk while the boy ate.

"Have you ever tasted mango?" his father asked him when he came down. It was dark outside now, and the boy said he hadn't. "I have some left over from my lunch. It's lovely."

The boy took a bite and closed his eyes. "It tastes like a pine tree," he said, and his father was proud of him for that. It sounded like poetry to Omeer, like something a smart boy would say.

There were people coming and going, and Omeer had to get up several times to let them in or out. He turned the little TV on for the boy to watch, with the sound turned way down, but the boy turned it off again and read his book that he had carried down under his dinner plate.

When Omeer sat down again, the boy said, "You look different," and smiled a little at his father. Omeer remembered with shame slapping the boy's soft, round



cheek.

He said to the boy, "Don't worry about me, ok? Soon you will be better than I am, and remember that I want that for you. I want you to be better than me." He looked at his boy, at his shiny black hair, at his face turned up to Omeer. "You mustn't feel bad when you surpass me." The boy might not understand now, thought Omeer, but he'd remember and understand later, maybe. The boy shrugged and, folding down the page of his book, turned the TV on so that a picture sprang up. "I look different to you?" Omeer asked him.

"Your eyes or something," the boy said, staring at the TV screen. He turned to look at his father for a moment. "Your eyes don't look so tired." He turned back to the television.

A woman in a large hat came to the door and asked to be announced to Mrs. Jacobs on the seventh floor, but Mrs. Jacobs didn't answer Omeer's call.

"Jesus Christ," the woman in the hat said, sighing deeply and staring off above Omeer's head. "So *now* what am I supposed to do?"

"I'm terribly sorry," said Omeer, aware that he was apologizing to this woman who meant nothing to him, and that he had not apologized to his son. He felt the boy watching and wondered how his boy would come, finally, to think about his father.

"I am truly sorry," Omeer said to the woman. He bowed a little to show how sorry he was but still she looked angry and wasn't turning to leave.

She seemed like tangible evidence that his currency was continuing its devaluative slide. Omeer had failed his wife, had slapped his son, had gotten himself in debt for nothing and now he stood apologizing to strangers. His wife only smiled at him in her sleep now, and he was not allowed to share her bed anymore.

Mrs. Jacobs from seven came in the front door finally and calmed the woman with the hat down, leading her out into the park. He could hear the woman in the hat say, "Jesus Christ," and he heard Mrs. Jacobs say, "It's not *his* fault, Mary! God!" She rolled her eyes conspiratorially over her shoulder at Omeer, and he smiled, relieved.

The boy pretended to be watching TV, but Omeer knew he had witnessed the small disturbance and his father's ineffectiveness.

"What a lucky man I am," Omeer said, tears standing up in his eyes. This was as close as he could come to saying that he was sorry, for the slap, the debt, his position in the world, for being unloved by the boy's mother. He put his hand on the boy's shoulder and the boy allowed it to stay there a moment before shrugging it off.

The piano music continued into the fall. The woman with the purses wrapped in Saran Wrap continued to come every Tuesday, and Omeer wondered where she would go for the winter. Who would understand that, although once her shoes had been on the wrong foot, she deserved a place to sit on a Tuesday afternoon to feel like she was not alone?

His Samoan came only once in September and she was with a friend, a co-worker maybe. Omeer was so happy to see her that he jumped up without thinking and tipped his little folding chair over. He righted it and fled the park, his face warm, tremendously glad to have seen her.

He saw her for the last time in October when she showed up for the final piano performance of the year. She had on a long sweater that came below her knees over her tangerine-colored Spandex outfit. She was pushing a wheelchair with an old man in it. The man was unmoving and listing sharply to one side. The Samoan's robustness and polish made the man in the wheelchair look chalky and frail like a dried white leaf.

She sat down in a chair just a few tables over from Omeer and he could hear her talking softly to the man. She took care of him, Omeer realized. This was her job. The pianist came out, a jacket on against the chilly October afternoon. It was a Tuesday, Omeer knew, because the Saran Wrap lady was there, placing her purses on chairs like she was having a tea party and each purse was a guest. His Samoan pulled a sleeve of Oreos from her purse and put one in the old man's hand, pushing his fingers together so he wouldn't drop it. She whispered loudly in his ear, "It's a cookie. You can eat it."

She stood up behind him and patted down his hair with her colossal hand very gently, smiling down on him. The music started. It was classical, gorgeous, complicated music. It felt like a party. For a moment Omeer enjoyed his place in the park and forgot his debt, the way he embarrassed his son, his wife's dismissiveness, the board president's complaints. He felt these people in the park, the man pushing the garbage can and catching every fallen leaf, the woman with the wrapped purses, these were his friends too, or if not his friends exactly, well, they shared something.

His Samoan was tapping on the old man's shoulder, swaying to the music. Omeer could see her enormous, rounded calves like half-melons beneath her long sweater. He could see his building just beyond her, and a wedding party emerging from the hotel next door to it. They served coffee there for nine dollars a cup. He had asked the hotel's doorman. Nine dollars a cup. Imagine that, and people paid it.

The two men who had cleaned out the coins from the fountain earlier were there, whispering to each other, their heads close together, laughing, leaning on their brooms. The wind was in the piano player's hair and made his smile look like it hung under a white cloud. There was a mother with her child asleep in its stroller, completely limp, while the mother texted on her phone to someone who was far away.

Omeer thought of those people in the paper who had lowered the park decades before. They had been visionaries. They had. As everything fell away, his savings, his marriage, his hair, Omeer knew he was still tremendously lucky. Lowering the park had, despite reason and cost and common sense, made the



park into a palace, Omeer's palace. Here he sat amidst the swirling leaves, knowing that he would be back in spring, right here to listen to the music with his companions, the park like a cradle, rocking them all together. Incredible. 🌸

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This story also placed on the *Glimmer Train* Top-25 in the Open Fiction Contest in 2014

Judge Patrick Samway, S.J.'s Comments:

For years, the stories of Mavis Gallant in The New Yorker that focused on Paris were among the best published in English during the latter part of the 20th century. In her own way, this author explores New York City and particularly Bryant Park in Omeer's Mangoes as Omeer struggles to find some significance in his rather ordinary life. The last word of this story, "Incredible," sums up how incredibly well conceived and written this story is.

N. West Moss is a writer and a teacher with ties to New Orleans. Her whole family is buried up in Metairie



*The 2014 Prize for Best Short Story was made possible by a gift from attorney **Frank G. DeSalvo**, shown here at left with *Witness to Change* author and former New Orleans First Lady, **Sybil Morial**, and his brother, Faulkner Society Co-Founder, **Joseph DeSalvo**.*



*Cemetery, and she's hoping to return to New Orleans to live at some point in the future, before she ends up in Metairie with the rest of her ancestors. Her winning story, Omeer's Mangoes is part of a collection of short stories set in Bryant Park in New York City. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, Hospital Drive, the Westchester Review, The Blotter, Okra and elsewhere. In 2013, West won the gold medal for best essay in the William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition and her essay was published in the 2013 edition of The Double Dealer. This year, West also placed as first runner-up in the Novel-in-progress competition with her first novel, currently under agent review, **Dove on the Door**, which is set in New Orleans. Currently, she is at work on a young adult novel called **Camp Bibby**. Omeer's Mangoes has been published in the Saturday Evening Post since winning the Faulkner Society medal.*

I believe in New Yorkers. Whether they've ever questioned the dream in which they live, I wouldn't know, because I won't ever dare ask that question.

–Dylan Thomas



THE LINDBERGH BABY

By *Andrés Carlstein*

*The First Runner-up, Short Story Category of the 2014 William Faulkner
-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.*

Author's Note:

This story came to me by combining the embellished experiences of two people I know. Half came from my brother Rudolf, who served in the first Gulf War. The other side of the story came after I visited a good friend from high school, at the home of his grandmother, the charming (and splendidly named) Lulu Klock. Lulu told some incredible anecdotes from her life, including the one that lends the title to this story.

This is the story of a troubled, unnamed war veteran, from his point of view. The two other characters are Gram (the woman who raised the veteran), and the veteran's estranged son, Jesse. Jesse's mother has died. His father is having difficulty facing the responsibility of caring for his son because, while serving in the war, he accidentally killed a child. These two scenes take place in Gram's house, where the narrator grew up. The narrator struggles with the desire to unburden his conscience, while Gram attempts to figure out what imminent disaster is about to happen, and how to prevent it.

HAVE TO RING the bell three times before Gram answers.

"That was fast," she says.

"Not much traffic."

"You were speeding."

"No, Gram."

"Don't lie to me." Gram presses a quivering palm to my cheek. The meat of her hand is cool and yielding, like risen dough off a stone countertop. "And you smell like hooch."

"Jesse, this is your grandmother." I step aside to reveal the boy hiding behind me. She isn't his grandmother. She's his great-grandmother, but she was like a mother to me, so a grandmother is what she can be to him. Gram switches her scowl off like a bad TV show and replaces it with a warm light for her only great-grandchild. Jesse's eyes set on the old square CRT television, a hulking monolith in the corner on four round legs, half the size of a car, the pride of her second late-husband, Ernie. She claims she gave up men because she tired of burying them. Jesse looks around—at the Yankees mug on the piano, the dog

hair gathered in the corners—everywhere but at her. Gram's eyes are watery but I can't tell if that's now just their usual state. He's the last generation of her line she'll live to see. She smiles with such loving intensity that even I feel a bit embarrassed for the boy.

"When was the last time you fed him? For pity's sake, let's get this young man a meal." At that Jesse seems to rise within himself and he looks up at Gram, finally, and begins to observe her. Maybe this is the first time anyone has referred to him as a man.

During dinner she sits through Jesse's silence for a long while, watching him when he isn't looking, like a big cat timing a lunge. After he's eaten his first serving she speaks.

"You see the rubble of that house, in the lot across the street?" Gram eyes Jesse over her spectacles. "Did your father tell you why it was torn down?"

He shakes his head.

"That house was haunted," Gram says.

He looks up at her with hopeful disbelief, like she just said he won fifty dollars.

When Gram was a teenager her family came home one day and found that the neighbors had abandoned the place. They'd left the door open and a meal on the table. They just dropped everything and went away. She tells Jesse about the knocking sounds, and how the family's youngest daughter once followed a disembodied voice up to the attic and was locked inside by some unknown force.

"Her father found her wearing only her small clothes," Gram says. "She'd hung her dress to flap out the garret window, which she broke open while trapped. She had no other way to signal for help. She was only up there for half a day but she didn't talk again for weeks. We always assumed those people were just a bit off. But the next family that moved in did no better. They packed up and left within three months. The house stayed vacant after that."

As teenagers my friends and I explored that old building, trying to scare ourselves. All we ever found were empty beer cans, used rubbers, smashed windowpanes. The place was finally bulldozed before it could collapse on somebody. Funny how I'd forgotten all about the haunted house.

Gram and Jesse get up from the table to look out



the window and she puts her hand on his shoulder as she talks and points. Just like that she's got him. She snatches something beyond my reach so easily that for a moment I almost resent bringing him. I imagine that as a young woman she felled giants with a smile—she must've dropped men flat on their faces.



Gram pours herself another whiskey as we sit on the deck in the ashen light. The clouds obscure a bright moon though the diffuse glow still comes through. The fireflies have already faded away, the hour too late for them.

"Why'd you come here?" Gram says.

"Shouldn't a boy know his family?"

"That's some question." She doesn't say it spitefully. But I feel the slap of it regardless. I don't respond.

"You better not be here to do what I think you're doing," Gram says.

I look down and put an elbow on my knee. My fingertips touch my brow and I realize I'm covering my face.

"Aren't you tired of this?"

"Yes ma'am, I am tired."

"What if I die? Who'll look out for him?" She says.

"You're doing something I can't let happen."

"I've done lots of things you wouldn't."

She pauses at this and looks out at the distance. Maybe she's checking the topography of what I said, a place she's never been, to see if there's a safe way through. After a moment more she says, "We all do things."

"Not like what I did."

"Oh no? You know my whole life? You know where I've been?" She pulls another ice cube from the box on the table and puts it in her glass. "You want to go on forever feeling sorry? You aren't the only one you're punishing."

I swear quietly and start to get up.

"You sit down," Gram says. She doesn't speak angrily. She's not commanding. She just talks like she's stating what she knows I have to do. She said it in the way some women can, the way that takes all the fight out of a man with just her sound. As if my sitting back down is like the sun coming up. I sit down.

Gram leans back in her chair. We're silent for a long time. If I could tell anyone it'd be her, right now. Instead of speaking I close my eyes and swallow, tasting burnt earth and hints of hickory and leather. I try to think about the taste, to focus on anything other than what comes to my head by default. I savor the whiskey. Gram keeps much better spirits than I can afford. I can barely make out the sound of the ice against my glass. What a riot crickets and bullfrogs make in a field at night.

After a time Gram speaks of how the family came to Odessa. I know part of this story, they were moving here to start a chicken farm. The area is still mainly

agricultural. Gram's father was an engineer, and they'd lived in Hoboken, New Jersey, where Gram was born. It was the Great Depression and he'd lost his job. A common story.

"Papa arranged the chairs and mattresses and steamer trunks on a flatbed," she says. "He tied it all down with precision. A beautiful web, now that I think back on it. Uncle Danny drove the truck. Papa took all of us along behind in the Nash. That was a great car. We were fortunate. We were on a waiting list for eight months to get it. They couldn't build 'em fast enough. My sister Nancy was just a toddler, you know, and she was asleep on the bench seat next to me in the back. I'll never forget it. March 2, 1932." Gram reaches up to wipe at something on her cheek—an insect or maybe a memory of one. "We were on the road so early, coming through New Jersey. There was a roadblock along the way. That was the morning after the Lindbergh boy went missing. It was a national outrage. I was a child and didn't understand. It seemed to me the whole adult world was breaking apart around me. There were lights and people shouting and car horns, even so early in the morning. Everyone was panicked. At the checkpoint the policemen stood Papa and Uncle Danny on one side of the road. I remember their slickers and their shotguns. They made Mama wake Nancy up and undress her. Nancy had to stand naked in front of Mama and Papa and Uncle Danny and all those strangers. They had to prove she wasn't a boy child. The police needed to be sure before they let us go. Mama stripped her and she wobbled there in the cold, wailing and holding Mama's hands, the rain splatters on her naked legs and leather booties.

"In the car I asked Mama why they made us show Nancy with her clothes off. Mama didn't look back at me when she said, 'because some idiot doesn't know how to lock his damn door.'"

Half an hour goes by and the sounds of the outside night still. We are quiet all this time, Gram and I. We listen together to the quiet. She clears her throat with a wet growl as she starts to stand up. "I'm not going to tell you what to do," she says. "You're grown."

She walks by me and puts her soft hand on my shoulder as she passes. Then I feel a heavier pressure as if she almost falls—the move to comfort becomes one simply to keep her feet. I start to shake involuntarily. She stops dead, her hand still on me. We hang there the two of us, quivering, suspended by strings. Finally she puts her other hand on my head. I sit with my hands in my lap and my ear on her belly, which smells like baby powder and the piece of trout she dropped on herself during dinner. 🌸

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Judge Patrick Samway, S.J.'s Comments:

Retrospective stories about wartime, as Tim O'Brien revealed in his **The Things They Carried**, can have inherent drama and power to reveal the depths of the human condition. In *The Lindbergh Baby*, written by Andres Carlstein, the principal character, Jesse, a veteran of the first Gulf War, both laments the death of his wife due to a car accident and the anticipated relationship he will have with his young son. In this tightly woven story, what is not said between father and son is as powerful as the war conflicts that are revealed.

Andrés Carlstein received his MFA in fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he was an Arts Fellow. He's been a MacDowell Colony Fellow and Yaddo Residency Fellow, and his short stories have been finalists for the Doug Fir Fiction Prize and the Gertrude Stein Fiction Award. His work also has appeared in *Connu* and *The Miami Herald*. He is also the author of the non-fiction travelogue *Odyssey to Ushuaia, a Motorcycling Adventure from New York to Tierra del Fuego*. He currently works as a professor and is finishing a novel, *The Red Gaucho*, which was a 2014 finalist for the William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition Novel-in-Progress Award.



Recommended Reading: Faulkner House Favorites

Ron Rash, *Above the Waterfall*, 2015

Above the Waterfall is the sixth novel by Ron Rash, the best-selling poet, short story writer, and novelist from the Carolinas, and one of our 2013 ALIHOT award recipients. This novel is set in Appalachia, and follows the story of the sheriff, Les, and park ranger Becky, as they attempt to solve the mystery of a fish kill at a private resort. Along the way, Rash takes the reader deep into the psyches of the two protagonists as they reflect on past scars: Becky's from a school shooting when she was a child and the death of a radical ex-boyfriend, Les's from his ex-wife's suicide attempt. Both Les and Becky cherish their natural surroundings, and turn to nature to salve their wounds when the human world will not suffice. Les and Becky share a deep friendship on the brink of romantic love, a bond that is challenged by the fish kill. The novel also follows Les into the meth labs that dot the landscape, representing a poisoning of both the community and the pristine natural world of the mountains. This is a tale of the human world vs. the natural world, the past vs. the present, in which Rash explores the overlap between these spaces and questions the human impact on our surroundings. The language in this book is stunning, and Rash uses the novel technique of interspersing poetry, attributed to Becky, throughout the story, giving the reader a transcendent sense of the beauty of the Appalachian landscape.



SKY, FIRE, SHRINE, MACHINE

By Emily Choate

The Second Runner-up, Short Story Category of the 2014 William Faulkner -William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

NADINE LET BRANT convince her to come work his family's fireworks tent with him. He said she'd make enough money for the whole summer. He said he'd get lonely without her for three whole weeks.

The tent sat three counties west of Nadine's hometown. She'd never set foot in Brant's county before, but she figured it couldn't be all that different from home—both towns south of Nashville, east of Memphis. When she first arrived, nine days ago, she found that the tent was pitched in a half-dirt, half-gravel lot next to the Beacon Vista Seafood Restaurant, and beyond it in every direction lay untouched acres of thick, dark woods. She tried to keep her cool. After all, she had grown up near some woods. She hadn't always been a city dweller like she was now. Turned out, living *near* the elements was not living *in* them. Tall pines jutted from dense undergrowth, reaching for her on every side and narrowing her view of the sky. White webworm tangles clung to most of the big trees like hairy, ugly fruits. She didn't wander far. All her life Nadine breathed deeper when she could gauge where she stood.

She squirmed in her lawn chair. Afternoons like this one, when business was slow, she hated being stuck out there, baking in her own stink. She kept her fingers splayed so that they wouldn't stick together in the muggy air. She stretched her sore arms. Brant had told her she'd be expected to help roll up the tent's stiff vinyl-coated walls in the morning and lower them at night, but she didn't know how strenuous the task would be.

She was watching Brant give the hard sell to their sole customer, a deacon from the church he grew up in. Brant was talking up a featured display of the most intimidating, high-priced finales the tent offered. Their names all made ominous promises: Incoming! Napalm Rampage, Exploding Night Arsenal, Last Chance. You'd have to be a serious arsonist to set off those monsters in your backyard. They weren't selling.

A big sign hammered into the dirt by the road warned folks not to bring their firearms or to Kindle Any Flame on the premises. Otherwise, it might be

easy to forget that the tent was a giant powder keg. Local families stocked up for their holiday barbecues. Carloads of teenagers dropped in, headed for the quarry or some lower-grade mischief in their friends' yards. Making cats jump really high was on every kid's agenda that summer. There were quieter souls, too, who browsed the long tables—rows of crates stuffed with bright rockets, cones, spinners, and bombs. They said nothing, bought nothing. They passed up every fuse waiting to be lit.

"Your uncle tells me you're headed to law school," the deacon said. Nadine didn't trust him. He seemed to be casing Brant the same way Brant was casing him—not just for a sell, but for a win.

"Yes sir. Pepperdine. This one, Alien Invasion, says it'll blanket the sky with 'Fields of Martian Green.' Sounds good."

"Where's Pepperdine at?"

Nadine heard Brant sweep away the word *California*. He then tried to distract the deacon with their most worrisome display item—a simple black cylinder the size of a small beer keg, yellow letters wrapped around it spelling ARMAGEDDON SURPRISE. But the only impending doom that interested the deacon was Brant's move west. He'd been angling for his moment of shock and wouldn't be robbed of it now.

"California?" he said, loud enough to send Brant back a step. Brant turned Nadine's direction and tossed her the half-shrug she liked so much. She knew he liked to please her that way, in a way no one else would see. That was intimacy.

She offered him a commiserating face, wrinkling her nose to keep things playful. She'd been surprised to learn how good it felt to please him back.

"California's a long way away," the deacon said.

Brant's smile never wobbled. He managed to coax the deacon into some haggling over his purchases. Nadine listened closer. Sleeping and waking in the tent had a way of making even the clearest things murky. The facts and details of the lives they'd been living, which should have been easy to keep track of, seemed hazy and distant. She'd met Brant at college in Nashville—her second year, his last. Thirteen months together. Now he had graduated, sliding into his



hometown for one last summer on a slick of everyone's pride in him. Hers too.

Brant's voice sharpened into a tone she knew well: "Sounds like a fair deal. Let me consult my associate." He turned his back to the deacon and headed for her chair.

The tent lay just beyond the county line. All the tents did. It was a holy line of demarcation year round, not just during fireworks seasons. The Beacon Vista Seafood Restaurant marked that line; you could buy a beer there, to wash down your shrimp platter. You had to drive a couple of miles either direction to reach the nearest town. Humidity and chigger bites aside, this arrangement captivated Nadine—pitching camp on the permissive side of the threshold. She got worked up, making lists with Brant of all the naughty things they could do within spitting distance of that line.

Right now, Brant looked like he had any number of those things on his mind. In a postured voice she doubted was convincing as a sales tactic, he said, "What do you think, partner?"

Then he leaned close, his hands propped on the card table beside her. His voice low, he threw the first pitch in the next round of an ongoing game: "Combustible Night."

Nadine thought it over, then answered: "Night of a Thousand Stars."

"Starry Kisses."

"Kiss My Bliss."

"Blissful Nirvana."

"Nirvana Balls."

"You know," Brant said, close to a whisper, "you give me Nirvana Balls."

Nadine sweetened her face her into endearing disapproval. She shook her head No. Brant spun around, lifting his hands in resignation.

"Sorry, sir. Lady drives a hard bargain."

Brant liked to haggle. He was good at it—convincing people to budge one more inch. She was flattered to see him include her in what he did best. This game hadn't originated in the tent. Conversation between them could turn list-shaped at any moment. Sometimes he took her to parties with his pre-law friends. Whenever they sounded off about politics or religion—one always bled into the other—Brant grabbed center stage. He loved persuading them all of whatever theory he'd cooked up on the ride there. To bring his point home, he'd launch into a catalogue: theologians who had mommy issues, or politicians who needed to get laid. And while he may have kept the pre-law crowd howling, his eyes stayed on Nadine. Through the cheap cigar smoke, she always gave him her best face of sexy knowing, even if she hadn't heard of half the names on the list.

She listened as Brant worked his charms on the deacon, but her eyes scanned the woods. Squinting through heat waves, she looked beyond the tent, then beyond the Beacon Vista. She focused her eyes on some train tracks that ran behind the tent and the

restaurant. These tracks marked the boundary between the woods and the clearing. When she'd arrived, she was glad to see them. Railcars rumbling past seemed like something that would be important, clarifying, and emblematic. She set two quarters down on the tracks and kept her ears cocked, waiting for trains to blow through and reveal what they were supposed to mean. But after a week and no trains, her listening had begun to change, crawling into all her senses and making her forget what exactly she'd been tuning up to hear. Now she paid nervous attention—alert for everything, all the time. The quarters sat where she'd left them, unflattened.

That summer kept dishing up plenty of reasons for Nadine to stay sharp. Here they were, gearing up to enter the world—the one they'd heard was Real. Brant's California and law school sounded real enough. In her mind, Nadine spent a lot of time stating and restating her own vague plans for the future. Mostly, she searched for ways to avoid admitting that she would have followed him anywhere, but he had not yet asked her. As days in the tent passed, the words he hadn't spoken yet seemed to be waiting out there, somewhere she couldn't see, as if they could sound at any time—a starter pistol to tell her the future had begun.

Out front, tires crunched gravel. Nadine turned her attention back to the tent. A girl stepped out of a green Mercury, trailed by two small boys. She was striking, shorter and slimmer than Nadine. Her skin was pale, but opaque. She looked untouched by heat or emotion. She was Nadine's age, give or take a year. Certain local girls her age did shop there—girls with kids of their own already. Nadine rang up their purchases and did her best to make small talk. But the cool jolt of ego Nadine got from those transactions embarrassed her. She'd come through, free and clear, where they hadn't. That meant something about her, right? Something smart, maybe, or just privileged?

Nadine reached for the card table beside her and flipped up its gingham tablecloth. This table was the tent's Holy of Holies. Beneath it, they stashed the good stuff: most of the money, a rifle, a box of shells, and a mini-fridge that, like the lights strung up in the tent, ran off a generator. She grabbed a Coke from the fridge and flipped down the gingham. She liked knowing all that was hidden there. Especially the rifle—a gun in a fireworks tent, even unloaded, was illegal. Its barrel peeking out from behind the fridge pleased her, not because it protected her from dangers, but because it was a secret she'd been let in on.

The pale girl who drove the Mercury left the two boys to pick out cherry bombs. Then she hung back, glancing over the bins, taking ages to finger the simplest rockets. She reminded Nadine of some girls back home. Girls who stepped off the edge of the known world. Most went to the public school, but there were two girls at Nadine's church-run academy who had ended up banished. One day, they were



undisputed members of the tiny world all the girls had made together. And the next, without warning or explanation, they were cast over the wall, but seared into her memory.

Nadine grew up three streets off the well-groomed town square of Vienna, rhymes with Hyena—a small, handsome county seat. Vienna's square, where her father ran the pharmacy, and its surrounding streets of historical houses sat on a high hill that resembled a footstool. The hill overlooked the rest of the county—miles of dark tangled woods and hollows. From the second story of her family's restored Victorian, Nadine spent hours staring out her bedroom window, making a kind of survey of the surrounding wilderness. Everything peeking through the thick tree cover looked like it was in some state of decay—roofs with rows of shingles blown off, small unmowed fields, and almost beyond her range of sight, a tall round chimneystack. The blackened stack marked the abandoned grounds of a pig iron plant where her granddad Hearn had worked for decades. He lived with Nadine's grandmother in a small house within sight of the grounds, far into the county's unincorporated depths.

Up in Vienna, getting a fix on her position seemed easy. The historical houses, churches, and shops were lined up in straight rows of well-kept streets. Over the years, she toyed with the urge to descend, out there, where the lost girls all lived. Part of her jonesed for a life big and unruly enough to teach her the secrets they must've learned. Those girls knew things, real things, and their world felt like it hung so close, almost within reach. But here and now, in the tent, when Nadine met girls like them in the eye and took their cash, the prudish squirming inside her won out. She counted the seconds until they drove off.

She knew these thoughts were ugly. She never dared reveal them to Brant. *Elitist*—that's the word he would have used. And maybe she was. What Nadine knew for sure was that relief came, physical relief, every time they grabbed their toddlers and left. Relief that, though those girls had wandered close and could have lobbed their strange fire her way, they'd chosen not to strike.

Nadine wiped her forehead with the cold Coke can and watched the pale girl snaking her way around the tables. In her hands, the girl was twirling a brightly papered spinner Nadine recognized as one she had loved in childhood—a Sky Fire Shrine Machine. She'd loved it mostly for its name. Lots of fireworks had that kind of vivid but stiff name. Nadine liked trying to picture from their labels what would happen when they exploded. All that potential she pictured coiled inside a dark fist, ready to punch into the sky. "Unlit Unit" was the industry term Brant loved to use, never failing to imply some double entendre. She saw the items of her life this way, too—coiled tight, slapped with labels, lined up in a row. College, Career, Brant, Future. To save her life, she could not picture what

would happen when any one of these went off: how it might look, what force it might unleash, or where it might propel her.

The pale girl twirled the Shrine Machine slowly in her hands. Most of those girls back home had doughy, impassive faces, but this one was different. She had sharp, assessing eyes. She might be a decent haggler. But when the girl reached up to tuck her bleached hair behind her ear, Nadine saw that she wasn't shopping at all. Instead, her eyes were fixed on Brant.

She was waiting for Brant to recognize her. He hadn't yet. Brant stood at the edge of the tent, trying to wrap things up with the deacon. The girl's body started to hint at impatience. Her thin legs tensed; a string of beads shifted around her ankle. Nadine sat up straighter in her lawn chair and crossed her own legs, slick and stinky with bug spray.

Brant turned toward the girl. Recognizing her, his face crumpled inward.

"So, Pepperdine," the deacon said.

"Yeah." Brant had trouble paying attention now. "Yes sir?"

"That's not near San Francisco, is it?"

"Way south, sir. I think it's pretty different there."

Brant snatched glances at the girl. The deacon shifted the cylinder he'd purchased, Signs and Wonders, from one arm to the other. He drew Brant's face close to his own with the tug of his handshake. He spoke in the moist hush of unprompted spiritual counsel that made Nadine's skin crawl: "You take the cokehead movie stars, son. Just remember Whose you are."

After the deacon drove off, Brant stalled a few moments before coming back inside the tent. He wiped sweat from his face. When he turned, he was smiling. He took a few steps toward the girl. They looked at each other. Nadine didn't move.

"Hey you," Brant said. The girl rolled her sneakered foot over some gravel.

Brant tried harder, working his face into a smile. "You been okay?"

"He's gonna be in Pre-K." With a short jut of her chin, she gestured toward her son across the tent. He was arguing with his friend over which bomb looked deadliest.

"He's big now."

"Really he's kinda small," she said, monotone.

"Well, it's good to see you." Brant's voice shifted gears. "Lori."

Nadine's stomach lurched. Brant had had trouble with her name. Not trouble remembering, but disgorging the word from his mouth. It was distasteful to him.

Another car pulled in. Brant's shoulders eased. Noisy teenagers swarmed the tent, stocking up for the quarry. Nadine helped them but didn't hear a word they said. She kept glancing toward Brant, straining to hear. Twice, she swore she caught him move to touch Lori's arm, then stop himself. She could only grab a few



words.

"I thought you didn't live here now," Brant said.

"Manny wants back-up at the Legion," Lori said. "I'm down at the lake for the Fourth."

Brant shifted gears again, chipper with impersonal customer service: "Why don't I ring your stuff up?"

Lori turned away from him, and her eyes met Nadine's in a hard flare. Nadine snapped her attention back to the teenagers, pretending to care about their quarry plans. Lori corralled the two boys into her car while Brant bagged the fireworks they'd picked. Nadine watched Lori swoop back inside the tent to grab the paper sack from Brant's hands. She came and went without saying another word.



Vienna always held its Fourth of July picnics in a baseball field that ran along the base of the footstool hill overlooking everything else. A barbeque spread, some pickers down from Nashville, a few speeches from some elderly judge or the historical society—those were the boring things Nadine had to get through, until true dark, when the fireworks would go off. While hours of summer dusk stretched out, the long waiting would twist in her gut. But at some point, her granddad Hearn would round up Nadine, her sisters, and their friends. He'd pull from the trunk of his car a paper sack stuffed with pre-show goodies. He'd lead them into the far outfield, where he'd already dragged a giant square of cardboard to use as a platform. Watching the noisy, pretty spinners and cones, she could forget she was still waiting for the real show.

The summer when Nadine was ten, Hearn took her into a clearing at the edge of his property. Along a wooden rail, he lined up small tin targets—mismatched scraps from the vast stash of metal he'd dragged from the pig iron plant since it closed.

"You'll hunt or get hunted," he told her. Nadine was the only grandchild he had who was willing to shoot, and it turned out she had a decent eye.

She hadn't touched a gun since that summer a decade ago, but she still had the good eye. Pacing the train tracks behind the tent, she watched Brant, who was struggling with one of the ropes that supported the tent's walls. No matter what kind of Boy Scout knot Brant tried, that rope kept coming loose. The early evening hours had slowed to a crawl, no customers. Snatches of the Braves game on the battery-powered radio crackled across the clearing. She was waiting for the relief she'd come to expect, the deep breath that ought to have come when Lori drove away. Eyeing him now, all she could see was Lori. She had left tremors behind her. Nadine's thoughts spun in wild turns. With precious few words, Lori did something that had never even occurred to Nadine—she'd made Brant seem somehow less than impressive. In fact, from where she stood now, he looked small.

Bent over that one stupid knot. Every day he enjoyed schooling her about all the knots he knew—their obscure names, their anthropological origins. Five times a day that rope came loose.

She hopped off the rail and headed for the tent. "Tell the truth," she said, swooping in to shoulder the rolled-up wall. "You only know, like, two knots. Right? I mean, they're all the same, and every time you just make up a new name?"

Brant looked at her, startled but amused. Before he could answer, Brant's Uncle Stan tapped his horn as he pulled into the lot. Stan owned Brant's tent and two more on the opposite, lakeside border of the county. He shuffled back and forth, delivering stock and supplies and collecting money. He'd brought a big load of crates with him tonight, which he wasted no time starting to unload.

Holding the rolled-up tent, Nadine flinched from her sore arms. Brant went for a smirk first, then appeared to think better of it. He tried encouragement instead: "Think how buff they're going to be. Those'll be Popeye arms."

Nadine swallowed some rising annoyance. She forced herself to respond the way she would have any other day: "The better to pummel your face with."

She knew he liked it when she was mean and quick. *Wry* was the word he'd once used.

Setting down a crate, Stan hooted his approval. He pointed to her skimpy arms and said, "Sweetie, right there's why girls working here always makes trouble."

Brant let go of the rope. He tapped his finger on the knot he'd just tied and said, "You'll be interested to know. That one's well-regarded throughout the Rhine Valley."

"Regarded as what?" she said.

"Herr Schnitzel-Dick," he whispered, grinning. She was in no mood to play along.

"Not your best," she said. "Let's skip the history lesson."

Brant blinked at her a few times, as if flipping through a catalogue of responses, unable to find the one he wanted. How could Lori have rattled him so much? She tried to recall all the indisputable differences between girls like Lori and herself. She'd been compiling them for years, but for the moment, she couldn't bring any to mind.

Nadine said, "Tell me about that girl."

Stan called out from the truck: "Brant, get moving on these crates."

Brant sprinted off. Nadine flipped up the gingham to grab the day's take from a Gremlins lunchbox once carried by Brant's cousin. She always counted the money for Stan and entered the total into a small ledger. Next to the ledger, Nadine noticed the receipt book. She picked it up and glanced at the next-to-last entry—Lori's purchase. Nadine prided herself on being able to figure quick addition in her head. She saw right away that Brant had charged her next to nothing.



Stan set down his crate near the card table. He coughed in a stagey way that made Nadine put down the receipt book. After glancing at Brant, who was loosening ropes tied across the truck bed, Stan said, "You're a city girl, huh?"

"Not really. It's like a small town."

"Well, you don't look so comfortable out here. This too rough for you? Too hot?"

"No. It's fun." Nadine lowered her voice. "What did you mean by girls making trouble out here? It happened before?"

Stan leaned over the crate and fiddled with some twine. "You know, you ever get too hot or something, you're all sore. You want a night indoors, hot bath, you let me know. Brant's aunt lives over in Somerville now."

Nadine tried hard to swallow. "Thanks."

Brant interrupted, dropping a stack of crates beside Stan. The racket sounded intentional. He opened the top crate and pulled out a couple of cones.

He asked, "Are we out of Happy Delights?"

Nadine glared. He was trying to flirt with her.

Brant persisted: "I could sure go for some Fancy Sizzle. Gypsy Dancing Girls?"

Nadine turned the ballgame up. Braves were losing. She turned her chair away. Stan cleared his throat. He and Brant ambled toward the truck. Once Stan was gone, Brant let her be.

The dusk felt borderless, like it would keep stretching outward forever, and Nadine would be stuck out there, inning after scoreless inning. She paced the length of the tent, searching for distractions. She had brought a whole backpack stuffed with novels—mostly books Brant seemed surprised she hadn't read. She'd figured the tent would be the perfect chance to catch up. But the backpack sat unopened and she never thought about it, except for the night she dreamed that the books were infested with chiggers. Every time she turned a page, they crawled up her hands in battalions.

She doubted night would ever come, but the ballgame did end. The gloaming petered out too. Brant and Nadine performed their evening rites. They untied all the knotted ropes and rolled down the tent walls. She got the sandwich stuff from the mini-fridge and spread it out across the gingham. A shiny film had begun to form across the meats.

She chewed with bitterness and felt Brant watching her. If he was sick of eating sandwiches too, he didn't let on. But he was watching her. Done eating, he crouched in front her and said, "I know what we can do." His face hung heavy with lust, the kind he thought might actually lead somewhere.

Without a word, she beamed him in the face with her sandwich. The bread fluttered away mid-air, but the meat thwapped against his forehead and slid down his nose.

She marched out of the tent. Now it was full dark, but the moon was bright. She tried to breathe. Cricket chant flooded her ears. Out there between counties,

that chant seemed noisier, and more emphatic, than normal. She heard Brant's footsteps in the gravel behind her. It was absurd, what she had done. She faced him, expecting him to be pissed about taking a sandwich in the face. But his smile was warm. She let him reach for her.

"Your arm's not so bad now," he said.

She breathed deeply, remembering that it was summer, and out there, they might as well be alone in the world. He liked to persuade her, and he was trying it now. For the first time, she wondered whether she could persuade him too. She pointed to the sky.

"It really is a Night of a Thousand Stars," she said, quoting the cheesy firework label with genuine pleasure.

Brant winced. Clichés were acceptable: you could spend your irony on them. But God help you if you used them to say what you really felt. It had taken Nadine a long time to learn that one, but sometimes she still slipped.

She kissed him, too hard, and he laughed when their teeth clanged. She tensed up. She felt that she was unlearning things, fast—all the important things between the two of them. He led her by the hand back inside the tent.

"Relax," he said, setting her on top of the nearest table, her feet dangling. He pointed to the most phallic, neon-bright rocket nearby. "Can I interest you in some Stupefying Wonder?"

She needed to believe she could stop doubt in its tracks, that she could make things how they were before—before the tent, before Lori, before all the games and rituals keeping them together had begun to unravel. She tried hard to remember how the game worked.

"Maybe Towers of Awe?"

Her flip-flops slipped from her feet. She needed to believe she could get what she wanted, and that she could do it without saying a word.

"Swarm of Honey Blossom?"

She pushed him back, slid off the table, and pulled him down to the zipped-together sleeping bags where they slept each night.

His face against her stomach, he said, "You smell so good, so lurid."

She didn't want to hear his words—how they had always persuaded her. What if she too could wield that kind of sway? What would it make of her? She strained to hear beyond him and his words, into the bigger night happening around them. There was only cricket chant, signaling any kindred who might be listening.



In the ladies room of the Beacon Vista, closed for the night, Nadine had trouble deciding which smelled worse—fried shrimp platters mixed with PineSol or the pungent smell rising off her own body in waves.



Nine days in the tent, and she was still trying to forget real bathrooms existed anywhere. If she couldn't have them, then no one could. She ran a wet paper towel inside her bra and under her armpits. The paper towel smell wasn't sexy, not even to Brant, so she usually didn't scrub that hard. But now all she wanted was to feel blank, get clean.

Her leg hiked up on the sink, she braced herself with an elbow against the wall and dabbed ChigaRid on her afflicted panty line. Chiggers went hardest for the hidden places. She ran down the list of words he'd used to describe her. She had worn them smooth and familiar as a string of beads, and now she searched for them in the ladies room mirror—*cogent, pliant, wry, shrewd*. Strung together, they made a pretty good girl to know. Someone you couldn't help but want. There was a new one. She tried some *lurid* faces. But there was another word he'd called her tonight, too, while she was trying not to hear him. That word had slipped onto the string of beads before she could stop it. *Wry, shrewd, lurid, mine*. It had come out more hot breath than word, but he'd said it—"You're so mine."

Dried off and dressed, she stepped outside. The sky had changed. Clouds shuttled fast across the moon. Nadine looked upward, as from a riverbed, as if she were watching the underside of a current—one stronger than she was, pushing her forward. She walked along the edge of the bramble. She spotted tiny lights twinkling on the tracks and bent to scoop up her quarters. When she tilted them at angles, small circles of moonlight reflected against the tracks, tree trunks, the salmon pink walls of the Beacon Vista. The lights she flashed against the tent made exaggerated shapes—larger and somehow more distorted than they should have been.

What she didn't know grabbed at her stomach in swift, breathless tugs. Things about Brant didn't add up. Her life with him had ruptured in the moment Lori turned and looked straight at her. She knew it was true the same way she knew Hearn had marked her with his dead aim, and decided he could spare her from the dangers of being one of the hunted. Late in the summer she was ten, after supper one evening, Hearn led her by the hand onto the abandoned grounds of the pig iron plant. He said he wanted her to see where he'd worked, the blast furnace. On the edge of his property, they passed the long row of tin targets, most of them dented now, and hiked deep into the woods.

Nadine kept stopping to rub one ankle against the other, feeling overrun by itchy, biting things too small to see. Hearn said, "Pull your socks over your pant cuffs. Don't make it so easy for them."

The first signs of the crumbling plant buildings and machinery took her by surprise. Craggy ledges of brick wall and mounds of rusting scrap metal peeked through the trees and ground cover. He led her through the cluttered main yard, past ruined buildings and hulking mounds of broken parts. Hearn stopped

in front of the blast furnace's high brick stack.

She walked close, craning her neck upward, thrilled to see what this thing looked like from the ground. She started to explain that the stack was what she always used to get her bearings when she mapped the county from her bedroom window. But she stopped herself. It would sound silly.

Hearn pointed to the side of the stack's base, at a small covered platform that looked like a porch. "I worked there, by the slag notch. You want to see inside?"

She nodded, still staring upward. "What does it do?"

"The furnace? Heat up iron ore and coke."

"Coke?"

He laughed and set his hand on her shoulder, nudging her toward the platform. "Not Co-Cola. This coke, you get from coal."

The wooden steps had rotted, so he gave her a boost. Hearn grunted. His knees were shot by then. That summer, she had done a lot of scuttling around, fetching things for him. As she scrambled onto the platform and got to her feet, Hearn said, "You heat metals up. Change one metal into another. Then you get things left over, that you can use."

Nadine approached a windowless metal door, rust gripping one corner. She reached out for the doorknob, but hesitated. Hearn said that it should be unlocked. She tugged at the knob, also rusted, and then used both hands until the door gave way with a shriek. The jolt made her stumble back, and when she heard his voice, quiet and firm with authority—"Don't move"—she was looking down, at arcs of orange rust embedded across her palms. But then she heard the thin droning—low at first, then gathering angry and deep around a purpose. She looked away from her hands, then slowly up the dark space that filled the doorway, to the top of the doorframe. A large nest of hornets swung there, a cyclone of ash.

"Steady up," Hearn said. "Don't let on it's *your* blood they want to see."

Here and now, Nadine crossed the train tracks, tilting her quarters to flash reflections across the parking lot. For the first time in days, she remembered her car, parked in a far corner. It was possible to leave here. Nadine stuffed one quarter into her shorts pocket and brought out her key ring. The Beacon Vista ladies room, her parents' house, her car—such a small number of doors she could open. Nadine palmed the other quarter and then chucked it as far into the woods as her arm would allow.

Inside the tent, she crept to the gingham table. Careful and silent, she opened the lunchbox, took two tens from the next morning's change, then put one back. Brant lay nearby, his face so walled-off in sleep he could have been a stranger. She saw how easy it was to trick yourself into believing you had a claim on someone else's body. The moment you did, you were just begging for that body you thought you knew so well to rise up and shock you. Remind you that it



wouldn't be tamed. She sneaked outside and headed for her car.

She drove the state road across the width of the county, following signs to the lake. She knew the American Legion stood near a public swimming area. She half-hoped she would fail to find it and have to turn back, but when the road opened into a clearing, she knew she'd found the place. Across the gravel lot, music spilled from the whitewashed Legion and echoed across the lake. The echoes sounded something like the holiness whoops she heard sometimes at her grandparents' house, lying awake in their spare room. Through the window screens, distant shouts and electric organs rode in from some place that lay beyond dark, somewhere unreachable. But from her second-story perch in Vienna, that tiny Pentecostal church was easy to spot—just search for the white square letters they'd painted, spelling HOLY WALK HOLY across their flat black roof.

In the Legion parking lot, Nadine looked herself over in her rearview mirror and retied her ponytail, hoping to mask the fact that she'd washed her hair in a ladies room sink.

An elderly woman sat behind a table in the entryway, selling raffle tickets for the upcoming holiday weekend. She waved Nadine in. From the entrance to the bar, she could see into the Event Room, where most of the crowd danced to a cover band playing Haggard. Tables of local men and a few older couples were scattered around the bar. Nadine realized then that she had no idea what time of night it was—might be early in the evening or almost dawn. She'd kept time only by the sun for more than a week.

Lori was tending bar. Nadine forced herself to walk straight in, before she could lose her nerve. She grabbed a stool at the bar's farthest end, in a corner by the wall.

Lori recognized her without hesitation. She served the beers she'd been opening and walked down the bar to Nadine.

"What do you want?" she said, not referring to a drink order.

Nadine discovered she was stumped. She wasn't sure what she wanted or how to answer. In the Event Room, the band ended their set. Over loud cheers, Nadine managed to say, "I don't want to bug you. I just got to wondering."

"You got to wondering about your boyfriend," Lori said, breaking into a smile. "And now you think I got some story it's your business to know?"

Nadine fell even blanker. Lori rolled her head around on her neck. She said, "He didn't tell you one thing about me, did he?"

Nadine bristled against the challenge in Lori's voice. A game needed to be played here. Caught between pride and the lure of getting answers, she weighed her options and ventured a lie: "Sure he did."

The Legion crowd spilled into the bar. Lori broke

away from Nadine to greet the flood of patrons. She knew everybody. Without needing to take orders, she doled out Millers and Coors to all the regulars—older men who teased her with sweet talk, saying she'd always be their one and only. She teased them back, keeping them at bay, making them behave. She knew exactly what she was doing. Nadine made herself small in the corner, and watched.

Someone bogarted the jukebox, filling it with Tom Petty, drawing both cheers and groans. Then the crowd parted down the center for a pair of girls, one black-haired, one blonde. They sidled up to Lori. She winked and handed them each a Bud Light, a slice of lime stuffed into its neck. Lori leaned across the bar and shouted something into her friends' ears. The girls clinked their Buds. They left the bar to dance with each other and then with some old guys. They sang every word of *Free Fallin'*.

When the song ended, they headed for Nadine's corner. They pulled up barstools and sat down, effectively trapping Nadine against the wall.

"Sorry, sweetie," the blonde said, reaching past Nadine to grab an ashtray. Using her long fingernails to lift a smoke from the pack she'd dug from her purse, she added, "I know you."

"I don't think so," Nadine said.

"The girlfriend, right? Brant's girl? You sold me bottle rockets. You don't remember?"

Nadine had never seen either of these girls before, but she decided not to press it.

"I'm Hannah. She's Courtney." Hannah lit up.

"So you know what went down?" she said, pointing at Lori with her cigarette. "What happened between them two?"

"Sure." Hearing the waver in her own voice, Nadine regretted lying. It was a strategy she couldn't pull off.

"Then you know what makes our guy so special."

"Our guy?"

Hannah blew a trail of smoke straight into the ceiling. She said, "Any other guy, they'd have been scared shitless. That much blood, Memphis doctor patching her up, saying no more babies ever. Ever. Any guy would lose his shit. Right?"

Nadine took a couple of tries to say, "I guess."

"Not our guy," Hannah said, her face a smirk cast in lead. "Stuff lines up for him, don't it? I'm sure you noticed. So he was relieved. All his problems solved. Like *that*."

She snapped her fingers and leaned into Nadine's face. Through a hot rush of smoke, she said: "And you and I both know. *That's* what gets him off."

Hannah's smirk spread wider. The naked voltage firing across her face made Nadine shudder. She grabbed hold of the bar. Then, from behind the two girls, an older man's bellow broke through: "Here's my ladies."

Grateful for any distraction, Nadine looked up. It was Uncle Stan. He looked confused to find her there, but decided to be charmed instead: "Aren't you



supposed to be tucked into your sleeping bag, manning my stock?"

"You leave her alone, Stan," Hannah said. "She needs a break. Go on, get out of here."

Stan opened his mouth but didn't speak. After a pull of Corona, he wandered off to a table of old timers. When he was gone, Hannah's face warmed into camaraderie. Courtney tilted her head Stan's direction and grinned: "Goddamn Perv."

The two girls laughed, hard. Nadine breathed deeper. Then she laughed too.

"Point is," Hannah said, wiping her eye with her knuckle, "all that shit went down a long time ago." She laid a hand on Nadine's knee. "Brant loves you now. And you're so cool about it. I mean about the little boy."

Nadine's head throbbed with questions.

"Some girls," Hannah went on, "they'd look at Brant and just see a dumbass pussy. Scared his own secret redneck bastard kid's out there somewhere, like a grenade running around with the pin out."

Nadine's throat collapsed when she tried to speak. She stifled a cough—she didn't want them to think it was from the smoke. None of them said a word. Even the crush of bar noise seemed to hold itself back as ruthless seconds ticked past.

Then Courtney set down her empty beer. She drummed her fingers against the bar.

"Han, wait. You sure you got that right?"

"What right?" Hannah said.

"Wasn't that the deal with his other kids?"

Hannah lifted her palms in a swift Oops. "Oh yeah. I forgot. Those ones the state took away."

Courtney turned to Nadine, looking helpful: "You really ought to track down their moms too."

Hannah nodded. "Of course that all happened before he went into the Pen."

"Underage girls. Like, young ones."

"At least they were wives. Religious thing."

"The kiddy porn?"

"Just for money. Wasn't personal. He's not Stan!"

Courtney spun around on her stool. Eyeing Stan, who was leaned back on his chair's hind legs and holding forth over his paunch, she growled low. "You're damn right he's not."

Nadine blushed to her ears. Her heart thudded. *They are fucking with me.*

"You got a problem?" Hannah said, staring hard, full mock concern: "What are you, some kind of snob?"

Nadine felt everything inside holding her upright start to crumble under the weight of being played such a fool. She tried to stand up. Hannah grabbed her sore arm.

"You look thirsty."

"I have to go."

"No, you need a drink," Hannah said and hollered, "Lor!"

At the other end of the bar, Lori dumped out an ashtray, and to Nadine's horror, headed their direction.

Lori sized things up fast. She reached out to Hannah, who let go of Nadine.

Lori's face stunned her. It wasn't hard. It didn't mock her. And it refused to give anything away. Whatever secrets this lost girl knew, she had no intention of spilling them to Nadine.

"Our girl here wants a shot," Hannah said.

Lori rested her hands on the bar. Not without kindness, she said, "I won't serve you."



Nadine would barely remember stumbling past the girls, dodging Stan, and speeding away from the lake. She was too blinded by bright flashes of shame. She stole looks at herself in the rearview. She looked blotched and half-crazed. Back on the state road, she rolled down her window, letting her blood cool. Lights from passing cars and distant houses flickered across her as she passed through the heart of the county.

The night was loud as it rushed past—tires, crickets, wind. As she entered the stretch of woods leading to the tent and county line, houses and cars disappeared. Trees pressed closer and thicker. She felt she had stepped past the edge of every mapped place.

When her car stopped short in the gravel, Brant burst halfway through the tent flaps. High beams threw harsh light across his body, naked to the waist and stiffened to a battle posture she'd never seen. To be either hunter or hunted, always—it wearied her. Was there another choice?

Once she cut the engine and got out, he relaxed and stepped away from the tent. He was holding the rifle at his side. He saw her glance at it and said, "You know how things are. Somebody shows up this hour, they didn't come to buy sparklers."

She leaned against the hood of her car and didn't speak.

"I didn't even know you were gone. Where were you?"

She didn't answer. Brant came close to her. He set the rifle on the hood.

"Where were you?"

Nadine brushed past him into the tent. He followed her. She tried to gauge how long it might take to gather up her belongings. She looked around for a mess to clean up, but she had never unpacked.

She looked up at him and smiled. "I know what we can do." She thrust her hands into one of the large discount bins and brought up two fists full of ground spinners. "Don't you think we've earned ourselves some festivity?"

Brant pulled on a t-shirt. He tried to look good humored. "You mean blowing ourselves up? I knew you were pissy, but not *that* pissy."

"Just these little guys. Pick out your toy soldiers."

Brant and Nadine ran out into the middle of the Beacon Vista's parking lot, the tails of their t-shirts loaded with treasure. The sky was rich black against the moon, and the pavement pushed out the heat it had hoarded all day. Brant went first, lighting a Ground



Blossom Spinner. It released a high whistle, and they leaped over orange and purple sparks shooting across the lot.

Nadine set off a Luck Luck Goose. First, it shrieked. Flames spewed from its mouth. Then “eggs” of crackling sparks rocketed, one after another, from its hind-end. Pictures blasted through Nadine’s mind—Lori’s son whining about cherry bombs, girls changing smelly toddlers atop metal bleachers at high school track meets, the needling fear that condoms might go bad in the boiling summer heat. All these things used to make her queasy, as if somehow they could leak on her. But now she was breathless, almost weightless, as other girls’ fates knocked loose from hers.

The whole scene began to strike her as funny. She pointed to the rocketing egg-sparks. “Look, it’s the miracle of birth.”

Brant flashed her a wary look. He set off a row of miniature tanks. Their guns fired sparks at enemies hidden in the woods. Then Nadine set out her final choice—three Fire Sky Shrine Machines. The one she remembered from Vienna, the one Lori twirled in her hand while she stared Brant down. Nadine set one aside, lit the other two, and ran back a safe distance.

While she and Brant waited, the fuses hissed and burned. She knelt low to watch them closer, her knees warmed by the pavement. The Shrine Machines ignited. First, a few sharp, pleasing reports blew. Then a half dozen low-arc-ing flyers buzzed in dizzy paths. Most of them planted in the dirt near the tree line, but one rogue flyer made a break for the tent. At the last second, it hung a sharp right and fizzled out in an overhanging tree. Brant cursed at the near-miss. Nadine kept low to the ground, watching showers of sparks erupting from the Shrine Machines. Colors emerged and shifted as greens and golds gave way to reds and purples. She waited for the moment she remembered best: when the sparks had slowed, then stopped, and the show seemed to be over, up popped thin green paper roofs, Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop, until the Shrine Machines had built themselves into five-tiered towers.

Nadine felt a hard tug down the center of her ribcage, the weight of everything collected there—hunters and their prey, a coiled string of beads, every unlit unit of her future—waiting inside the crucible heart of a furnace.

Brant said. “You’ll be interested to know. In China, shrines housed sacred relics.”

She stood up from the pavement and walked off, unaware of what she was doing until her feet hit the gravel in front of the tent. She looked back at Brant, who was gathering wrappers and charred firework remains. She picked up the rifle from the hood of her car. It was loaded.

“That was careless.”

Brant looked up from his pile of burnt trash. “You got me there. I should’ve put it back.”

She walked halfway to him and then stopped in her

tracks.

He said, “Why don’t you hand that to me?”

She aimed the rifle at the last unlit Shrine Machine.

“Won’t deny it,” he said, standing up. “That’s funny. I get it.”

She glanced at him from her line of sight.

“I said it was funny.” Brant said. “What is this? Did you hear something about me? Was it Stan? That girl? I’ll tell you about her. I know that’s what you want.”

Some stories were never meant to be hers. Now it seemed as if everyone who had given her a piece of the girl she was—honed her aim, praised her body, showed her mercy—might also become a line she must choose when to cross.

“Nah,” she said. “I don’t need to hear it.”

She wondered where Brant was headed. For the first time, she didn’t try to shoehorn herself into the picture, but wondered, simply, where he was headed.

Would he keep rising in power and luck, recline untroubled on Malibu beaches? Or would his luck start to turn, making him flounder? Would he start to pine for the old turfs and their easier prey? He might become a deacon or an Uncle Stan. That might make him happiest: presiding over tents like these, trying to believe that every threat came labeled: Incoming! Reign Of Flame, ARMEGEDDON SURPRISE, End Is Nigh.

Brant’s hands rose in stick-up surrender, even though she was aiming at the firework. He kept talking. “You can’t shoot that thing anywhere near here. You’re not stupid. You’re better than that.”

In the last moments she could ever picture her future as a dark waiting fist, her sights narrowed on the past. She couldn’t remember if she heeded Hearn’s words that summer, with the hornets’ nest swaying in the doorway. Did she stand tall, or did she run away squealing? Maybe she was stung but fought back and took some hornets down with her. She liked that idea. But the memory was gone. Instead, a hard thrill against the walls of her belly told her it had hardened into something else: a piece of dented tin, lodged deep, that could change her from one metal into another. It seemed to be changing her now, into someone who would dare aim her fire straight into the Machine. Maybe even someone who could blow shit up and then walk away, steeled against the wake of her own trouble.

Brant backed away. He was souring against her, wearing a look she’d seen on him once before. He forced the distasteful word from his mouth: “Nadine.”

She said, not without kindness, “You can go.”

She seemed now to be peering down a long line of sight. As if she were watching from some high far-off scrap of perch. From there she could watch a boy—someone she was already beginning to forget—hurl words at her that she could not hear. She could watch a girl turn to walk away, blue flyers buzzing past her shoulders, bright plumes of color and fire climbing the sky, and sparks raining too close, singeing her arms



and her hair. She could watch this girl lift the tail of her shirt and wipe her smoke-stung eyes as clean they were going to get. 🌸

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Judge Patrick Samway, S.J.'s Comments:

This story by Emily Choate dramatically relates how Nadine comes to terms with the previous amorous relationships of her co-worker Brant, as they sell fireworks whose names provide a wonderful description of their increasingly tense relationship: Incoming!, Napalm Rampage, Exploding Night Arsenal, and Last Chance. Such explosive pyrotechnic devices provide a wonderful comment on the structure of this story.

Emily Choate has been awarded writer's residencies at Vermont Studio Center, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, and ISLAND (Institute for Sustainable Living, Art, and Natural Design). Emily's writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from The Florida Review, Chapter 16, Yemassee, Nashville Scene, and elsewhere.

A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College's MFA program, Emily belongs to the Peauxdunque Writers Alliance and has attended numerous writers' conferences, including Words & Music, Bread Loaf, Sewanee, and Tin House. She has taught writing and literature, held various library jobs, and currently freelances. A native Nashvillian, she now lives at the wooded edge of the city, where she's working on a novel.



Recommended Reading: Faulkner House Favorites

Ecstatic Cahoots: Fifty Short Stories. Stuart Dybek, 2014

This is a thrilling book of stories by Stuart Dybek, a writer who has been producing contemporary, strange, and wonderful short stories for years. Some of the stories in **Ecstatic Cahoots** are so short as to be just a few sentences; for example, the story *Misterioso* goes simply:

"You're going to leave your watch on?"
"You're leaving on your cross?"

Dybek is a master of saying a lot in a small amount of space. His descriptions are always pertinent and precise, belying his skill as a poet. These stories are by turns bizarre and touching, and his skill with magical realism is reminiscent at times of Borges. Though there are a whopping fifty stories in this collection, Dybek manages to make the whole thing cohere beautifully. This collection is a treat for any lover of short stories.



OTHER FINALISTS

Finalists

An Iron Lung Child, Lottie Brent Boggan, Jackson, MS
Can We Discuss This After I Am Dead, Rebecca Eder, Peoria, IL
Codes, Nancy Antle, New Haven, CT
Den of Rhyme, Craig Faris, Rock Hill, SC
Ferocious Faith, Bruce Wexler, Elmhurst, IL
First Things First, Teddy Jones, Friona, TX
Flock Apart, Tad Bartlett, New Orleans, LA
Happy Story, Brendan Minihan, Jr., New Orleans, LA
Indelible Myth, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Infidelity, Kirsty Gunn, London, England, UK
Kirkegaard in the Desert, Charles Broome, New Orleans, LA
Kiss Him for Me, Richard Gazala, New Orleans, LA
Love and Other Birds, Nancy Rowe, New Orleans, LA
Mustang Sally and her Road Rage Zen, Robert Hambling Davis, Newark, DE
My Uncle's Arm, Paul Negri, Clifton, NJ
Rich Women on Wednesdays, Michael Devault, Monroe, LA
The Boy Who Would Be Oloye, Maurice Ruffin, New Orleans, LA
The Last View of Delft, June English, Baton Rouge, LA
The Man Who Feared Women, Paul Negri, Clifton, NJ
The Twilight Club, Leslee Becker, Fort Collins, CO
Three Graces and A Tractor Beam, Armand St. Martin, New Orleans, LA
Through The Body of Mary, Joyce Miller, Cincinnati, OH

Short List for Finalists

After Midnight, Pete Peterson, Escondido, CA
Anna Borden, Ania Savage, Denver, CO
California Native, Catherine Dupree, Los Angeles, CA
Coercion, Amalia Bilger, New Orleans, LA
Emancipation, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Eufala, Emily Choate, Pegrarn, TN
Family Reunions and a Haunting Question, Mal King, Santa Paula, CA
Frank Didiot, Carin Chapman, New Orleans, LA
Good People, Paavo Hanninen, New Orleans, LA
Heartwood, Joan Mora, Carrollton, TX
He Lied Through His Crooked Teeth, Mary Kuykendall-Weber, Middle Grove, NY
House of Ruth, Craig Faris, Rock Hill, SC
In Your Beautiful Country, Lucien Childs, Anchorage, AK
Little City Hall, Cheryl Schleuss, Covington, LA
Lucy Cat, N. West Moss, West Milford, NJ

Miles Gloriosus, Geoff Wyss, New Orleans, LA
More Room Out Than In, Harry Bruns, Covington, LA
Myrtle's Surprise, Petra Perkins, Highlands Ranch, CO
Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear, Stan Kempton, New Orleans, LA
Oyster, Charles Holdefer, Brussel, Belgium
Paris, Bruce Colbert,
Peculiar Apocalypse Behind the Gates, Jennifer Moffett, Ocean Springs, MS
Robert, Benj Gibicsar, New Orleans, LA
Schrödinger's Opossum, Anne Reed, New Orleans, LA
See No Evil, Leslie Daniels, Thorold, Ontario, Canada
Shopping for Lions, Devorah Cutler-Rubenstein
Snow on Easter, Kathleen Gerard, Township of Washington, NJ
Standing Up for Number Two, Joe Bryak, San Pablo, CA
Superpowerless, Tad Bartlett, New Orleans, LA
Tending Sheep, Joseph W. Allen, III, Shrewsbury, MA
The Curious Case of Dr. M., Obert Fittje, Tallahassee, FL
The Face in the Light, J. Ed Marston, Chatanooga, TN
The Hot Springs, Hannah Reed, Baton Rouge, LA
The Phone, Rebecca Mitchell Dhillon, Richmond, Surrey, England
The Porter, Pat Gallant, New York, NY
The Witches of Havers Street, Delores Mae Dahl, Los Angeles, CA
Thirty Three Years, Rodney Nelsestuen, Woodbury, MN
Three Graces and a Tractor Beam, Armand St. Martin, New Orleans, LA
Tiny, Tom Andes, New Orleans, LA
Understanding Fitz, Wendy Simons, Stevensville, MI
Under the Moonlight, Tina Hayes, Washington, DC
Wasn't Tomorrow Wonderful, Melanie Dante, Philadelphia, PA
Water Runs, Julia Carey, New Orleans, LA
When Walls Weep, Mary Hutchins Reed, Chicago, IL
Wreck of the Amtack's Silver Service, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT

Semi-Finalists

All Are They, Helen Archeris, Newark, NJ
An Offer of Hari-Kari, Elaine Crauder, Havertown, PA
Antipasto, Rebecca Eder, Peoria, IL
Baby Darlin, Eve Troeh, New Orleans, LA
Before the Fall, Mary Hutchins Reed, Chicago, IL
Being Sent to the Yardstick Library, Mary Kuykendall-Weber, Middle Grove, NY



Bullfrog Willie Smith on Guitar, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Certain Angels, Elaine Crauder, Havertown, PA
City in the Sky, Lisa Jackson
Culting on the Coastline, Jevin Lee Albuquerque, Monterey, CA
Eye See Ewe, Mary Jean Pramik, San Francisco, CA
Family Plot, Eugene Mora, Westbury, NY
Fanny's Patent Leather Shoes, Belinda Straight,
For the Greater Good, Laura Weddle, Somerset, KY
Hannah's Limit, Belinda Straight
Heart Worm, Mike Beasley, Carthage, TX
Heredity, Carolann Neilon Malley, Granby, MA
He-She, Mark Havlik, Huntersville, NC
Hill Beautiful, Robert L. Fox, Willis, MI
Hunting Squab, Wade Perrin, Marrero, LA
Juniper, Erica Seideman, Prairieville, LA
Loretta's Diner, Joyce Davis, Northbrook, IL
Lost and Found, Amina Gautier, Chicago, IL
Movie Money, E. M. Schorb, Mooresville, NC
Ms. Hancock, Sylvia Veronica Scott
Mr. T, Jacqueline Guidry, Kansas, MO
Murderous Santa, Aiden Siliak, Lexington, KY
Not a Duck, Elaine Crauder, Havertown, PA
Nothing No Stronger, Laura Weddle, Somerset, KY
Only the Good Die Young, Janet Taylor-Perry, Ridgeland, MS
Rare Earths, Patricia Warren, McLean, VA
Redondo/Rounded, Mario Beruvides and Maria O'Connell, Lubbock, TX
Runaway, Charlotte Schenken, Omaha, NE
Shristi, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Simple Roast Chicken, Valerie Keiser Norris, Simpsonville, SC
Speaking of the Dead, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Storm Damage, Charlotte Schenken, Omaha, NE
Stranger on the Verge, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
Summer, M. L. Dunser, Columbus, MS
The Arsonist, the Astronaut, and the Artist, Brittany Grady, Morris, MN
The Day Louis Armstrong Died, Johnny Goldstein, St. Louis, MO
The Loss of All Lost Things, Amina Gautier, Chicago, IL
The Moth Orchid, Belinda Straight
Them Old Coins, Marley Stuart, Covington, LA
The Pursuit of Happiness, Amoi Lyons
The Whalesinger, Gregory Friedlander, Mobile, AL
The Wounded and the Wild, Hariett Kardel, Salinas, CA
Tragedy, M. Alison, Ithaca, NY
Trick or Treat, Devorah Cutler-Rubenstein
We Can Do It, Patricia Holland, North Middletown, KY
Who Knows These Children, Jacqueline Guidry, Kansas, Mo

For others who placed, please visit our website.



THE MORNING AFTER

An Excerpt from the novel All of the Lights

by Maurice Carlos Ruffin

The Winner, Novel-in-Progress Category of the 2014 William Faulkner -William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

Authors Note: In the previous chapters, the unnamed protagonist went to a reception at a mansion owned by a member of the law firm where he works with the intention of impressing his superiors into giving him a promotion. Things fell apart. He ended the evening drunk, wasted, and naked. Just before this scene, he saw his wife and child off for the day. Dreading facing the embarrassment of the previous evening and fearing that he's been fired, the protagonist decides to catch a streetcar to work in an effort to waste time.

THE ST. CHARLES STREETCAR LINE ran like a crooked smile from the intersection of Carrollton and Claiborne avenues, thirteen rickety miles past the statue of that Confederate anus, General Robert E. Lee, to the doorstep of the skyscraper where I worked.

One-hundred and sixty years of operation and no one ever bothered to insulate the streetcar. You shivered in the winter. You roasted in the summer. Come tourist season, you couldn't find a bench to sit on. If you were lucky enough to find a spot to rest, you weren't riding until someone shoved their ass in your face, as if to say, "you might be sitting pretty now, but I have the upper cheek." In other words, a ride on the streetcar was guaranteed to be noisy, smelly, and slow, but I needed to ride, badly.

I rocked from heel to heel at the Constantinople Street stop, my briefcase strap already sweat-pasted to my chest. It was the morning after my unveiling at Octavia's mansion, which was just a few blocks upriver from where I stood. I wanted nothing more than to go back to my bed, now that Penny and Nigel had gone off to work and school, and take a couple of Daisy Cutters so that I could skip the day entirely. Instead, I had another relaxant, the kids called them Apples. Still, my temples throbbed in time to my shifting, and if you told me the pit of my stomach was infested with gremlins, I couldn't have sworn otherwise. I would have traded my soul for six or eight more hours of

sleep, but my soul couldn't have been worth more than a light siesta.

I had only been fired once: from the Dairy Queen in Metairie, for wearing a dashiki to work. I wore it in silent protest to the owner's support of former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke's bid for the U.S. Senate. I was preaching to the wrong choir, it turned out. The owner was Duke's college roommate. Duke got 20 percent of the statewide vote that year. I was pretty naive in my 20s, not that much had changed.

After last night, there was no doubt that my career with Seasons was in the last seconds of the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour. No promotion. No raise. No getting my wife and son out of that rotten trailer and back into our real house. Our homeowner's didn't cover any of the flood damage. Our flood insurance, the little that there was, had been tangled in red tape for years. I'd hoped that becoming a shareholder would at least help me get a loan to get the work started. But I was finished. Without a job, a bank wouldn't give me enough money to make a collect call.

The only question was which of the two others would be selected, Rollo or Franklin. If I was a betting man, and I was, I would have put my chips on Franklin. I may have been the trouble maker, but Rollo was just too far in the other direction. He once came in on a Saturday, and shined all of the partners's desks with Pledge. People that obsequious are creepy. No, Franklin was the best of both worlds. He never stepped in the line of fire like me, but he wasn't a complete Uncle Tom. It was him, after all, who convinced the firm to finally invite a black kid into the summer program for high schoolers. (I'd tried, but I didn't have sway with the right people.) If anything, I was proud of Franklin. If one of us had to make it, it should have been him.

Maybe he would change things for the better. He would make partner, get on the executive committee,



and then methodically and relentlessly, make the firm better like a stream wearing down a boulder. My dynamiting tactics had never done anything but create rubble, piles of me that were probably being cleaned up as I waited. Shelly, the human resources director, had likely already cobbled together my severance package, two weeks pay and unemployed health care benefits. She might have already mailed it. I always admired her efficiency.

People acted like being fired was the worst thing in the world, the embarrassment, the fear, the shame of gathering your box of desk trolls and dollar-bill origami, rubber stress balls and loose change, holiday cards and notes scribbled on overcast afternoons when you were younger and stronger, but didn't know it. If the whole point was to snatch economic success, then being escorted by security to the sidewalk. I was surprised that we didn't sew a red "f" onto people's shirts before shoving them out into the street.

I'd given plenty of thought to having lived in constant fear of being fired for most of my career. There were worse things than getting the chop. The ending of anything was an invitation to clarity. Anyone who had ever been dumped could tell you how crystal clear the relationship became once it exploded. That was the time to see who was clingy, who was disengaged, and who played who like a ukulele.

Still, my enlightenment didn't mean I was excited get an anvil dropped on my head. I'd invested too much in Seasons. And now my investment was worthless. To work at Dairy Queen, I only had to fill out an application and code-switch to "hi, my name is Bill" English. I remembered well, I did my best to channel Theo Huxtable from the Cosby Show, a tactic I also used in my Seasons interview. White folks really dug Theo, for some reason, apparently. But it had taken a lifetime to get my shot at Seasons. When I added up Pre-K through law school and multiplied it times resume-stuffing, extra-curricular activities, a landfill's worth of student loan debt (which I still hadn't put a dent in over a decade after the fact), and the effort of not falling off the mechanical bull that was life at the firm, how many man hours was that? How many lifetimes?

It was all downhill from there, and not in the sense that things were about to get easier. Of the pack of Big Law firms downtown, Seasons was the alpha dog. There was nowhere to go from there but to scavenging in the world of the beta puppies. I'd seen what happened to the other poor souls who had been terminated with extreme prejudice. The lucky ones managed to get some general counsel post with a start-up. The unlucky ones haunted traffic court, haints negotiating speeding ticket settlements for gas money.

The smart ones quit the practice of law altogether to pursue their other passions. What were those passions? Delivering bottles of spring water to suburban homes? Selling steak knives? Leading a cover band? I wasn't sure, but I knew it had something to do with not being miserable all the time.

A dim, white eye drifted closer, the glow of a headlight creeping out of the morning mist. Streetcar number 920 swimming toward me. "Swimming" because the somber cylinder reminded me of a whale at sea. A dour, one-eyed Orca with no concern for my human problems.

That was the reason I'd decided to catch the streetcar that morning instead of driving. My normal commute was barely ten minutes. The streetcar took closer to an hour. I needed to draw out time before my decapitation. There was something about waiting on the neutral ground between the opposing lanes of traffic, luxury cars and the occasional bike flashing by, that coated everything in a dream-like patina. I felt underwater, a barnacle searching for something to cling to.

Pzztz. A spark jumped from the overhead power line. The 920's metal wheels scraped like knives being sharpened, the discs kicking up a fine dust. That dust was like smelling salts in that it always brought me to full attention regardless of how early it was, how much I had drunk the previous night, or how much I wanted to die. It was a disturbing tang, the alchemy of electricity, metal, and me.

However, I'd learned there were few things more pleasurable than bobbing along the tracks as the live oaks fell behind me and looked forward to it.

Unfortunately, the cabin was crammed with tourists. Nearly all of the seats in the cabin were taken except for one of the benches parallel to the open windows. I squeezed into a spot. A couple sat to my left reading the *Picayune*. Beneath an ad for Blanco's Milk, there was a short article, some quack saying the city would be underwater in twenty years, ten if we were lucky. Across from me, a blonde woman wore a purple hat with white fluff on top. It looked like pillow had thrown up on her head. I smiled at her. She grimaced at me and looked away.

The 920 slid forward. The restaurant across the avenue, the Dixie, was still boarded up. Someone had graffitied the plywood in electric blue letters. *This is New Orleans.*

I leaned back against the wooden bench, shut my eyes, and let the hot breeze flow across the nape of my neck. I would just rest and count and stretch my ride out to infinity. It was worth the price of admission.



The 920 stopped. A good number of tourists, speaking a language I couldn't place, got off, probably to sight-see the above-ground cemeteries. What kind of monsters flew halfway around the world to look at tombstones? As if people didn't die where they came from.

Most of the benches were still occupied, but the aisles had cleared. Some high-school-aged students got on and went to the back. Many sets of eyes followed them. Nothing about a handful of girls and boys in suits and dresses would have attracted attention in most major American cities, but 1) since the storm New Orleans was no longer a major city having lost half of its population; 2) plenty of people objected to calling the New Orleans American even before the storm (more on this later); 3) school had been out for weeks; 4) the group was a mix of blacks, whites, Hispanic, and Asian, which just didn't happen in New Orleans; and 5) there had been a series of muggings, break-ins, and acts of vandalism by a group calling itself the Kujichagulia Front. They dressed like bankers, and left leaflet rants in coffeeshops. These kids were too young to be members of the KF, but I'd seen this more and more lately. Youngsters who wore KF-style clothes, instead of dressing like Lil Wayne or Rihanna. At least they were thinking, even if they were just simple reactionaries.

Streetcars were bi-directional. At the end of the line, the conductor would cross from one end of the cabin to take the helm at the other end. The students were at the rear helm. One of the boys broke free from the cluster. He had very short dreads and wore a black suit with a black tie. The boy sat next to me, then placed his book sack on the floor. He didn't say anything for several blocks, but stared at his friends who weren't paying him any mind. His friends were singing a song; it was peppy like a something the Jackson Five might have sung back in the Motown era. I couldn't quite make out the words from our distance.

"Why ain't you sitting with your peeps?" I asked. Whenever I spoke in Ebonics, the words clinked against my ears. The older I got and the longer I worked in the corporate law, the more my fluency dropped. Like someone who had taken high school Spanish, I understood most of what I heard, but I found it harder to speak without sounding like a poseur. This was bullshit, of course. Each previous generation of blacks, myself included, handed down most of the slang that modern society used.

"I don't like to sit in the back," he said. I was surprised at his proper way of speaking. Not too proper, but it was clear that the kid opened a book from time to time.

"Rosa Parks would whip my tail if she saw me sitting

in the back," he said.

"Sure you right," I said.

"They think we're them," he said, glancing around at the passengers closest to us.

"Who?"

"People who don't know it's rude to stare." The boy raised his voice when he said this. The woman in the purple hat pressed her Whole Foods bag closer to her body.

"You a lawyer, huh?" the boy asked. Because of the way he flattened his mouth, "lawyer" sounded like "liar." *You a liar, huh?*

I nodded.

"You ever get tired of acting white?"

"You got me wrong," I said.

"I'm just playing," he said. "That stuff about acting white, that's a twentieth century way of looking at it. Even if it's kinda true."

"Are you from here?" I asked. This kid had gotten my attention. How many kids on the streetcar just like him had I ignored out of fear? No, not fear. Boredom. Did I really want to hear another black boy tell about his dream of playing ball one day? But not this strange kid. He was a type I'd never seen. A mold-breaker.

"These people looking at us because they think we're thugs, and we stare side-eye at them because we think they're blue-eyed devils. And she holding her shopping bag like she think you going to steal her kumquats. And you going to your work cause you think that'll change how they looking at you, like it matters how they looking at you."

"Hey," I said. "There's nothing wrong with working hard—"

"To get paid, right? Cause that'll fix everything. Money will make everybody love each other."

The kid pulled a plastic case from his book sack. He opened the case, which was foam insulated. It was a gun case. He picked up the gun with his finger on the trigger. Purple Hat Lady screamed. The couple next to me pressed back against the bench. The murmurings increased as the wave of people who realized what was happening rolled to the rear of the cabin. I peeked out of the window behind me. I figured I could fit through if the boy was distracted long enough.



The 920 rumbled to a stop.

The kid shoved the muzzle into his mouth. Purple Hat Lady stopped screaming. The kid bit off a hunk of the end and chewed. His friends had moved to the front of the streetcar, and were guffawing in the aisle, except for one of the girls. She was Asian with pixie-cut hair and pink lip stick. She held a high-tech, miniature camera in her hand.

“Hazelnut chocolate,” the kid tossed the chocolate gun—what was left of it—at me. I was never a good catch, but somehow I managed to grab hold without dropping it.

“If my name was Dylan,” he said to me. Purple Hat Lady held a hand over her chest. “You think people would have freaked so hard?”

The boy licked his fingers.

“My dad is a professor of English,” he said to Purple Hat Lady, then flipped his hand at me dismissively. “You thought I was one of them, too.”

I halfway reached out for him. I wanted to tell him that he’d misunderstood me, but the kid and his friends jumped out of the 920 and ran up the block. They disappeared around the corner.

I was, magically, already at the Sky Tower where I worked. I hadn’t checked the time before I boarded, but it seemed like no more than thirty seconds had passed since I got on. My leisurely ride was over before it began and my hands, which were still hovering in the air, were moist. They dripped with chocolate, almost like I was melting. Fortunately, I hadn’t gotten any on my seersucker.

Judge M.O. Walsh's Comments: *All of the Lights* is more than a novel in progress. It is an absolute gift. The story of a black lawyer in an all-white firm, battling personal demons and marital challenges, racism and the complications of ambition, this is a novel with every level of conflict you could ask for: internal, external, familial, racial, social, immediate, and looming. Yet, in spite of this, *All of the Lights* also manages to be quickly paced and funny. It feels heartfelt and true because the author is the real deal and his characters—BL, Penny, and Nigel—are the benefactors of his skill. So, of course, are we. This is a novel to fly through once for pleasure and then return to savor the little things you may have missed; all the gems scattered about in the author’s clear prose and insight. Ruffin seems to know what makes us human, what makes us interesting, and a book like *All of the Lights*, the promise of it, is the reason I read. I’ll be shocked if we don’t see this one on bookshelves soon.



Maurice Carlos Ruffin is a charter member of the Peauxdunque Writers Alliance, a New Orleans group formed from the Words & Music Writers Alliance, and a graduate of the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop. He is a winner of the 2014 Iowa Review Fiction Awards Contest, the 2014 So to Speak Journal Prize, and the 2013 Joanna Leake Thesis Prize. His work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*, *Redivider Magazine*, *Callaloo*, the *Apalachee Review*, and *Unfathomable City*, a recently published New Orleans atlas edited by Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedecker. Maurice has placed in the competition previously and has read new work at our annual meeting of the Words & Music Writers Alliance. It’s never happened before in the history of the William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition, but in three categories of the 2014 competition, including Novel-in-progress, all preliminary round judges selected one entry as the standout, as their first choice. In the case of preliminary readers for Novel-in-progress, all of them sent back words to the effect: “*All of the Lights* is the clear winner.”



THE DOVE ON THE DOOR

By N. West Moss

The First Runner-up, Novel-in-Progress Category of the 2014 William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

Editor's Note: *The Dove on the Door* is the first novel by N. West Moss. It is set in New Orleans in 1878 during a yellow fever epidemic. The idea for the novel came from a family story. Moss' great-great-grandmother, a noted painter, botanist, and wife of a judge in 1800s New Orleans, worked with the Sisters of Charity during epidemics, caring for the sick and dying. It was dangerous work, as no one knew how yellow fever was spread, and many doctors, nurses, nuns and aid workers died tending to the sick. Those who could afford to leave the city during the epidemic-ridden summers left, but not Moss' great-great-grandmother, Mary Bella Brice. This was intriguing enough to for Moss to want to learn how she was able to survive in spite of constant exposure. West's research for the novel brought her back to the city many times. It also allowed her to research some of her fields of interest including: epidemiology, burial practices in New Orleans, the Sisters of Charity, the work of the clergy in New Orleans, and her own family history. To that end she spent countless blissful hours working with the fine research facility, the Historic New Orleans Collection, as well as the Louisiana State Museum, the Hermann-Grima House, the Southern Food and Beverage Museum, and some of the professionals up at Metairie Cemetery where Moss' family is buried, who helped her unearth some family records of illness, burial and death and also illuminated some of the burial practices and history of Metairie Cemetery itself, which was once a race-track and became a cemetery in 1872, just a few years before the novel begins.

The excerpt published here is the prologue to *The Dove on the Door*. The prologue is set in 1847 (whereas the rest of the novel takes place in 1878) and introduces the two main characters, Constance Prague Branch and Sister Marie Claire, a nun with the Sisters of Charity in New Orleans.

PROLOGUE: NEW ORLEANS 1847 July, thought Sister Marie Claire. Not a promising word. An obvious word with no shadow, July.

Hail Mary, she thought, full of grace. Now grace, that was a word she could contemplate, full of shadowy complexity. The beauty of grace, the unattainability of it, the yearning for it despite its unattainability, or because of it.

"Find out what has become of Mrs. Prague," the Mother Superior had told her, and so she had begun the long walk uptown to do what she had been told, to

see what had become of Mrs. Prague and her daughter, Constance.

She chose to walk past the docks full of noise and stacked with cotton bales. She didn't look up into people's faces and felt how free she was, how invisible inside her costume, a child of God.

The wharves creaked beneath the stacked-up banana crates and she could hear the sides of the boats rubbing against the dock, could see the Mississippi rolling past, like a woman so uninterested that she had become the most compelling woman on earth.

Putting the river at her back, Marie Claire watched someone making a fire at the corner of the Square. Black smoke hung above the flames, trapped by the thick morning air. A cannon went off close enough to make her jump. They were trying to dispel the miasma, was all, and the fomites. People thought the fever was spread by fomites, by the liquids that left the body, and so they burned the mattresses of the sick. It made everyone busy, even if it did nothing to kill the fever. *Everything*, she thought, *was a matter of faith*.

Her body felt trapped in its coffin of wool. She prayed. *Hail Mary full of grace. Full of grace*. Perhaps Mrs. Prague had gone visiting and the nun would find nothing but an empty house, or a house with Mrs. Prague and little Constance entertaining visitors. That was possible.

She passed the yellow fever tents and saw one a nurse stirring sheets in a boiling cauldron of water with an oar. Four miles or more to go just to get there, find news, and then all the way back in this heat. *Keep walking*, she told herself.

A pain in the head was the first symptom of yellow fever, like a red-hot poker to the temple, she had been told. She'd seen the agitation of a high fever and engrossing pain a hundred times, but it started with a simple headache. When summer came, those with money left. But not Mrs. Prague, who stayed to help.

She thought of her first patient—a fever of a hundred and five, no sweating, his skin like an animal hide. She's held his leathery hand. The next morning, the body had been laid out in front of the tent, steam rising from the dead man's open mouth. That's how hot the body had been. He had turned yellow, his liver, in a final quiver, pushing out all of its bile. And black vomit down his shirt-front, his own boiled, vomited-up blood. Smelled like blood sausage, if she told the truth. *Boudin*.



Hail Mary, she thought. *Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed are you amongst women.*

Flowers, she would focus on flowers as she walked. There was blue chicory by the side of the road, and chamomile. *Chicory* sounded sharp like a razor. *Chamomile* was a rounder word. *Chamomile. Mother of God.* She pushed up and out of the Quarter past sweet olive bushes. Ah, bay leaves. She brushed her hand along the bush, took in its swampy male scent. Horton had smelled of bay leaves. What would she find at the Prague home? *Pray for us sinners, now and at the time of our death.*

Oleander. Camellias. Gardenia. She had liked to make her long red hair smell of lavender for Horton, before her vows. These uptown gardens were planted by slaves, not like the pretty weeds of the Quarter. Here were morning glories with their triumphant, wide-open flowers that would curl back in on themselves, done forever by nightfall like young girls, falling to the ground with a wet sigh. Morning glories. *Mourning glories.* She did not stop to taste the honey suckle. *Keep moving.*

Crepe myrtle, she thought. No sight of the Pragues for days, and no one could remember exactly when they had last seen them. The little girl, Constance was how old? Six? She had taken the sister's hand once. Sweet girl. Serious girl. Tiny. Plain. She had taken the sister's hand and led her to the garden to show her the flowers. The sister wiped her sweating palm down the front of her habit.

Speckled euphorbia. There wasn't any to be seen, it had just come to her mind for no reason but the words sounded ecstatic. *Euphorbia. Euphoria. Speckled euphoria.*

The palmetto trees ahead reminded the sister of Palm Sunday, of Jesus heading into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday was a happy event, unless one knew what followed, knew of the catastrophe of Good Friday, followed by the resurrection. The calm before the storm. The storm before the resurrection. Speckled euphoria indeed. After Jesus, euphoria and tragedy forever linked to one another.

"Orange trees," she said out loud. It stiffened her spine to hear her own voice. "Orange trees," she whispered. "Fig trees. Pear trees." She stepped onto the oyster-shell driveway.

No one was coming out to greet her.

She knocked on the oak door first with her knuckles, rapping just beneath the picture of a dove with an olive branch in its beak that Mrs. Prague had tacked there. "This is a house of peace," Mrs. Prague had told the sister whenever she entered, waving at the dove on the door. Yes. A house of peace.

Her knocking was too weak to emanate deep into the house, so she used the brass knocker, slamming it as hard as she could. No response. She reached for the cross on her belt before she took the doorknob in her hand and turned it. The door opened and without taking a step inside, it was clear that death had taken up residence.

She left the front door open wide for light. The fat shafts of light that entered the room fell on millions of floating dust motes, lit up like lightning bugs. The light fell too on the stoppered bottle on the mantle. No one

was here to see her, so she unstoppered the bottle and sipped so that a small stream burned down her throat and lit her up inside.

There. She looked around. There was the unmistakable odor. Sister Marie Claire was able to tell if a patient had yellow fever just by his breath. The exceptionally hot, hemorrhaging blood of people with a spiking fever had an odor. That smell was here, but there were other smells too.

Today, though, it was not just the smell that announced Death, but the sound, the hum of thousands of black flies that pulled the sister in, like an engine singing two-part harmony with the sister's heartbeat. The Sisters of Charity were often the first to visit the dead, but the black flies were there before the nuns even, the first true mourners, all in black. Whoever was dead in the house, the sister reasoned, had been dead less than two days if the flies were still here. Maybe someone was still alive. The alcohol gave her a lovely feeling of things not mattering quite so devastatingly.

The sound was upstairs perhaps? But loud to be so far away. *Other people*, she thought, *might be alarmed*, but the liquor let her be at once present and distant, both lifting her hand to the cross that hung at her belt, and watching herself lift her hand. She could feel her heart beating beneath the bib and the wool and the linen and finally the bone of her rib cage, wrapped inside the rest of it, her heart like a lightning bug caught inside a jelly jar. She had been a girl once, capturing lightning bugs.

At the bottom of the stairs was a quilt of odors fanned by the flies' wings. It was ferociously hot inside the shut up house. She held the banister with one hand, and took a cloth and held it over her face to keep the flies from clogging her nose and throat. She squinted as a few sentry flies ventured downstairs, landing on her lashes and ears, but she continued up the stairs parsing the layers of odor. She could smell cleaning solution, fly droppings, food maybe, hot blood.

At the top of the stairs, she stood in front of the door to the master bedroom. Whoever had died was in there and she might as well get on with it. She pushed the door open, the light from the hallway following and causing a cloud of flies to rise up and settle back down like a flock of birds. She walked to the window and opened the shutters there, looking out into the yard below. *Lemon trees*, she told herself. *Turn around.*

Mrs. Prague lay in the bed. Black, granular vomit stained the front of her dressing gown. There were maggots too, working here. The nun didn't see them but they were working in large enough numbers that she could hear them. Nature was a marvel to her, the way it sent in clean-up crews to begin work on everything that died.

She couldn't leave the house until she found the girl, couldn't report to the doctor, couldn't send cleaners, or for Mr. Branch.

The nun got down on her knees and looked beneath the bed. Nothing there. "Constance?" she said through the cloth she held over her mouth. As she stood, she said



it again, louder, “Constance?”

She looked toward the door she had opened to enter the room. “Constance?” she asked, an adult demanding a child listen. The door began to swing slowly as if it would reclose itself and shut Sister Marie Claire in the room with Mrs. Prague and her wide open mouth. As the door swung, it revealed the emaciated body of tiny Constance lying against the wall. The sister studied the cadaverous girl, looking from her feet up to her torso and face. She was in her nightgown.

There was no vomit on Constance, so it wasn't the fever that had killed her? Starvation happened often enough, a child starved at the foot of a dead parent dead. But there were hardly any flies on the girl. Sister Marie Claire stared, calculating. There was no blood. There were no flies. The girl was stretched out behind the door on her side, facing the nun, as though she were asleep, although her eyes were open eerily, unmoving.

“Poor Constance,” she said out loud, “poor girl. God bless her soul,” she crossed herself. The girl's eyes were fixed as though she were looking at the nun.

The nun moved a bit closer and leaned toward Constance, watching a black fly land on the little girl's glassy, wide-open left eye.

Constance blinked.

Sister Marie Claire dropped her cloth and knelt on the floor, slipping her hands beneath the child as though she were a sack of almonds. She picked her up and carried her down the stairs, the nun suddenly desperate to get outside. She was almost running as she came to the front door, afraid that death had woken up and was chasing them.

As she crossed the threshold, she glanced at the dove pinned to the door, and looking down she saw a violet

pushing up between the cracks in the stones. “Violets,” she whispered into Constance's hair. *Violets.* 🌸



Judge M.O. Walsh's Comments:

Dove on the Door has one of the best openings chapters I've read in a long time. We follow a young nun, Sister Marie Claire, through the streets of New Orleans during the yellow fever epidemic of 1847 to check on a woman they've not heard from in a while. As we navigate the sweltering heat of the French Quarter in summer, covering our mouths to avoid the smoke and smell of people burning the linens of the dead, the writer sums up our situation in lines of great beauty and simplicity, such as: “July,” she thought. Not a promising word.”

N. West Moss is a writer and a teacher with ties to New Orleans. Her whole family is buried up in Metairie Cemetery, and she's hoping to return to New Orleans to live at some point in the future, before she ends up in Metairie with the rest of her ancestors. Her winning story, *Omeer's Mangoes* is part of a collection of short stories set in Bryant Park in New York City. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Hospital Drive*, *the Westchester Review*, *The Blotter*, *Okra* and elsewhere. In 2013, West won the gold medal for best essay in the William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition and her essay was published in the 2013 edition of *The Double Dealer*. This year, West also placed as first runner-up in the Novel-in-progress competition with her first novel, currently under agent review, *Dove on the Door*, which is set in New Orleans. Currently, she is at work on a young adult novel called *Camp Bibby*.



The Prize 2014 Prize for Novel in Progress was made possible by a gift from Faulkner Society Co-founders **Rosemary James and Joseph DeSalvo.**



PLEXUS

By Krista Wilson

The Second Runner-up, Novel-in-Progress Category of the 2014 William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

In this time-twisting dystopia, girls wear corsets, boys wear makeup, and steam and incandescent power rule, but the digital era has come of age, complete with handheld devices (called cruxes) and a virtual world of information, entertainment, and commerce. In fact, the entertainment industry and social media have married into one big conglomerate: Plexus. Their spoiled only child is advertisement, and consumerism is the new religion. Citizens are being filmed and targeted for marketing at all times, by "publicams" (which are everywhere) and even their own cruxes. Furthermore, they are the entertainment. Anyone could become The Story, and they may be idolized, or villainized, depending on what is shown and how it is edited. Humiliation suicides are as common as car wrecks. Welcome to Urbania.

The excerpt opens with Sofia and her friends Canberra (effeminate and entertaining), Jakarta (Canberra's best mate, frivolous and social), Kabul (Jakarta's serious brother), Amman (big, beautiful and sassy), Santiago (Amman's dodgy boyfriend) and Victoria (shy and fragile) all shopping in Emporia.

NEXT WE ARE ON TO clothes shopping. The fashions change so frequently that one must buy new clothes all the time or be distressingly out of date. Me, I just save everything and wait for it to come back around. Corsets never go out of style; just certain colors and fabrics come and go.

Using her goggles, Amman blinks through options for teal gas pipes with coordinating tunics while Kabul searches for leather boots.

"Got em!" Amman says. "Three blocks that way." She points with one finger, the rest clutching the handle of a shopping bag that hangs down, like a lantern.

"My boots are the other direction," Kabul says. Before we can decide if and how to split up, we hear a simultaneous chime from a sea of cruxes all around us, ours included. As always, everyone stops to see what it's about, and whom. This particular story gets my attention, since for the first time, it's someone I know.

"How long? I don't know..." Victoria says on screen, larger than life. Her face is everywhere. People on the street stop and watch her on the giant screens across

all the buildings. "I think I've liked him since we were kids. He's always been so nice to me...and he's so dishy!"

People start giggling. I shoot a look over at Victoria. I know who she's talking about. This is going to kill her.

Her eyes grow wide, never leaving the screen. I glance over at Kabul. He hasn't figured it out yet.

"Do you think he likes you back?" the voice off-screen purrs. Pretty sure that's Pristina. Then the screen shows a photo of Kabul in a leather blazer and a ruffled blouse, looking like a fashion model. Now he gets it. His brow wrinkles, as if he can't believe that's really him up there. I'm fairly certain he doesn't own those clothes.

Onscreen Victoria grins and shrugs. "I dunno... I think he's got a thing for Sofia." My picture appears, equally doctored. I'm wearing a tightly fitted sequined corset and sleek purple gas pipes, lots of makeup. Instead of my usually tousled ash-brown hair flipping in every direction, the onscreen version of me has silky ringlet curls trailing over and around my shoulders. My hair looks darker in the picture, with auburn highlights, and it's several inches longer than in real life. My brown eyes are clearly enlarged in the photo, tapered at the ends like almonds. Stunned, I can't believe that's me up on the screens. I feel my pulse quicken and my skin go hot.

"That's what everyone says, anyway," Vic's voice continues. "But she's obviously not interested."

Brilliant. Now all three of us are humiliated. When will everyone learn to just keep their mouths closed?

"So, there's hope, I guess," onscreen-Victoria continues. Could she not tell she was being videoed? Pristina's crux obviously took all this in. Every once in a while, the camera angle shifts, so we can tell it was also being shot from one of the many publicams that are virtually everywhere.

"So what is it you hope for?" the off-screen voice continues, probing.

"Well..." Victoria looks hesitant, a little nervous.

"Come on...it's just me."

Balderdash! There's no such thing as "just me." But I know she's going to fall for it, since they have made this *The Story*.



“Okay. So I picture us one day getting married, and we’ll have a boy and a girl. The boy will look like him, that dark curly hair and those dreamy brown eyes. And the girl will look like me, and he’ll tell me she’s as beautiful as her mother...”

While she talks, the screen shows comically doctored photos of babies’ bodies with their grown-up heads. Kabul’s “baby” face even has the shadow of a beard and mustache, while Victoria’s is crafted with massive amounts of makeup, and she’s making a sexy pouty-face. The crowd erupts with laughter all around us, like a spreading fire, and we’re caught in the middle of it with no way out.

I sling my arm around Victoria’s neck and start walking briskly back to the metro station.

“Let’s go, mate,” I mutter to her. “I think we’ve all seen enough.”

People on the street start to recognize her and begin to point and laugh, calling out to her and making kissing sounds. To obscure her face, I yank her goggles down, picking up the pace. The show is playing everywhere, at the platform, inside the train, on everyone’s crux. There is no escaping it. I find a couple empty seats at the back of the train car, and I sit her down, standing in front of her to hide her. It’s no use. Across the aisle, three teenagers—one boy and two girls—peer at us, trying to see around me. I glare at them, moving onto their line of sight and blocking Victoria from their view.

“Hey that *is* her!” the boy shouts. “That’s the girl in *The Story!*” Most of the passengers start to look around me to the whimpering mess in the seat behind me.

“Mind your own business!” I yell. “All of you! You make me sick!”

I realize that I am now making a spectacle of myself, which Plexus would love to add to this saga, making it last for hours, maybe even days. After all, there are plenty of publiccams on the train. Not to mention all the cruxes onboard that are aimed at me right now. So I do the only thing I can think of that might make them not use this.

“I hope you’re all happy, you selfish lot of vultures!” I look directly into the camera above me. “Show your insipid human dramas, ruin people’s lives, humiliate them, but eventually you’re going to run out of victims. Or worse...lose your audience. Someday people may just quit watching altogether. Then where will you be?” I lower my voice, still staring at the camera. “What will you do then, when we all grow tired of your gossip and lies? When we all just... turn off our cruxes?” I hold mine up to the camera, open the back, and pull out the bio-thermal adapter.

The crowd on the train gasps. Someone shouts, “No!”

For the first time ever, I have turned off my crux. The only thing even close to what I’ve just done is the childhood prank kids play on each other when they take your crux and hide it in the freezer. For hours, while your crux warms up again, you are off Plexus. You can’t search for anything, you can’t send or receive

bolts, you can’t buy things...and you don’t know anything about *The Story*. Most kids get furious and go a little mad, waiting to get back on and find out what they’ve missed.

On the screens in the subway train, Victoria and I rush down the street (cut) and onto the train (cut). Now they show me getting in front of her, just moments ago (cut), now me glaring at the kids (cut). Now there is a close-up of Victoria, her head bowed, hands laced over her short hair, her shoulders shuddering with silent sobs. We’re surrounded by images of ourselves. Then suddenly, *The Story* cuts to a corset advertisement—before the onscreen version of me ever says a word. They stopped transmission just before my diatribe, which I find interesting. I wasn’t sure my idea would work, but it did.

And I just learned something about Plexus: they don’t want *The Story* to be about them. 🌸

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Judge M.O. Walsh's Comments:

In a market that seems glutted with dystopian futures, Plexus manages to feel absolutely fresh and new. The writer’s ability to juggle the jargon and complications of the new world in ways that keep the reader charging along without confusion are only a part of the success of this novel in progress. The main achievement is in the protagonist, Sofia. This writer has created an entire world for us. We are lucky to have it.



Krista Wilson’s third novel, **Plexus**, is her first foray into young adult literature and

category fiction, signifying a return to the novels she read as a kid. Krista holds a B.A. in English (with minors in Italian and psychology) from Auburn University and an M.Ed. in English education from Auburn University at Montgomery, AL. She has taught at five colleges and universities, and she currently teaches middle school language arts in Marietta, GA, giving her a legitimate excuse to read young adult literature.



THE OTHER SIDE

By Jacob Appel

The Third Runner-up, Novel-in-Progress Category of the 2014 William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

"All warfare is a hoax perpetrated upon the common man...."
—Congressman Abraham Lincoln, April 28, 1847

"The ghosts of battle make dissemblers of us all."
—General Robert E. Lee, letter to President Jefferson Davis, October 3, 1864.

SYNOPSIS

TWENTY-EIGHT YEAR OLD HORACE EDGECOMB, a mild-mannered and popular high school history teacher in suburban Laurendale, New Jersey, prides himself on his ability to connect with students of all backgrounds and ideologies. Yet when one of those students, Sally Royster, turns out to be the daughter of the nation's most prominent Civil War denier, Edgecomb finds himself pressured by both Royster's organization, Surrender Appomattox, and his own unscrupulous principal to teach the American Civil War as a theory, rather than as fact. Needless to say, he refuses. But after he outmaneuvers Royster's father at a Board of Education meeting, Horace finds himself recruited by an old flame, Vicky Vann, now employed as a special investigator at the Treasury Department, to convert publicly to Royster's cause and to infiltrate his organization. Surrender Appomattox's goal, he soon discovers, is to conduct DNA testing on Abraham Lincoln's bloody cloak to prove that the man allegedly assassinated at Ford's Theatre was a hired actor.

Horace's plunge into conspiracy theory brings chaos to the lives of those who surround him: his sister, Jillian, who fears his notoriety may prevent her from adopting a child; his roommate, Sebastian, who hijacks Horace's first press conference to market his own line of blasphemous coloring books depicting the prophet Mohammed; Sebastian's "inamorata," Esperanza, who studies normative prosopography—the art of reading the truth from people's facial musculature; and Sebastian's friend, Albion, a schizophrenic poet who pens obscene limericks and haiku in Horace's living room. Yet as Horace becomes increasingly steeped in Surrender Appomattox's plans, he also finds himself attracted to eighteen year old Sally, an interest that clouds his judgment and leads him to a crisis of historical faith. Ultimately, he must choose between Vicky Vann and Sally Royster, and in doing so, between those who revere

the Civil War as a hallowed and unifying moment in our nation's past, and those who believe the conflict to be nothing more than a hoax concocted to serve a political agenda.

FIRST SALVO

"Are you going to teach us the other side?"

For Horace Edgecomb, these proved words that would forever separate the before from the after—although in the moment, the question, which arose from the lips of sharp-featured girl named Sally Royster, seemed more like a hollow provocation. Edgecomb hadn't anticipated any questions at all. Not final period on a Friday afternoon with the minute hand closing in upon three o'clock. This was only the second week of the school year, far too early to be thinking about quarterly exams, so even those rare students who might harbor a passing interest in what their textbook hailed as "the colossal maelstrom of the American past" likely had their minds focused on pizza or football or sex. Except Sally. As her classmates folded shut their notebooks, Sally honed her large, onyx eyes on him—eyes so dark they reminded Edgecomb of a parrot's—and waited for him to tackle a subject that had been settled with the blood of countless New England farm boys, and then re-fought by historians for another century.

"Not today," replied Edgecomb. "I've got a headache."

That drew a laugh—and Edgecomb was a teacher who valued laughs, who cared that his students called him by his first name, and appreciated his jokes, and returned from college over Christmas break to update him on their intellectual adventures. He prided himself on grading generously, and never giving anyone a hard time, and the day he officially received tenure would be the last day that he ever showed up for work at Laurendale wearing anything other than blue jeans. Of all the students in his twelfth grade American history class, only Sally didn't appear to appreciate his laidback



style.

“So you are going to teach us the other side,” she pressed.

“I didn’t say that.” Egdecomb wasn’t one to relish confrontation, certainly not with a girl ten years his junior, but he also wasn’t about to let her browbeat him into presenting the Union and Confederate causes as moral equivalencies. He glanced at the class’s sole African-American student—the overweight daughter of the school nurse—as though seeking her approval. The last thing he needed was anyone walking away with the notion that he might be a Southern apologist. “Most historians today agree that the Civil War was fought over the expansion of slavery,” he explained. “And I’m hoping none of us wants to stand on the side of the slaveholders.”

To Egdecomb, that seemed a sensible reply. He looked again toward the African-American girl, Louise, hoping she might show her approval—but she was struggling to stuff her textbook into her knapsack. Sally, who still trained her sharp features on him like weapons, now pointed her pencil at him as well.

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” rejoined Sally, an angry furrow puckering above her nose. “I don’t mean that other side.”

“What then?” demanded Egdecomb.

“Are you going to teach the conflict as a theory, rather than as some sort of incontestable fact? Are you going to teach us that lots of people—very smart, well-informed people—don’t think it happened at all?”

He wasn’t sure that he’d understood her. “Don’t think what happened?”

“The Civil War,” she answered, but in a tone that might as well have said, ‘The Civil War, you idiot.’ “Are you going to admit that numerous people think it’s a hoax?”

Egdecomb was digesting this challenge when the bell rang. To his amazement, not a single student stood up.

“No, I’m not going to teach that,” said Egdecomb. And he should have stopped there, but she’d riled him to indignation. “I’m also not going to teach that the earth is flat, or that the moon is made of green cheese, or that babies are deposited on doorsteps by happy-go-lucky storks. The Civil War is a hoax? Are you insane?”

Every eye in the room now focused upon him. Several of the students looked genuinely frightened. Nobody dared moved.

“Okay, see you on Monday,” he said to break the tension. “Class dismissed.”

On the way out of the classroom, Sally Royster walked fully erect with her head facing straight forward; Egdecomb called after her at the last instant—and he was positive she’d heard—but she didn’t acknowledge him as she strode out the door.

The next morning, at brunch with his sister, Egdecomb still had Sally Royster weighing on his mood. They’d chosen a corner booth at Mackenzie’s Dinette, near the kitchen, because Jillian preferred not to sit with her

back facing the entrance—in case a lunatic showed up brandishing an assault rifle. She’d brought along wet wipes to sanitize the cutlery, and her own variety of toxin-free tea. As much as he adored her, it genuinely amazed Egdecomb that the state of New Jersey allowed his older sister inside a middle school classroom.

“I’m 100% sure she wasn’t joking,” he explained. “Any other student, I’d be thinking this was some sort of prank—it even has the potential to be funny. But I’m telling you, this girl wouldn’t know funny if it bit her on the ass.”

“So you lost your temper,” said Jillian.

“Let’s just say that, in hindsight, I wish I’d handled things differently.”

He’d replayed the moment in his head countless times over the intervening eighteen hours, even though he recognized that the wiser course would have been to block the episode from his thoughts entirely, preventing his brain from consolidating unpleasant memories. Yet he sensed Sally Royster was precisely the sort of girl to file a complaint and he wanted to be prepared for the worst.

“You don’t think they can terminate me for this?” he asked.

Jillian shook her head. “Probably not. You didn’t threaten her, did you?”

“I’m not that clueless. All I did was say that you’d have to be insane to believe the Civil War was a hoax.”

“The School Board’s not going to like the word ‘insane’—if it ever gets that far.” Jillian squeezed two drops of organic vanilla extract into her tea. “Let’s just hope this kid doesn’t carry a diagnosis of depression or ADHD or something.”

“I don’t see her as that type. Unless self-righteousness counts as a psychiatric disorder these days.”

Egdecomb stopped speaking while the server, a flat-chested girl flaunting fuchsia hair and a nose ring, set down their meals: for him, an omelet with bacon and home fries; for his sister, a scoop of cottage cheese and a banana. “Cottage cheese without a bed of lettuce,” announced the waitress.

“Without a bed of fertilizer and pesticide,” muttered Jillian as soon as the girl was beyond earshot. She eyed her banana warily, as though deciding whether to peel from the top or the bottom. “Horace, can you make me a promise?”

“Something tells me I’m not going to like this.”

“It shouldn’t be a big deal,” said his sister. “Just please don’t create any trouble.”

“I’m not the one creating trouble.”

“You know what I mean.” Jillian’s voice assumed a pleading tone and she looked as though she might sob. “All I’m asking is that you don’t do anything that gets in the newspapers or on television....Anything that might reflect badly on me.” She paused and locked her eyes on his. “If I don’t get this baby, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

At thirty-seven, single and with few romantic prospects, Jillian had decided to adopt an African orphan. She carried around a canvas bag full of



computer printouts describing various parentless offspring in Ethiopia and The Congo. Her plan was to complete the application process during the school year, then visit the home country over the summer to retrieve the lucky youngster.

“Do you really think they’re going to care what I do?” asked Edgecomb. “You’re the one adopting the child.”

“How should I know? They require a thorough background check,” said Jillian. “Why wouldn’t they want to know what my brother does? It only seems reasonable.”

“It doesn’t seem at all reasonable to me.”

“Please, Horace. You can cause all the trouble you want—you can chain yourself to the Lincoln Memorial, for all I care. Just do it next year. Okay?”

Edgecomb glanced up from his omelet. “Look, I’m not causing any trouble. I’m sure this will all blow over....”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“It will.”

They ate in silence for several minutes—or Edgecomb ate, while his sister inspected her meal like a lab technician. On the far side of the dining room, a party of nine celebrated a fortieth wedding anniversary at a circular table, the kettle-bellied husband serenading his mousy beloved—and every other diner in earshot—with a gravelly rendition of “Embraceable You.” In the booth behind Edgecomb’s sister, a teenage couple kissed and groped vigorously. Edgecomb’s silverware clanked against his plate as he struggled for something more to say.

“Why can’t you just pay lip service to her,” asked Jillian, “like I do with the creationists? I have one or two of them each year, you know—everything from intelligent design nuts to a fundamentalist kid from Brazil who sincerely believed the world to be six thousand years old. I used to try to change their minds. At some point, I realized it’s easier to tell them they’re entitled to believe whatever the hell they want, as long as they fill in the correct bubbles on the state competency exams.”

“This isn’t like creationism. It’s more like Holocaust denial.”

Jillian nibbled at her banana, reflecting on Edgecomb’s words. “No, it’s not. Holocaust deniers are dangerous, because, quite frankly, somebody might actually believe them. But this girl is a lone wolf. She could be the only Civil War denier on the entire goddam planet. Come on. There are states in this crazy country where half the population owns a Confederate flag. Do you really think we need to worry about people believing that the whole thing was a hoax?”

“It only takes one bad apple,” said Edgecomb.

“Whatever. You’re starting to sound as crazy as she does.”



When Edgecomb returned home—to the chaotic Hager Heights bachelor pad which never shook the scent of his housemate’s marijuana—he discovered that Sally Royster was far from a “lone wolf.” A cursory Internet

search revealed thousands of hits for an organization called “Surrender Appomattox” whose website advanced “evidence” against “the greatest deception in the history of humanity.” Its homepage included endorsements from several professors at universities that Edgecomb had never heard of—one in Venezuela, one in Equatorial Guinea—and a list of Frequency Asked Questions: Did Abraham Lincoln exist? Were African-Americans ever slaves, and if so, who freed them? How can the Civil War be a hoax when people occasionally unearth shell casing and cannonballs while excavating in their backyards? Who benefits from perpetuating the Civil War myth? Edgecomb did not bother to scroll through the answers. He did look up the IP address and discovered that the site belonged to Roland G. Royster of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Twenty more minutes on the computer told Edgecomb all he’d wanted to know: Royster was the father of Sally (as well as two younger children); he’d recently purchased a luxury property in Laurendale, New Jersey.

Edgecomb decided to share his research with his housemate, although that meant enduring the hallucinogenic haze that swathed Sebastian’s bedroom. It wasn’t that he sought the man’s opinion. He didn’t. In fact, Sebastian Borrelli possessed some of the worst judgment of any human being Edgecomb had ever encountered. Rather, the discovery of a community of Civil War deniers living in one’s midst was simply a phenomenon that demanded to be shared, and rapidly, like the death of a relative or the arrival of extraterrestrial life. By telling, one rendered the event real. As he stood outside his housemate’s bedroom, bracing his lungs for the cloud of noxious smoke, Sebastian burst into the foyer, nearly hitting Edgecomb with the door.

“Dude. That’s a crazy place to stand,” said Sebastian.

Sebastian Borrelli stood a head taller than Edgecomb, his coarse, dark hair bound in a ponytail. Although it was already mid-afternoon, he sported a silk dressing gown and appeared only minutes removed from slumber—but since he worked from home, developing and distributing novelty items via computer, he might easily have been fresh from a long-distance business meeting.

When Edgecomb had first met his housemate two years earlier, on the heels of being jilted and ejected by his live-in girlfriend and after days spent scouring apartment listings for an immediate opening, he’d taken the rental as a stop-gap measure, planning to decamp as soon as feasible. Yet Borrelli’s easygoing ways had grown on him—a carefree oasis in a desert of anxiety and angst—and while he cursed his housemate for forgetting to pay the utility bills, and occasionally allowing a street-dwelling schizophrenic man named Albion to sleep on their living room sofa, he could no longer imagine sharing a home with anyone else.

“I was about to knock,” explained Edgecomb, pushing shut Sebastian’s door to trap the cannabis fumes. “I’ve got the strangest thing to tell you. Even you aren’t going to believe this.”



“Awesome,” said Sebastian. “Because I’ve got something to tell you too. Something totally brilliant.”

“Another business idea?”

“The business idea,” Sebastian shot back. “You’re perfectly entitled to your cynicism—but once you hear this, Teach, you’re going to have to admit that I’m onto something.” He hugged his lanky arm around Edgecomb’s shoulders, like a triumphant soccer player. “I’ve even got a prototype to show you.”

Edgecomb followed his housemate into their kitchen. He’d become all-too-familiar with the wacky curios and souvenirs that Sebastian hatched up: sunglasses armed with tiny windshield wipers, ice skates for dogs, condoms containing built-in timers to clock performance. What amazed Edgecomb most was that people actually bought these items—lots of people. Sebastian’s “remote control golf balls,” which surreptitiously walked themselves across the putting green, had become so popular that several local courses now banned them. If his companion had possessed the slightest financial acumen, Edgecomb suspected he’d be worth millions. But he didn’t—not a shred. In fact, the guy was better at hemorrhaging money than he was at earning it, so instead of savoring cognac on the Riviera, he was smoking dope in suburban New Jersey.

Afternoon sunlight bathed the kitchen in a warm autumn glow. On the countertop, propped against the cabinets, rested a canvas artists’ portfolio. While Sebastian removed a pad of sketches, Edgecomb poked his head into the refrigerator.

“For Christ’s sake. Where’s all the food?”

Sebastian said nothing. Edgecomb slammed the door.

“You cannot be serious,” he objected. “I bought six bags of groceries yesterday—enough food to last a week. Don’t tell me you ate it all?”

“Not exactly. I gave it away.”

“You what?”

Sebastian looked up from the sketchpad. “All they had at Church on the Hill this morning was freeze-dried broccoli,” he said—referencing their local soup kitchen. “Something went haywire with their supplier.”

“So you decided to fill the void?”

“What was I supposed to do?” asked Sebastian. “I know those guys. I couldn’t just let them go hungry...”

This wasn’t the first time Edgecomb’s housemate had fed their hard-earned food to the downtrodden of Hager Heights, a small but determined band of alcoholics and brain-addled ne’er-do-wells, but it was the first time he’d emptied out their entire refrigerator. The most infuriating part, of course, was that the guy didn’t have a clue that he’d done anything wrong.

“It’s not a big deal. I’ll pay you back,” said Sebastian. He reached into his wallet and counted out a roll of twenty dollar bills. “Here’s two hundred. That should be more than enough to cover it.”

“That’s not the goddam point. This isn’t a supermarket.”

But what was the point, really? Nothing he said was going to make Sebastian Borrelli any more sensible, or less altruistic.

Edgecomb pocketed the cash; it was far more than enough.

“Anyway, what’s your brilliant business plan?” he asked.

Sebastian held up a line drawing depicting a handsome young man in a turban; then he flipped to the same man in conversation with a second figure. The second figure wore a crown and carried what looked like a magic wand. “Well? What do you think?”

“I’m sure it’s obvious, but I have no idea who that is.”

Sebastian grinned. “Dude. I thought you taught history,” he said. “That’s Mohammed. And that’s him with the angel, Gabriel, receiving his first revelation.”

“Mohammed? And how exactly is this a brilliant business plan?”

Edgecomb’s housemate slid the sketch back into the portfolio. “Mohammed coloring books. Isn’t it genius?”

“Mohammed coloring books?”

“I’m obviously going to hire a professional for the drawings,” explained Sebastian—as though the images were of innocuous mermaids or farm animals. “But it’s the concept that’s going to sell this, not the artwork. Impressed?”

Edgecomb had learned his lesson from his encounter with Sally. Now he focused on deep breaths and counted backwards from ten before speaking.

“You do realize that drawing the prophet Mohammed is the Islamic equivalent of flag burning,” he finally said. “Even if Muslims were in the market for personalized coloring books, none of them are going to buy one of these.”

“Of course, they’re not, dude,” replied Sebastian. “But right-wingers are. Every shotgun wielding kid in the Bible Belt is going to want one of these babies—or, at least, their parents will want one for them. I can envision a whole collection of ‘Color the Prophet’ books...”

“You’re going to get killed,” cried Edgecomb. “You’re going to get us killed.”

“Nobody’s going to kill me over a coloring book. Do you realize how ridiculous that would look?”

“Of course, they’d kill you over a coloring book. And even if they didn’t—do you really want to offend two billion people?”

Sebastian shrugged. “Whatever. There’s nothing offensive here—just a narrative history of the Quran in pictures. It proves how silly the whole controversy is.” Edgecomb’s housemate punched his shoulder lightly. “Don’t be such a pessimist, Teach. Anyway, what’s your earth-shattering news?”

Edgecomb knew better than to protest any further. He’d lost whatever marketing credibility he might have had when he’d warned Sebastian against producing a collection of figurines called “Feminists in Bikinis,” which featured Susan B. Anthony and Eleanor Roosevelt, among others, in revealing swimwear. He’d anticipated a torrent of bra burnings and invective—and secretly feared that he’d never go on another date. Yet rather than protesting, local women’s organizations had embraced the project as “ingeniously subversive”



and purchased the toys in bulk quantities. Somehow, Edgcomb suspected that Islamic groups would prove less understanding. But what could he possibly do? Of course, now that his housemate had decided to insult a quarter of the world's population gratuitously, his own encounter with Sally Royster and his research into Civil War deniers struck him as comparatively trivial.

"It's not earth shattering. Just strange," he said. "In class on Friday, one of my students claimed the American Civil War never took place. That it was a hoax. And then I went online this morning—and it turns out there's a whole group of nutcases who believe this."

"Yeah. Surrender Appomattox."

"You've heard of them?"

"Sure. Their leader was on the radio this morning," replied Sebastian. "He makes a persuasive argument."

"Good god, Sebastian. He's a lunatic."

"Maybe. All I'm saying is that he's a convincing lunatic. That doesn't mean I believe him—but I understand how someone who didn't know any better might be swayed...."

"Someone who lived under a rock."

Edgcomb opened the refrigerator again, even though he knew it was empty, as though a snack might have generated spontaneously. It had not. "If you'll excuse me," he said, "I'm going to go shopping. Again."

"Can you pick me up some beer?" asked Sebastian. "Oh, and I almost forgot. Your boss called."

"My boss?"

"Your principal. The gal in charge. She's got a hot voice."

"Jesus Christ. She's sixty with grandkids."

"I'm just saying, dude. Hot voice."

"What did she want?" demanded Edgcomb.

Dr. Foxwell had never before called him at home. Not once.

"She wants to meet with you, dude. Seven o'clock Monday morning," said Sebastian. "Sounds like Teach is in the dog house."



Even after teaching nearly three years at Laurendale, the prospect of a visit to Dr. Foxwell's office kept Edgcomb tossing and turning with anxiety dreams until the first sounds of morning drifted through his bedroom window. Some of the blame lay in his own experiences as a teenager. He'd never followed authority easily, and he'd been suspended from tenth grade for plastering cars in the faculty parking lot with bumper-stickers that read: "ROLLESTON HIGH: BRAINWASHING CHILDREN SINCE 1917." Most of the blame, however, fell squarely on Sandra Foxwell, who'd learned the art of school administration from Iago. She smiled and pressed flesh as well as any smalltime politician—and local parents adored her as a result—but everyone who worked for her realized quickly that her equine grin carried duplicity in every tooth. During his first week on the job, Edgcomb had been warned by a senior colleague, Lucky Pozner, to

duck into the nearest open doorway when he saw "The Sly Sandy Fox" approaching.

Edgcomb arrived for his appointment at six forty-five, and at seven fifteen, Foxwell emerged from her sanctum and beckoned him inside. The principal bore a striking resemblance, he reflected, to an over-the-hill racehorse—her wavy, frosted mane curled around the sides of her long, bony jaw. Surrounded by terracotta masks and wooden carvings of gazelle, acquired on her frequent trips to Namibia, where she'd once served in the Peace Corps and now consulted for the Ministry of Education, Foxwell's features suggested an extinct grassland equid of the variety depicted in the dioramas at the Museum of Natural History. But thanks to Sebastian, Edgcomb found himself assessing the woman's voice for sex appeal. Fortunately, he didn't hear any. Eyeing his surroundings warily, he settled onto a black leather sofa that reminded him of a psychiatrist's couch.

"I'm glad you could join me, Horace," said Foxwell—welcoming and disarming, like a carnivorous plant. "I've been meaning to check in on you for some time. How is the year going?"

Edgcomb had no patience for pleasantries. "It can't be going all that well," he replied, "Or I wouldn't be sitting here."

"Oh, I don't know about that." Foxwell beamed. Behind her—covering every inch of plaster—hung professional certificates and commendations designed to impress, possibly even to intimidate: Fellow, New Jersey Principals Institute; Lifetime Member, Leadership for Progress. Edgcomb recognized many of these honors as available to any high school administrator willing to fork over the registration fees. "From what I've heard, you're having a rather good year. Word on the street is that students connect with you—and that's more than half the battle...."

"Is that the word on the street?"

"More or less, Horace. You're precisely the sort of enthusiastic, innovative teacher that this district needs so dearly."

"Thank you," answered Edgcomb. What else could he say?

"I've heard about those murder games—what do you call them?"

"Simulation mysteries."

The previous spring, Edgcomb had guided his Advance Placement course in American history through a series of interactive simulations focused upon forensic questions from the past: Was President Zachary Taylor fed poisonous cherries? Had Booth been hired to shoot Lincoln? Did Grover Cleveland really father an illegitimate son? He had no doubt that his 'boss' knew exactly what these exercises were called—that her feigned ignorance was part of a larger ploy to keep him off balance.

"That's right. Simulation mysteries," echoed Foxwell. "As I said, yours is the innovative voice that progressive education craves."



Edgecomb wasn't thanking her a second time. He sat stoically, hands folded over his knee, waiting for her attack. Outside, visible through the partially open blinds, the first of the morning's busses dropped off the special needs students.

Foxwell toyed with an ornate letter opener—drawing attention to the heavy, gem-studded rings on her fingers—and the preposterous notion entered Edgecomb's mind that his employer might go berserk and stab him. Instead, she set the letter opener carefully at the top of her blotter, like a dessert fork above a place setting, and said, seemingly off-hand, "Of course, then there is this Sally Royster business...."

She opened a manila folder on her desk and pretended to scan the contents.

"I'm not sure what you mean," said Edgecomb.

"Isn't Sally Royster one of your students?" asked the principal.

"One of many."

"That's right. One of many....One of ninety-eight, to be precise. But the only one, as far as I'm aware," said Foxwell, "whose father has filed a formal complaint against you."

"That's totally unfounded," snapped Edgecomb.

Foxwell held up her hand. "Since you aren't sure what I mean, Horace, I think it's best that I enlighten you regarding all the facts. According to Mr. Royster, you raised your voice at his daughter when she inquired—inquired innocently, intending no offense—whether you were aware that some people doubt the conventional history of the American Civil War—and then you ridiculed her mercilessly in front of your entire class. In fact, you compared his daughter to 'Flat Earthers,' and even questioned whether she knew the biology underlying childbirth—"

"—That's not what I—"

"Please, Horace. I realize that there are two sides to every story. I just wanted you to be clear about what you're facing." Foxwell looked up. "So as I was saying, Mr. Royster claims you mocked his daughter with a reference to frolicking storks and then accused her of suffering from a mental illness."

On the surface, nothing Foxwell related sounded unreasonable. She hadn't taken any sides, as she said—she'd merely outlined the complaint against him. And yet, she'd somehow managed to make him feel as though he'd been in the wrong.

"Sally Royster's father is a Civil War denier, for Christ's sake," he exclaimed, struggling to keep his emotions in check. "I don't think there's much more to say on the subject. You can't expect me to teach the Civil War as a theory...."

"Why not?" asked Foxwell.

"Why not? Do you really want me to answer that?"

Foxwell retrieved her letter opener again, running her thumb along the blade.

"Look, Horace, I'll level with you. This is coming from upstairs." Foxwell lowered her voice to a whisper, although he had no doubt her every action was carefully

choreographed. "It's not public knowledge yet, but there's an effort underway to nominate Archie Steinhoff—our Archie Steinhoff—for lieutenant governor."

Archibald Steinhoff was Chairman of the Laurendale Board of Education and a white shoe law partner in Trenton.

"So?"

"So," replied Foxwell, "the last thing Archie needs at the moment is controversy...and your friend, Roland Royster, has a knack for stirring up trouble. He nearly bankrupted the city of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, last year with frivolous litigation....Royster is threatening to protest at tomorrow's Board meeting. Can you imagine how that's going to look for Archie?"

"Let me get this straight. You're telling me to teach the Civil War as a theory so that Archibald Steinhoff can get elected lieutenant governor?"

"Of course, not," answered Foxwell. "I would never think of curtailing the intellectual freedom of one of my teachers....All I'm saying is that having Archie Steinhoff in the statehouse would do wonders for school funding....for arts education, for after-hours programs....for this community. You may choose to do as you wish with that information, Horace." She closed the manila folder decisively. "That being said, if you'd like me to phone Roland Royster and inform him that you've reached an accommodation with his daughter, I'd be more than glad to oblige...."

"I'd sooner rot in hell."

Foxwell shook her head and sighed—like a disappointed parent. "In that case, Horace, I'll have no alternative but to forward Royster's complaint to the district's grievance board." The principal rose abruptly and opened her office door. "As your colleague, I can't help adding that I strongly urge you to reconsider. Having a good friend in the statehouse would do wonders for our children—and your intransigence isn't helping them any."

"I'll take that under advisement," said Edgecomb.

He left Foxwell's office, drained to the brink of exhaustion. His body felt as though he'd worked an entire school day, although the colossal analog clock in the student commons read only twenty minutes before eight.



Thanks to the vagaries of block scheduling, Edgecomb didn't teach his twelfth grade history class again until the following afternoon. That afforded him ample time to anticipate his next confrontation with Sally Royster. In one of his fantasies, he forced the girl into his Honda at gunpoint and drove her on an improvised tour of Civil War battlefields, parading his captive through the oak thickets of Shiloh, and across the bloody wheat field at Antietam, and on a merciless hike up Gettysburg's Seminary Ridge through the torrid heat of Indian summer, until she cried uncle. Only, he didn't own a gun. And even if he somehow acquired a firearm, he had no inkling of how to handle one: In another version of his daydream, he accidentally shot



himself in the groin and had to have his penis surgically reconstructed. The bottom line, of course, was that even if he managed to abduct Sally, and to drum the madness from her thick skull, he'd still have faced certain termination from Laurendale, and an equally definite end to his teaching career—and at twenty-eight, with \$6000 in the bank and a credit score so low that the agent who'd financed his car had initially assumed the figure to be a typographical error, Edgecomb wasn't in a position to embark on a second career. So there'd be no kidnapping, no made-for-television-movie-style jaunt across the Mason-Dixon Line, nothing to land him and Sally a spot on the morning talk shows. Yet that didn't mean he'd be standing down either. Far from it. When Tuesday afternoon rolled around, Edgecomb entered his classroom braced for a lethal struggle.

Sally sashayed to her desk seconds before the bell sounded. Her pale skin flushed a gentle purple under the fluorescent overhead bulbs—and Edgecomb registered that the girl had entered the classroom alone, that she existed outside the cloud of banter and carousing and flirtation that enveloped her peers. It almost seemed as though she inhabited a personal force field, repelling these juvenile antics, and under any other circumstances, Edgecomb would have felt sincerely awful for this isolated young woman. He'd likely have drawn aside a few of the more popular students and urged them to befriend her—as he'd previously done for a Belgian exchange student. His dedication to historical reality, however, trumped his sympathy for her suffering. Moreover, nothing suggested that Sally was indeed suffering. In fact, he assured himself, the teen appeared perfectly content in her holier-than-thou self-quarantine.

Edgecomb came armed with a battle plan. The day's lesson featured a review of the political events leading up to the Confederate firing upon Fort Sumter—material covered during the spring of eleventh grade and forgotten over the ensuing summer—and as he reviewed each of these seminal events, the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Wilmot Proviso, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, he emphasized the historical evidence for it. "Can I prove the Missouri Compromise occurred?" he asked. "For that matter, can I prove that the state of Missouri exists? I've been there, by the way. They call it the Show-Me State. And they sure did show me. Showed me the Cardinals trouncing the Mets 10-0 and 16-1 in double header." His remark drew snickers from the boys. "That was my way of figuring out which of you are Yankees fans, by the way," added Edgecomb. "So I can take points off your exams." More laughter. "But does Missouri exist? And was it ever compromised? Who can really say? All I can tell you is that I've seen photographs of Henry Clay, and I've been to his estate in Kentucky, and I've read original newspaper accounts of his role in brokering the Compromise, and his personal letters on the subject—and there are hundreds of thousands of other documents about the Missouri Compromise that I've never read, and honestly, that I'd

never want to." Widespread laughter. "But I suppose they might all be forgeries. Part of a giant hoax. In fact, we might all be figments of someone's imagination—maybe characters in a child's dream—or, more likely, the nightmares of a psychiatric patient—so take everything that I say with a sack of salt grains." Edgecomb paced the room while he spoke, painstakingly keeping his eyes away from Sally. "Gravity itself may be an illusion. But until I have good evidence for that, I'm not stepping out of any tenth story windows."

Edgecomb found himself enjoying his own sermon. He did a similar number on the election of Lincoln. "I suppose Douglas might have won," he said. "For those of you who think Al Gore actually received more votes in 2000—that Bush stole the election—imagine how much easier it would have been for Lincoln to steal an election in an era when it regularly took three days to tally the votes." Edgecomb hoisted himself onto the edge of his desk, letting his legs dangle over the side. In the front row, Brittany Marcus and Maria Winch, two of his most attractive and least focused students, exchanged clandestine notes. He glanced at them knowingly and Maria giggled. "Okay, I've talked far too much for one day," Edgecomb announced. "Any questions?"

Now he has no choice but to make eye contact with Sally. She sat with her arms folded across her ample chest, her piercing gaze locked on his. And then, as he'd expected, and dreaded, her slender arm shot up. Edgecomb scanned the room for another hand, but his nemesis faced no competition.

"Sally?"

"Mr. Edgecomb," she asked—civil, yet not friendly—"Would you mind if I made an announcement?"

That caught him off guard. He'd been expecting a direct challenge, while he now sensed a sneak-attack lurking behind her announcement. But he'd allowed countless other announcements over the course of the years—for pep rallies and cancer benefits and Spanish club fiestas—so what choice did he have?

"What would you like to announce?" he asked.

The girl stood up. She was tiny, he registered—probably under five feet, although her presence made her seem so much larger. "At the Board of Education meeting tonight," she declared, "a group of citizens will present a petition for equal treatment of all historical viewpoints. I know this might not be of interest to many of you, but for those few of you who are concerned that we're only being taught one side of important issues—that we're being indoctrinated—this is an opportunity to fight back." She glowered at Edgecomb. "You're welcome too, Mr. Edgecomb."

"Wish I could, Sally," he replied. "But I already have plans. You see, I'm washing my socks tonight."

That drew a few titters, but not the laughter he'd hoped for.

"Too bad," said Sally. "But better your socks than my brain."

A collective gasp—part alarm, part awe—swelled



across the classroom.

Edgecomb grinned. “Touché, Sally. Maybe I will come after all.”

“I hope you do. I hope you all do,” she said. “We already have enough signatures to compel a vote, but we can always use more, so please let me know if any of you would like to sign on.” And then she held up a small mechanical device; it took a moment before Edgecomb registered that it was an old-fashioned tape recorder, the miniature sort that journalists had used in the pre-cell phone era. “If you do come tonight, you may even get to hear yourself on tape, Mr. Edgecomb. I’m sure the Board of Education will enjoy your thoughts on the Missouri Compromise.”

You little bitch, thought Edgecomb—but this time, he held his tongue.

He took a deep breath. “Please give that to me,” he ordered. “There’s a policy against recording inside the classroom without permission.”

“An unconstitutional policy,” countered Sally. “You get a court order, Mr. Edgecomb, and it’s all yours.”

Edgecomb felt his temper rising, the heat brewing in his forehead.

“Give me that,” he demanded, stepping toward her. “Right now.”

“I don’t think so,” said Sally.

She slid the device into her cleavage. The gesture was so provocative that it had the paradoxical effect of bringing Edgecomb to his senses. After all, he couldn’t reach into the girl’s blouse for the recorder. And the machine was probably still running. If he made a snide remark about her breasts, that would cook his goose.

“Very well,” he said. “I haven’t said anything that isn’t true. If you’d like to share my genius with the School Board, who am I to object?”

He glanced at the wall clock; he had only two minutes to redeem himself. Louise, the nurse’s daughter, was already packing up her books. Edgecomb turned toward Abe Kendall, a lanky, stoic, Orthodox Jewish kid who always wore a skullcap and also happened to be the star of the school’s basketball team. “I have a tidbit about Judaism that I bet even Abe doesn’t know,” he ventured.

Kendall looked up with interest.

“Abe, did you know that your namesake, Abraham Lincoln, was Jewish?”

An expression of polite bemusement spread across the boy’s features.

“Are you sure?” the teen asked.

“Absolutely,” replied Edgecomb. “He was shot in the temple.”

Kendall grinned. Other students followed. Brittany Marcus didn’t get the joke and looked to her neighbor for explanation.

“Good one, Mr. E.,” said the basketball star.

“Thanks,” he replied. “But please don’t write that on the state exam.”

He glanced sidelong at Sally. She held the eraser end of her pencil against her lower lip, reflective and resentful. The pendulum of power, Edgecomb realized

with relief, had swung back in his direction. For the moment, at least. He still held it, albeit tenuously, when the bell sounded several seconds later.

The Laurendale Board of Education met in a small theater on the third floor of the high school that also served as a drama classroom during the day. Posters from various senior class musicals lined the walls—revealing a pattern that included productions of *West Side Story* and *Grease* at least once each decade. Puppets from an avant-garde staging of Brecht hung off the rafters. At the front of the room, three folding tables, each equipped with a pitcher of water, separated the elevated seats of the seven anointed school board members from the masses who had elected them. A microphone stood at the head of each aisle for audience members to ask questions. When Edgecomb arrived—with Sebastian Borrelli in tow for moral support—the followers of Roland Royster had occupied nearly the entire gallery. They carried placards reading: “History Is Often Inconvenient” and “Grant and Lee were Actors” and “Test the Cloak”—the last sign, Edgecomb had learned online, a reference to Surrender Appomattox’s efforts to conduct DNA testing on the clothing that Abraham Lincoln had worn to Ford’s Theater. Edgecomb spotted Sally in the front row, styling a striking orange sundress. He presumed the red-faced gentleman sitting beside her to be her father. Roland G. Royster appeared younger than Edgecomb had expected—closer to forty than to fifty; he boasted a towering forehead and a mane of long, prematurely silver hair.

Edgecomb and Sebastian maneuvered their way through Royster’s army and joined the standing-room-only crowd against the far wall. Edgecomb had previously been to a School Board meeting once before—to voice opposition to a plan requiring that newly-hired faculty contribute to their own health insurance—and, in the eighteen months since, the entire composition of the Board had changed. As the five men and two woman filed to their seats, he noted how ordinary they all looked, more like beleaguered parents or mid-level executives at the end of a long commute than like formidable legislators. Even the chairman, Archie Steinhoff, distinguished by rugged features and an aquiline nose fit for a Roman emperor, and sporting a three-piece suit whose value likely exceeded the cost of Edgecomb’s entire wardrobe, somehow managed to convey an air of mediocrity and ineptitude, accentuated by his poorly-disguised toupee.

Sebastian nudged Edgecomb with his elbow and drew his attention toward a girl in the third row. “She’s hot, dude,” he said. “You know her?”

“Jesus Christ,” hissed Edgecomb. “She’s like fourteen.”

“I bet she’s at least sixteen,” rejoined Sebastian. “Age of consent.”

Edgecomb glared at his housemate. He didn’t think Borrelli was serious about the girl—ogling underage women was just part of his shtick—but he was never 100% sure. Every jest held a hint of truth lurking inside,



didn't it? In any case, he had no desire to be humiliated in front of a roomful of colleagues and parents.

"Her mom's not half-bad either," said Borrelli—his voice a register too loud. "Great body. Almost makes up for her face."

The woman beside Sebastian—a matron of a certain age, exuding an oppressive scent of lavender—appeared as though she might slap him.

"What do you say we invite them home?" continued Borrelli. "One for each of us. You can take your pick."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Edgecomb demanded in an angry whisper.

"Chill out, dude," answered Borrelli. "You know I'm just fucking with you."

Before Edgecomb had an opportunity to respond, Archie Steinhoff rapped a wooden block on the tabletop and called the meeting to order. "We have a large audience here tonight," he observed. "Welcome to all of you. As a public official, I must tell you that it's reassuring for me to see so many of my friends and neighbors, my fellow citizens, actively participating in the civic process." Edgecomb wondered what percentage of the audience would have described Steinhoff as a friend. "We'll proceed to approval of the minutes and then we'll follow-up with committee reports. New business—and I understand that one or more members of the community would like to address the Board this evening—is generally reserved for the end of the meeting."

A rumble of displeasure heaved through the audience. Yet Steinhoff persisted with the Board's customary routine: adopting the previous month's minutes without amendment, hearing updates from the Committee on Capital Expenditures and from the Committee on Professional Development and from the Ad Hoc Committee on Substance Abuse, the last established after much of the previous spring's graduating senior class arrived intoxicated to their prom, which had taken place on yacht docked at the head of Barnegat Bay, and one drunk girl had fallen into the harbor. Next, the Board's treasurer asked for technical changes to the district's accounting practices, which led to a slew of questions—intricate and seemingly trivial; in the end, the modifications were accepted unanimously.

Another board member, an overweight, moon-faced woman pushing seventy, offered a proposal to commence future meeting with a moment of silence for Laurendale graduates killed fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. A second member then asked if any graduates had in fact died in either war, suggesting that it would belittle the suffering of "our fallen heroes" to honor these local soldiers if they did not actually exist. A third member proposed a broader moment of tribute for all of Laurendale's war dead—dating back to the seven alumni who had perished in World War I and were now memorialized with a heavily-tarnished bronze plaque opposite the cafeteria. After twenty minutes of meandering discussion, the Board tabled the motion until the next session, at which

time the moon-faced woman promised to provide the names of graduates who'd perished in recent conflicts. "You'd think she would have looked that up before the meeting," observed Sebastian—still too loud. "Come on, lady. I mean: Do your homework."

"We're now open to new business and community proposals," announced Archie Steinhoff. "I know this is the first meeting for many of you, so I'd like to take this opportunity to remind our newcomers to say and spell your names before you speak—I'll thank you on behalf of Phoebe Woodsmith, our lovely Clarion reporter—and to kindly limit your remarks to under five minutes."

Roland Royster rose from his seat as soon as Steinhoff opened the floor. Every head in the gallery turned toward him.

When it came to mastering an audience, the protest leader certainly knew what he was about: Royster took his sweet time in ambling toward the microphone, allowing his supporters to cheer his approach, appearing almost inconvenienced by the demands placed upon him—as though he were performing a public service, under duress, and would have preferred to be at home dining with his family. He carried a clipboard of papers, presumably leafs of the petition, under his elbow. Edgecomb considered charging past him and grabbing the mic—not because he particularly desired to address the Board, but because he longed to tarnish the lunatic's moment. Alas, too many other spectators stood between him and the aisle to make such an effort feasible.

"Good evening," said Royster. "My name is Roland G. Royster. If the esteemed Board can spare a few moments, I've come to deliver a request on behalf of seven hundred fifty-eight of my fellow citizens of this great country."

"Please spell your name," interrupted Archie Steinhoff.

Royster appeared nonplussed. "Fine," he conceded grudgingly, clearly displeased at the distraction. "R-O-Y-S-T-E-R."

"First name, too," pressed Steinhoff. "For Phoebe's sake."

"R-O-L-A-N-D," said Royster. "Satisfied?"

The reply came from an elfin, bespectacled young woman perched in the front row, on the aisle, a spiral-bound pad in her lap. The celebrated Phoebe Woodsmith. "And your middle initial, sir? Was that B as in Brave or G as in Golf?"

"That was G," said Royster, "As in, give me a chance to speak, please."

Guffaws tore through the nutcase's entourage. Steinhoff pounded his wooden block until the gallery returned to order. The chairman issued a strongly-worded warning, threatening to adjourn the session immediately.

"The floor is yours, Mr. Royster," he said. "You have five minutes."

"Very well. Five minutes is not a long time. Especially when the liberty of mankind is at stake." Royster paused to let his declaration sink in. "As you may be aware, my



friends, intellectual freedom has always been the bedrock of a sound educational system. And today, as much as at any time during our nation's history, that intellectual liberty is under assault....” During the ensuing speech, Royster did not once mention the American Civil War or Edgecomb's conflict with his daughter. Instead, he spoke in the broadest platitudes, invoking the Magna Carta and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the legacy of Patrick Henry. By the time Royster removed a handkerchief from his breast pocket to dab down his forehead—a clever touch that Edgecomb recalled from a Henry Fonda movie—several members of the School Board were nodding their heads in accord. “So I present to you this initiative, on behalf of seven hundred fifty-eight of my fellow citizens, defending the sanctity of the marketplace of ideas and proposing that all faculty members be required, upon parental request, to devote equal time to both sides of any historical question.”

Royster handed the petition to the Board's secretary and returned to his seat. His followers applauded with abandon. “You'll note that more than two hundred of the signatures belong to Laurendale residents,” he added before sitting down. “According to your own bylaws, that requires an up-or-down vote of the Board.”

Archie Steinhoff conferred for what felt like a good five minutes with the Board's secretary and with the bald member to his left, holding his palm over his microphone. Several other members passed him written notes. “It appears that you are correct, Mr. Royster. However, in light of the seriousness of this proposal, the chair requests that you allow us to delay a vote until next month's meeting, which should give the Board an opportunity to review the matter in greater depth.”

The request drew a clamor of jeers. “After you're nominated for Lieutenant Governor,” shouted a lantern-jawed man in a denim jacket. More jeers followed. Royster's toadies, it appeared, already knew the scoop on Steinhoff.

“We'd prefer a vote this evening,” said Royster in an even tone. “Freedom postponed is freedom denied.”

A look of anguish flashed across Archibald Steinhoff's face, as though he were having his tonsils removed without anesthesia. He conferred further with the Board's secretary, with his bald colleague, with the member who'd questioned the need for a moment of silence. The moon-faced woman yawned and glanced at her watch.

“Very well,” said the chairman. “It seems we have no alternative but to vote on Mr. Royster's initiative at tonight's meeting.”

“Hell yeah,” exclaimed the lantern-jawed man.

Steinhoff again pounded his makeshift gavel. “One more outburst,” the chairman warned, “And I'll clear the room. Now if there is no further community business, we'll proceed to a vote on the initiative.”

A silence descended upon the theater. Edgecomb surveyed the gallery, hoping that someone might rise to challenge Royster. Nobody did. It wasn't even clear that those spectators not affiliated with Surrender

Appomattox—and he recognized a handful of parents he'd met on various open school nights in prior years—had any clue what the lunatic's appeal was really about. Most of the local residents who'd signed his petition probably hadn't known either—or were the sort of knee-jerk liberal populists who believed it their duty to sign every initiative and ballot measure that floated their way. Steinhoff understood what was at stake, of course, as did Sandra Foxwell, roosting in the front row, several seats off the aisle, but Royster's hazy speech had given them both claims to plausible deniability. In other words, if Edgecomb didn't stand up now, the hallowed dead of Bull Run and Spotsylvania would soon be reduced to mere theory—open to endless debate, or even relegated to the same intellectual dust heap as alchemy and saltational evolution and the Ptolemaic universe. Sally's father realized this too; Royster sat with his arms folded across his broad chest, relishing his victory, an intoxicated grin of power plastered across his ruddy features.

Edgecomb muscled his way forward. “He's a Civil War denier,” he called out—not waiting until he reached the microphone. “This has nothing to do with academic freedom or human dignity or anything of the sort. He wants us to teach students that the American Civil War is a hoax.” He finally arrived at the mic. “Did you all hear me? He wants us to teach that the Civil War never happened!”

The young educator now had the attention of every last person in the gallery, even ancient Leonard Brackitt—longtime president of the Laurendale Retired Teachers Association—who'd snored through the greater part of the meeting. Sebastian Borrelli had followed Edgecomb down the aisle, like a bodyguard; he stood with his arms akimbo, his face steeled with menace, just close enough to tackle anyone trying to silence his housemate prematurely. In the front row, only yards away from her teacher, Sally Royster wore an expression of unalloyed hatred. Archie Steinhoff did not interrupt him to ask for the spelling of his name.

“Do you really want us teaching the Gettysburg Address as theory?” Edgecomb demanded of the Board. “And what about people who question the moon landing? Or Holocaust deniers?” Then he focused directly on Archie Steinhoff. “Even if you're not interested in the truth, think about the optics. How is the media going to respond when I start presenting Auschwitz and Treblinka as controversial hypotheses? What are you going to say when the Anti-Defamation League shows up here with a bunch of concentration camp survivors in wheelchairs?”

Royster shook his head. “The requirement for teaching both sides only applies when a parent requests it,” he interjected. “I don't imagine there are many Holocaust deniers or moon landing skeptics living here in Laurendale.”

“But there are Civil War deniers,” Edgecomb shot back, pointing at Sally's father. “And he's one of them.”

“I reject that characterization,” objected Royster. “I



don't deny anything. I merely demand evidence."

"You had your five minutes," snapped Edgecomb. "Now let me speak." He drew a deep breath and gathered his thoughts. "The instant you pass this rule, that man is going to insist that I give equal time to the people who believe Mathew Brady's photos were staged and the Emancipation Proclamation to be a forgery. Look at their placards, for Christ's sake: 'Grant and Lee were Actors.' What more evidence do you need?"

Edgecomb stopped speaking, mostly because he wasn't sure what else to say. He suddenly realized that he'd become the center of attention—and a chill of anxiety sizzled up his spine. Out of the blue, he heard Jillian's voice pleading inside his head, warning him, Please don't create any trouble. Fortunately, he'd chosen a good moment to yield the floor; momentum seemed to have shifted against Sally's father.

"Is this true, Mr. Royster?" inquired the oldest member of the board—a wizened gentleman with drowsy eyes who Edgecomb had suspected of catnapping. "Do you believe the Emancipation to be a forgery?"

"My personal views," answered Royster with equanimity, "should have no bearing on the matter. We've delivered a petition and now we're requesting a vote."

"I'm afraid Mr. Royster is correct," said Archie Steinhoff, apparently wishing to bring the controversy to a swift conclusion. "He did present more than enough signatures under the bylaws." The furrows in the chairman's brow had grown only deeper during Edgecomb's debate with Royster—as though each salvo had aged him a year. "I would also urge my colleagues to consider the following," he said. "This proposal does have considerable citizen support. Considerable. It's not every day that more than two hundred Laurendale residents take a public position on anything. If we choose to approve this measure tonight, and it's subsequently abused, we always have the authority to revisit our decision next month."

The bald man muttered his agreement. The moon-faced woman nodded. Archibald Steinhoff was a man of extensive influence, after all, and his preferences generally swayed the Board. Only the drowsy-eyed gentleman appeared doubtful.

"I realize that this proposal is now the only thing standing between many of you and dinner," observed Steinhoff—shattering the tension in the small theater. "So I now move to approve the initiative as presented. Is there a second?"

"I second the motion," muttered the moon-faced woman.

"Point of order," shouted Edgecomb. "I have a point of order."

Steinhoff removed his glasses, his face florid with irritation. "Yes?"

Edgecomb squeezed his fists for courage and asked, "Have the signatures been verified against the municipal voting rolls?"

Steinhoff flashed a puzzled look at his bald colleague.

"Seventeen years ago," continued Edgecomb, "the Board voted on an initiative that turned out to be based entirely upon fraudulent signatures. One citizen had signed four hundred different names copied out of the telephone directory. In response, as you may recall, the town amended its bylaws to require that the clerk of the Board of Elections verify each signature on a citizen's initiative against the voting rolls in order to prevent another such incident." He glimpsed Sally's father out of the corner of his eye; Royster still wore his smug grin. "I trust the Board will follow its own rules and have the signatures verified before proceeding..."

"That could take days," observed Steinhoff. "Even weeks."

"Exactly," said Edgecomb.

Another conference transpired between the Steinhoff, his bald ally and the Board secretary. The drowsy-eyed gentleman also shambled up to the conclave and offered a whispered opinion. Several minutes later, once the legislators had returned to their seats, Steinhoff pounded his wooden knocker for the final hush of the evening. "I understand that this ruling will disappoint many of you," he said. "But bylaws are bylaws. I have instructed the Board secretary to verify these signatures with the clerk of the Board of Elections and to report back to us four weeks from tonight." And without further comment, Steinhoff adjourned the meeting and retreated quickly into the corridor.

Now it was Edgecomb, not Roland Royster, who had captured the interest of those members of the crowd not affiliated with Surrender Appomattox. Leonard Brackitt congratulated him on "knowing your facts" and slapped him too hard between the shoulder blades, as though he were a choking infant. A handful of parents gathered around him to express their appreciation. Then he conducted a twenty minute interview with Phoebe Woodson, downplaying his own significance in the controversy and emphasizing the importance of academic freedom. He noticed Sandra Foxwell skulking at the periphery of their conversation—just close enough to eavesdrop on his comments—but she pretended to be rummaging for something in her purse. It was nearly ten o'clock when he finally escaped all the unwanted attention and piled into Borrelli's jalopy, a disfigured Dodge Dart distinguished by its one remaining tail fin. He'd gotten lucky: He'd caught Royster off guard, and the denier had been too self-assured, it seemed, to have prepared a backup plan. Sally Royster hadn't even found an opportunity to play the cassette tape from his afternoon history class.

"That was totally awesome, dude," said Borrelli as the Dodge peeled out of the gravel parking lot. He'd already lit a cigarette—and Edgecomb hoped it contained only tobacco. "You really did a number on them with that Board of Elections shit. How'd you ever find out about all that? That was pretty wild."

Borrelli drummed his thumbs on the steering wheel, playing it like a bongo. Outside, the suburban night flashed by at a dangerous speed.



“Crazier than you think,” said Edgecomb. “I made it up.”

His housemate stopped thumping. “For real?”

Edgecomb wanted to justify himself by blaming the School Board—by claiming that it was the members’ lack of institutional memory that was at fault. If you don’t know your own history, after all, you’re at the mercy of strangers, and strangers aren’t always honest. But deep down, Edgecomb knew, his deception wasn’t about history; it was about warfare. He was locked in an armed conflict with Roland G. Royster, and his children, and all of the vast minions of their nefarious organization.

“If Royster wants war,” he told his housemate, convincing himself with his own words. “He’ll get war. But from now on, I’m using live ammunition.”

“Teach is one mad motherfucker,” replied his companion.

Then Sebastian Borrelli whistled into the darkness and hit the accelerator.

SECOND SALVO

The headline on Phoebe Woodsmith’s lead story in the *Clarion* the following morning read, “MR. SMITH GOES TO LAURENDALE: History Teacher Educates School Board on Rules.” An editorial on page seven also criticized Royster’s initiative, going so far as to say that any board members voting for the proposal would effectively disqualify themselves from higher office. Since Edgecomb didn’t subscribe to the local newspaper, he only discovered his media triumph during his first period prep, when Lucky Pozner slapped the broadsheet down on his desk. The grizzled Chemistry teacher settled onto the radiator; its metal frame creaked under his profuse weight.

“You should have seen ‘Sly Sandy’ this morning,” he said. “Old dame looked like she’d just learned she was being dispatched to the glue factory. Yesterday, she counted herself a shoe-in for State Education Commissioner in a Sanchez-Steinhoff Administration, and today she’s in line for another decade counting paperclips on the second floor....I finally understand why they shoot crippled horses.” Edgecomb’s senior colleague unwrapped a piece of Nicorette gum and popped the morsel into his mouth. “So, old fellow, how does it feel to be a B-list celebrity?”

“This too shall pass,” Edgecomb replied, leafing aimlessly through his lesson plan. “By next week, nobody will remember that I exist. Possibly not even me.”

As far as Edgecomb was concerned, his fifteen minutes of fame couldn’t dissolve quickly enough. His sister had already left him three cell phone messages—her voice taut as a hangman’s rope—and he wasn’t looking forward to Jillian’s inevitable rant about how his antics had doomed her to a solitary old age. He also dreaded his upcoming class with Sally Royster; although he’d won their most recent skirmish, he anticipated that

her counterattack would prove ruthless. As a teenager, Edgecomb had fantasized about fame and fortune, even of being elected President—mostly with the aim of impressing his high school crush, Vicky Vann—but now he had reached the point where all that he really sought in life was, to quote one of his childhood heroes, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, “the right to be let alone.” Some people, most significantly his mother, deemed his attitude lazy, even pathetic. He preferred to consider it mature.

“History is full of insignificant people,” added Edgecomb. “And I’ve long since reconciled myself to the fact that I’m going to be one of them.”

“Au contraire, old fellow,” countered Pozner. “You’re no more significant or insignificant than anybody else.” What followed was a thirty-minute disquisition that could be summed up in one platitude: All human beings shape history equally, but only a few of them receive any credit. Edgecomb had heard every last word of it before, down to Pozner’s apocryphal anecdote about the never-identified passerby who’d saved an adolescent Rosa Parks from drowning, but he admired the zeal with which the recovering Sixties dropout preached his peculiar-if-inconsistent gospel of individual significance and benevolent Marxism. Only the clamor of the class shift, drifting in from the hallway, brought Pozner’s soliloquy to a premature close. “So the bottom line,” he said, shuffling out of the room as a brigade of ninth graders surged in, “is that, at the moment, whether you deserve it or not, you’re one of those lucky few getting the credit, so you might as well savor it.” With that, Pozner flashed him a salute—a curious gesture from a man who’d spent the final years of the Vietnam Conflict in Vancouver—and Edgecomb once again became an ordinary social studies teacher, lecturing antsy fourteen-year-olds on the Monroe Doctrine.

Only not that ordinary. During the course of the school day, as word of his Board of Education performance spread, assorted colleagues poked their heads into his classroom to congratulate—and often to tease—him on his newfound renown. His department chairman, Elgin Rothschild, called him a “veritable muckraker” and likened him to Clarence Darrow. Stan and Stu Storrow, the egg-bald twins who jointly ran the school’s physical education program, serenaded him over lunch in the faculty dining chamber with a chorus of “We Shall Overcome.” Most rewarding of all, Calliope Chaselle—the eye-catching and aloof junior librarian who boasted skin so delicate that one could admire the latticework of tiny blue veins in her flawless cheeks—even Calliope approached him after the midday staff meeting and praised him for his courage. “I showed my boyfriend your picture in the paper at breakfast,” she concluded, probably mentioning her boyfriend so he wouldn’t get the wrong idea, “And I said: Thorn, I work with that guy.” It figured that Calliope shackled up with a man named Thorn. Even the students were aware of Edgecomb’s stardom—with several suggesting that his newfound fame merited a break from homework.



Not all of the feedback, of course, proved positive. When he encountered Sandra Foxwell outside his classroom on his return from lunch—probably not a coincidence—the principal no longer appeared shell-shocked. Rather, she'd composed herself into a portrait of icy civility, her features as hard as the gemstones embedded in her earrings; on her jacket lapel, she brandished a mariner's cross brooch like a shield. "I'm so glad we've run into each other, Horace. I've been meaning to check up on you," she said. "Sometimes, in my experience, sudden publicity for an untenured teacher can get in the way of his classroom responsibilities—and I just wanted to make certain you weren't having any trouble."

"No trouble at all," Edgecomb answered. He forced a thin smile and kept his hands locked in the pockets of his slacks. "Thank you for thinking of me."

"That's what I'm here for," said Foxwell. "I'm truly relieved that you're not having any difficulties—at least, not yet. Should any challenges arise, it goes without saying, my office door always stands open."

Foxwell sauntered away and Edgecomb assumed their conversation had ended, but as he unlocked his classroom door, he discovered his boss again at his elbow. "One more word to the wise, Horace," she said—her tone all too friendly. "I like you. Genuinely. I wanted to emphasize that, because, over the years, I've watched my share of young teachers bite off more than they could chew—and, quite frankly, I'd hate for you to end up being one of them." And then the Sly Sandy Fox tramped up the corridor without affording him an opportunity to respond—not that he actually wanted to—her heels drilling the parquet like artillery.

Edgecomb didn't particularly fear his boss anymore—not after the showdown at the Board meeting. He probably should have: Even with the strong backing of his department chair, Elgin Rothschild, concerted opposition from Foxwell could, at a minimum, hold up his tenure. But that afternoon, only two threats unsettled Edgecomb—maybe because they so dwarfed all others. The first was the prospect that Phoebe Woodsmith might phone him from the Clarion to demand more information about the former petitioner who'd supposedly copied signatures out of the telephone directory. Edgecomb intended to claim he didn't remember the details—that he'd read about the incident someplace, while doing personal research for his own book, but no longer recalled where. What other choice did he have? He'd have to hope that the Board of Education's records dating back nearly two decades proved skimpy, a genuine possibility in an overtaxed bedroom suburb where half the families started planning their exoduses the day their kids graduated from high school. If Woodsmith asked him about his "book"—and why shouldn't a high school history teacher be writing a book?—he'd tell her he was researching conspiracy theories.

Edgecomb's other fear was Sally Royster. As much as he had every reason to dread Sandra Foxwell, and

didn't, he had no logical cause to be intimidated by an unpopular seventeen-year-old girl—especially one who looked rather like a quarrelsome macaw. Yet, as much as he hated to admit it, the young woman had somehow managed to burrow deep under his skin. During Edgecomb's fifth and six period classes, while he struggled to maintain focus on the intricacies of the XYZ Affair and the audacity of the Louisiana Purchase, his thoughts repeatedly detoured to various permutations of his impending encounter with Sally. Would she challenge him directly? Or would she bide her time until she caught him off guard? Edgecomb contemplated ways to forestall her tricks—taping his own lessons, for instance, and posting them on the Internet—but, at the end of the day, there was no way to preempt the unknown. What he feared most, of course, was losing authority, and the goodwill of his pupils, of becoming one of those well-intentioned-but-unloved teachers steeped in his own ineptitude. Rationally, he recognized that he stood far from that precipice, but anxiety isn't rational, so by the dawn of seventh period, Edgecomb felt himself breaking into a sweat.

The bell rang; classes changed. His twelfth grade students filtered to their seats. Already, after only three weeks, they'd imprinted themselves indelibly upon his psyche: Overweight Louise Buxner, seemingly always on the verge of tears; earnest and diligent Abe Kendall; perpetually befuddled Brittany Marcus, whose smooth legs kept sophomore boys awake at night, but who had no business inside an honors classroom—and knew it. Already, every one of them mattered to him. Yet Sally was different: He told himself he didn't give a rat's rump about the girl—that he'd feel only relief if he never laid eyes upon her again—but, if that were really true, then why couldn't he stop arguing with her in his head? When the class mustered to order, in a spontaneous gust of silence, her seat remained empty.

How dare she? It was one thing to challenge his authority directly, quite another to thumb her nose at him by skipping out on the confrontation entirely. That girl was mocking him—and the other students obviously knew it. Edgecomb muddled his way through John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, through the nomination of Lincoln, through the secession of South Carolina. But try as he might, he couldn't keep his gaze away from the unoccupied desk in the second row. Sally's vacant chair seemed to beckon him like an open grave. How the hell was he supposed to convince the girl that the Civil War had happened if she wouldn't to listen to him make his case?

As soon as the class—and the school day—ended, Edgecomb immediately called the main office to report her truancy. To his dismay, the attendance secretary was already aware of Sally's absence: She'd been phoned in sick.



Edgecomb arrived home to find Sebastian Borrelli and an unfamiliar visitor ensconced in their living room. His housemate's guest wore a pair of grease-stained



cargo pants and a T-shirt emblazoned, “Genius by Birth, Slacker by Choice”; his bleached hair recalled a well-worn shag carpet.

“Hey, Superstar,” welcomed Borrelli. “I want to introduce you to Sevastopol. He’s the new designer on my project. Hired him ten minutes ago. Who’d have thought I could find this much talent on Craig’s List—and on my first try, too....?”

A moment passed before Edgecomb realized their visitor was the illustrator his housemate had employed to draw the blasphemous coloring books. Multiple sketches of Mohammed in various states of undress, strewn about the coffee table, confirmed his worst suspicions. In several of them, the prophet wore a loincloth and bore an unsettling resemblance to Tarzan. In one, he appeared stark naked—and anatomically correct.

“I know what you’re thinking,” said Borrelli, following his gaze. “We’re obviously not including the risqué sketches in the children’s version. We’re not that stupid. Sevastopol drew them as a joke, at first, but then it struck me that we could also market an X-rated version as a novelty item for adults at church socials and gun shows. Clever, no?”

“Very clever,” conceded Edgecomb. “And I’m glad to meet you, Mr. Sevastopol.”

“Just Sevastopol,” said Sevastopol. “It’s my full name.”

“I’m sure it is,” replied Edgecomb. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m not feeling terribly sociable. Today was a very long day....”

“And it’s about to get longer,” said Borrelli.

His housemate handed him a stack of paper scraps, assorted shreds in various shapes and colors. They had a hodge-podge of names and numbers scrawled on them.

“What’s this?” he demanded.

“Phone messages, Teach. Forty-two of them.”

“Jesus. I don’t know forty-two people....”

“I sorted them for you. The media requests are on top: Hager Heights Sentinel-Times, Newark Star-Ledger, WKNJ. Then you’ve got your social calls—friends and family: Your Aunt Pauline in Arizona; Oliver Nepersall; that camp buddy of yours with the weird lisp; and some chick named Victoria Vann—asked you to call her back tonight, no matter how late. The fourteen on the bottom are all from your sister. And there’s also a message from your mom on the answering machine that says: ‘No need to get back to me today, but it’s unfair of you to ignore your sister’s phone calls.’ I saved it for you.”

“Vicky Vann called? You’d better not be fucking with me.”

“Sounds like a porn star name, dude,” said Borrelli.

“Or a call girl. You’re not hanging out with a hooker, Teach, are you?”

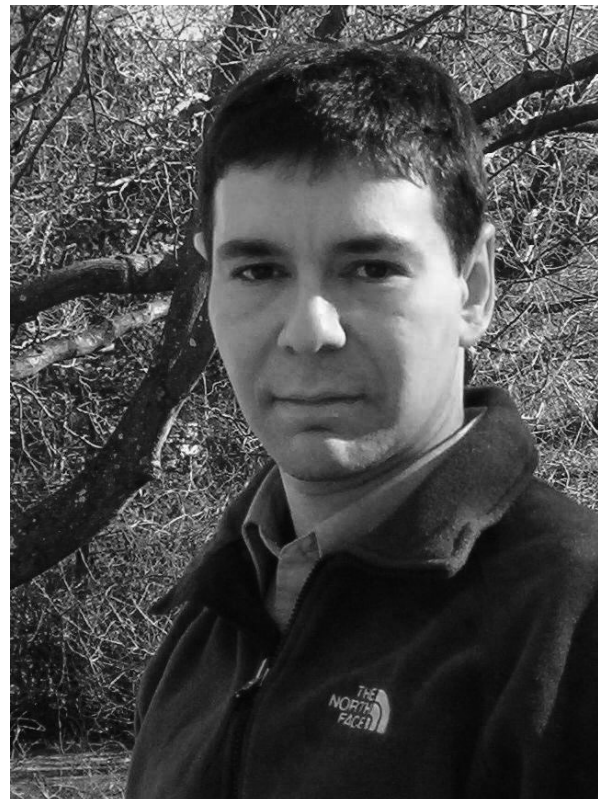
“What planet do you live on?” Edgecomb snapped.

“Sensitive, sensitive.” Borrelli rolled his eyes. “Chick did sound desperate to talk to you, dude. But you still don’t want to screw this up. You get your hook in—okay?—and then you run in the opposite direction.”

Judge M.O. Walsh's Comments:

*.It is all too often underestimated, how much skill it takes for a writer to pull off humor in a novel. Yet I blazed through the first fifty pages of **The Other Side** with a huge smile on my face. There is something sly and knowing in the way this writer builds a story around a high school teacher coming face to face with a group of dedicated—you won’t believe this—Civil War Deniers. This is a fun ride by a skillful and awfully smart writer.*

Jacob M. Appel—who previously has won the Faulkner Society’s gold medals for best short story and best essay, both of which have been published in *The Double Dealer*—also has placed in other categories multiple times. He is the author of two published novels, **The Man Who Wouldn’t Stand Up** and **The Biology of Luck**; a short story collection, **Scouting for the Reaper**; and an essay collection, **Phoning Home**. His short fiction has appeared in more than 200 leading literary journals including *Agni*, *Colorado Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *West Branch*. His prose has won the *Boston Review Short Fiction Competition*, the *Dana Award*, the *Arts & Letters Prize for Fiction*, the *North American Review Kurt Vonnegut Prize*, and more.





OTHER FINALISTS

Finalists

A Delicate Dance, Austin Gary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Beautiful Men and Me, Robin Martin, Brooklyn, NY
Broken, Janet Taylor-Perry, Ridgeland, MS
Fire on the Island, Timothy Jay Smith, Nice, France
For Every Man, A Country, Dan Turtel, New York, NY
Magdalena, Candi Sary, Costa Mesa, CA
Melting the Blues, Tracy, Chiles McGhee, Washington, DC
Mabel, M. L. Dunser, Columbia, MS
Nostalgia's Eternal Serenade, Nishith Singh, Lafayette, LA
Sea Butcher, Brent Benoit, New Orleans, LA
The Escapists, John Vanderslice, Conway, AR
The Final Voyage of Odysseus, Joel Freiburger, Glen Elyn, IL
The Independent Contractor, Matthew Minson, Spring, TX
The Miser, Shane Finkelstein, New Orleans, LA
This Year's Girl, Geoff Schutt, Chestnut Hill, MA
You Remind Me of Someone, Ledia Xhoga, Brooklyn, NY

Short List for Finalists

2023, David Anderson, Boerne, TX
Accidental Home, Jay Forman, New Orleans, LA
A Ladder in the Dark, Greg Jones, Orinda, CA
A Need to Know, Brenda Horrigan, Vineyard Haven, MA
Another Time, Caren Galimore, Christiansburg, VA
Ashram, Jonah Steinberg, Burlington, VT
Bill Lovelace, Mary Ann Avallone, Ocean Springs, MS
Cold River City, Leslee Becker, Fort Collins, CO
Creole Bodies, Marilyn Mell, New Orleans, LA
Delusions, Virginia Tell, Baton Rouge, LA
Dixiana, James McAllister, Columbia, SC
Egrets End, Margaret Spence, Tempe, AZ
E-Mail Suicide, Rebecca Jeschke, Richmond, CA

Gather Your Rain Dogs, Amanda Lisle, Brooklyn, NY
Haunt the Dark, Justin Quarry, Nashville, TN
In This Ground, Beth Castrodale, Jamaica Plain, MA
Invisible Hand, Laura Catherine Brown, New York, NY
Leonie's Mother, Valerie Winn, Gautier, MS
Lessons from Elephants, Katelynn Nicholson, Shinnston, WV
Nobody Else, Donaldson Brown, Brooklyn, NY
Of Light and Violence, Dan Turtel, New York, NY
Push Play, Joyce Miller, Cincinnati, OH
Seeing to Particulars, Jacqueline Guidry, Kansas City, MO
The Book of Rivers and Cities, Marilyn Moriarty, Roanoke, VA
The Goldberg Variations: The Very Model of the Modern Homosexual, Jonathan Arnowitz, San Francisco, CA
The Gorge, David Armand, Hammond, LA
The Impossibility of Interplanetary Love, Shannon Kirk, Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA
The Last True, Good Man, Paul Kettl, Philadelphia, PA
The Parish Runner, Matthew Mahan, Comargo, OK
The Martial Artist, Gary Craig Powell, Conway, AR
The Minerva Sabbatical, Heddy Lunenfeld, Tiburon, CA
The Red Gaucho, Andrés Carlstein, Iowa City, IA
The Seven Year Start, J. E. Nissley, Troy, NY
The Wishing Glass, Nancy Brock, Columbia, SC
Untitled, Alison Barker, New Orleans, LA

Semi-Finalists

A Beautiful Thought, Jacquelyn Galindo, San Antonio, TX
A Collie in Camelot, Melody Riggins, Aiken, SC
A Girl Called Margarine, Carolann Malley, Granby, MA
A Heaviness in the Trees, Robert Lukow, Syracuse, NY
Anchor Baby, Blake Sanz, Denver, CO



- Beneath the Railroad Trestle**, Evan Lawrence Ringle,
Gibsonia, PA
- Broken Heart**, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
- Busara Road**, David Hallock Sanders,
Philadelphia, PA
- Castaway in Kingdom Come**,
Robert Hambling Davis, Newark, DE
- Cat**, Thomas Tassinda, Overland Park, KS
- Colored Blue in Corona**, Stan Kempton,
New Orleans, LA
- Devour the Kingdom**, McHenry Lee,
Baton Rouge, LA
- Dream Castles**, Sheila Koster, Glendale, CA
- Dylan Meets the Beatles**, Richard Dunfey,
Boston, MA
- Epiphany**, Mark Havlik, Huntersville, NC
- Facelift**, Amy Pence, Carrollton, GA
- Faith Healing**, Kathy Conde, Superior, CO
- Feral Maril**, Leslie Tall Manning, New Bern, NC
- Free Love**, Mary Hutchings Reed, Chicago, IL
- Gem of Ohio**, Mary Jean Pramik, San Francisco, CA
- Gladiator**, Gina Berry, Plymouth, MN
- How I Killed Walter Lloyd Peitzak and One Other**,
James Carey Doane, Sayville, NY
- Ithaka**, Joe Dwyer, Sacramento, CA
- Jellyfish Dreaming**, D. K. McCutchen,
Shelburne Falls, MA
- Last Mutineer**, Robert L. Fox, Willis, MI
- Leaves of the Foster Line**, Stephanie Knapp Stoecker,
New Orleans, LA
- Marianne's War**, Douglas Hall, Rockport, MA
- Me and Mr. Sprunger**, Joyce Davis, Northbrook, IL
- Mega Mart**, Natasha Chin, Santa Barbara, CA
- Muckdogs**, Sally Ventura, Olean, NY
- Murder in the Wine Country**, Vernon Zimmerman,
Los Angeles, CA
- Oneiric Realities**, Lisa Morriss-Andrews,
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
- Paisley**, Jillian Ross, Trumbull, CT
- Peaches: A Jazz Fantasy**, Alex Jennings,
New Orleans, LA
- Perhaps She'll Die**, Matt Miller, Long Beach, CA
- Polie**, Ashley Shelby, Hopkins, MN
- Price of Refuge**, Shannon Schuren,
Sheboygan Falls, WI
- Redemption**, Justin, Chae, Bayside, NY
- Revenge is Sweet**, Pat Gallant, New York, NY
- Riding the Pine**, Christopher A. Milligan,
Sister Bay, WI
- Saddam Shame**, James McEnteer, Las Vegas, NV
- Second Chances**, Leslie Daniels, Thorold,
Ontario, Canada
- Socrates Has Fallen**, Nancy Dafoe, Homer, NY
- Stairway to the Sea**, Jeff Newberry, Tifton, GA
- Stringless**, David Krancher Barnes, Cambridge, MA
- Sunshine Crazy**, Lori Johnson, Bradenton, FL
- Sybelia Drive**, Karin Davidson, Columbus, OH
- The Accountant**, Ken Rumble, Durham, NC
- The Angel's Share**, Susan Poulos,
- The Devil's Rejects**, Daren Dean,
Denham Springs, LA
- The Elemental Series: Spirit**, Rachel Harper,
Slidell, LA
- The Good and the Bad of It**, Ellen Wade Beals
- The Islands**, Kent Dixon, Springfield, OH
- The Kingdom**, Jennifer Moffett, Ocean Springs, MS
- The Last Brave Men**, Ania Savage, Denver, CO
- The Lost Diary of Pocahontas**, Greg Klerkx,
London, UK
- The Miller's Wife**, Sheldon Moss, Eighty Four, PA
- The Old Doom and Gloom**, Dan Kellum,
Brooklyn, NY
- The Rebellion**, Amber Godwin, Conroe, TX
- The Sea Captain's Daughter**, M. P. Barker,
East Longmeadow, MA 01028
- The Terms of Our Survival**, Andrea Dupree,
Thornton, CO
- The White Pig**, Jonathan Janssen, Lancaster, CA
- The Zanzibar Affair**, Elizabeth Anton, St. Louis, MO
- Thin Threads of Allegiance**,
Robert Demarais Sullivan, New Orleans, LA
- Zinctown**, Barry Bergman, Kensington, CA



SWERVES

By Marilyn Moriarty

The Winner, Essay Category of the 2014 William Faulkner -William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

A PACK OF RUNNERS catches up with me on the sidewalk as I wait for the light in St. Germaine de Prés. They jog in place, a kaleidoscope of black pants and arm bands measuring heartbeats, steps or calories. The light changes. The runners acknowledge my existence only by the swerve my presence makes in their path, moving around me like they were fish and I was a reef. Their swerve brings to mind my cousin Annie's question to me, Annie, the daughter of my mother's sister, Annie who speaks no English, who is my age, who loves to read historical novels about George Sand and the queens of France. I have just come from her home in Orleans.

"What does being half French mean to you?" translated her bilingual husband, Christian. There was a deeper question here. I am adopted. I do not have genes from French parents but my mother (my adoptive mother, the only one I ever knew) was French. Shed blood forms the dark communion wine of French history. "Look here": Annie's genealogical tree traced both sides of the family through the 17th century. Several relatives stand out by the legend, "*Décedé pour la France.*" Died for their country. Everyone there has been vetted.

My answer: "If our identity has to do with the way we narrate our lives, then being French is central to the way that I narrate my life."

Crap. Lousy answer. Too postmodern chic, even for me.

Now I am walking the streets in Paris trying to understand something about the culture bequeathed to me by a woman long dead and something about the family who accepts me as French, or half French, or as their American relative.

Andrée died when I was 14. She rarely spoke of the prison camps. No document, no identity card, no photograph precedes 1946, the year she married, as if the rest of her history dissolved the day she married an American Army officer. She was 20 when the Germans moved into Paris, 22 when caught by the Gestapo, deported to Germany at 23, worked in prisons until she came home at 25. Annie and Christian did not know their aunt went to prison for three years. The living remembered only that Andrée was gone a long, long time. No one knew what happened to her. No

one went looking.

On the map Paris resembles an *escargot*. Twenty boroughs (*arrondissements*) curl, shell-like, three revolutions inside the external boundary of the *Periphérique* motorway. The Seine River skewers the snail, creating two banks, one north of the river (Right Bank) and one south (Left Bank). The bull's eye of Paris lies on the island in the Seine, the *Île de la Cité*, where Notre Dame Cathedral stands. A long time ago, the *Île de la Cité* and the *Île St. Martin* were a group of islands inhabited by a river-going people, the *Parisii*, who used boats to travel. They called their outpost by a (probably) Celtic word meaning "marsh" or "muddy." With Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul in 53 B.C.E. the area became Romanized. Caesar's **Commentaries on The Gallic Wars** is famous for its famous opening line, "All Gaul is divided into three parts." The Celts, who inhabited the third part, the Romans called Gauls. As the Romans circulated the *Parisii* toponym "Leuk Tin" in their Roman accent, it became *Lutetia*, or, in French, *Lutèce*.

Lutetia became Paris in 360 A.D. when the Roman emperor Julian changed the city's name to *Civitas Parisiorum*, City of the *Parisii*. The original Celtic name of Paris remains conserved by the Hotel *Lutetia*, the first luxury hotel on the Left Bank. Like others of its kind, this art deco building resembles a stone, wood, and glass Napoleon, not only in its design, but in its siting, with tiers lining up with surrounding buildings. Squatting on a corner with front entrances on two streets, the location made it attractive to the German *Abwehr*, which requisitioned the hotel during the war; and, then, with a twist of delicious irony, De Gaulle made the hotel the meeting place for returning refugees after the war.

When Christian asked me, "How did Veale and Andrée meet?" I remembered something about a function organized by the Red Cross.

"*Croix-rouge!*" Annie said. "Hotel *Lutetia*? Hotel *Lutetia!*"

"We just saw a movie," Christian explained.

My mother did not die for her country but she went to German prisons for the French resistance. Her life always seemed to me something hollowed by war, a



mise en abym swallowed up in its zero point. She died at the young age of 47. In my own mind and heart, she died for “la France.”

“Don’t ever leave your country,” Andrée told me once, even though she received American citizenship, all of us going to the ceremony and waving small flags on sticks. “I am a citizen,” she said, “but if there was a war with France. . . .” —she— she would go back to fight for France against the *États-Unis* is what she means, in her broken English learned from watching the television. That was my country—*Ay-tab Zuni* is how I heard it.

In the *Aytab-Zuni*, she played opera and Edith Piaf torch songs. She kept her culture alive in a small bag of water like an aquarium fish, and then she died in a Florida bungalow surrounded by kids, who ate Reese’s Cups, jawbreakers, Sweet Tarts, and drank Coke. She cooked gourmet cuisine for a family that thought Hardees hamburgers were a treat, this woman who lived in times so hard her lunch was a boiled carrot on a piece of bread with mustard. Andrée would fight for France if forced to take sides; of course, she would. Even if she was an American citizen. She longed for France like a murdered lover. .

To be French: It is to take a position. To take a position in language. I know the good names and the bad names: love De Gaulle, hate Hitler. To be French is to be like Paris, the human embodiment of duality: two sides split by a river, two sides joined by bridges. .

Is to inhabit the world as a creature of internal differences.

It is to be connected to a war.

I walk days through the streets of Paris, into the twisting alleys of the Latin Quarter, down the long tree-lined boulevards designed by Haussmann at the turn to the century, into the corners of the Marais, up and down the caged steps of the Tour Eiffel. Memory and imagination are powered by the same neurons; my legs are mapping a city inside my brain. Perhaps, this way, I can make it mine.

What does it mean to me to be half French? I actually have no idea.

Maybe it behooves me to become a tourist for a day. I take the number 69 bus to the Pere Lachaise cemetery in the 20th. Rick Steves’ travel book **Paris** gave the secret: enter the cemetery through the back entrance, which opens at the top of the hill. Since it will take two hours to walk through the cemetery—if you visit the famous tombs— you will gladly be going downhill. Seated in front of me are three other Americans, one holding the same book I cradle in my lap.

These other Americans know what I know. They have read the same book. . They, like I, like Rick Steves, can narrate the trip, the places, and the routes. They can make a claim to ownership through discourse. How can this be different from me?

Stepping off the bus, we set out at the same pace and then look around for the road that leads to the cemetery. I follow them, we exchange pleasantries, and

they turn off with their guide maps and discover other graves—Jim Morrison, Edith Piaf. I head down hill in the cemetery, leaning back to walk forward. I came to see only one grave, hat of a pair of lovers buried together.

An off duty guide directs me to a loop road at the base of the hill. This monument lies behind another grave. I find them this rainy dark October, the 12th-century lovers Abelard and Heloise. Their torrid love affair fills the letter they sent to each other after they went their separate ways, he to a monastery, she to a convent. The letters tell how Abelard fell in love with Heloise, the girl he was hired to tutor; how they secretly married, and how Heloise’s uncle assaulted Abelard at night and castrated him. Now they are boxed up in a white sepulcher, statues of each lying side by side, stone pillows beneath their heads, hands raised in prayer, eyes open. Metal spikes like spears fence the tomb. They are worthy saints. I have read their letters. I know who they are.

My hands grip the fence as I study the twin forms on the top of the sepulcher. Both are portrayed in long robes. His hair is tonsured; she wears a wimple. They are buried looking up to heaven, spirits following sight lines. . I think about them and their lives, holding them in my thoughts as in a mental act of resuscitation. Exploiting the homophonic link between *denken* and *danken*, Heidegger once wrote that thinking is thanking for being. My thought erects a canopy over their dead bodies. Memory invites them under its roof for shelter. We are all here—they in the sepulcher and I outside the fence, saying a prayer without a god—because collectively we all know that love is worth remembering. Pilgrimage centers pay tribute to divine love, to the places where my god or yours has walked, suffered, rested with a hand in a wall, a hand in a rock commemorating the divine. These lovers were not divine. But their letters strike sparks across time, like static electricity from the bedclothes. It is enough for me to thank them, thinking of them, whose anguish and pain became timeless in their writing. In the strange displacement of heart logic, their memorial answers me.

These lovers in the graveyard remind me how all things end, a most leveling notion. But all beginnings are glorious, figured by the spark, the flame, a Pentecostal holy spirit igniting a chain of events. We love the babe in arms and not the second childhood, the coiled fern not the dried frond. This end curves, the snake gulps the tail behind its head and my mind’s eye closes on the sight of the American Major called to the Left Bank. Perhaps he has been invited by the Red Cross to offer his expertise, or perhaps he wants to see how they run their operation, after all he’s been dealing with P.O.W.s since he’s been in France. An afternoon in early autumn, he enters the lobby of Hotel Lutetia, where, outside, fences have been papered with the faces of returning refugees.

The Major takes a seat in the restaurant, where a



meal or a tea or brunch or a dance has been organized by the Red Cross—

Now I use the French “Croix-rouge” because something really makes a difference when you speak a word in a different language; and I am pulled into it more and more as the city engulfs me; French carries in the language a gesture like a slap, a nod, a raised eyebrow; French puts me on a side in the story. . . .

—and a woman asks him for his order. Her blond hair is pinned on the side. Her face carries a Grecian symmetry, this caryatid who has thrown off her architecture; clear blue eyes under tweezed eyebrows make her look perpetually inquisitive. . . . When he speaks to her, her face lights up from within.

She is so lit from within that he cannot make direct eye contact with her for three seconds because he must call back his fled heart. Finally, he asks her, “*Wie heißen Sie?*” *What’s your name?* German now is their common language. You can see the irony here, can’t you, the way the language inserts itself like a trowel between bricks, and joins them the way that bridges of Paris unite two side of the river, divide two sides of the river.

He is handsome, and, let’s face it, as wholesome as any of the German youth, with a sculpted face, cleft chin, a radiant smile. With his shirt hanging loose from his shoulders, his belt cinching baggy pants, he gives the impression of a large teen-ager. In their first few words is the beginning. For her it will mean the start of an escape from poverty. For him, it marks the next chapter in the Catholic story of family. Later they will go out, maybe even dance. The *Zazous* loved American jazz and shouted “Let’s swing” as their cry of revolt, but she’s not like this, this girl from the country where her grandmother raised the chickens she chopped for the pot. They will listen to Piaf and dance to her torch songs if there is any dancing at all. Perhaps they hold hands as they walk, her skirt flipping up, his head thrown up, and the tongues of nascent lives sparking off them like fire. Love—the beginning of high romance, the glorious cadence of life before the genre changes. It seems right the name she first gives him is both true and false: “Liliane.”

Her *nom de guerre* supports a life: she was Norwegian, born in Oslo, she tells him. Her father, too, was Norwegian. They moved to Paris but she won’t go back. Her Nordic looks match the story. The camera he bought in Germany blinks on a crowd. In black-and-white photographs illustrated by Parisian landscapes, she stands out like a bullet hole; shot at dusk, shot in fog, her blond hair flares, a votive candle among shadowy blobs.

Maybe something will change for her with this handsome soldier, the Americans different from the Germans. An authentic life roots in her fiction. Andrée grew upon a farm. She knew how things planted and tended can grow. Miracle of life—it comes from nothing—sunshine, water, air. A little clock starts ticking. Something quickens. Out of the inert, a germ. A seed stretches inside its coat, one cell becomes an-

other, until the seed splits. A little green thing puts a foot outside to the earth and holds on; its head rises by increments until a sprout stands erect, the remnants of the seed hanging on a leaf’s edge, till the wind blows it off. And then in the heat, the wind, the storm of the storm troopers, how easy it is to die. It is easier to kill something than to kill a memory. Sometimes nothing can kill a memory, not even the doubt of those who maintain it.



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Judge Jane Satterfield's Comments:

A compelling pilgrimage through the mysteries and histories that bloodlines, literature, and kinship bequeath to us, **Swerves** reminds us of the heady work it takes to situate ourselves in time and place. Engaging tough questions about inheritance and nationality, this eloquent and skillful essay brings to readers a clear-sighted vision and the confident measures of a riveting, necessary voice.



Marilyn Moriarty lives in Roanoke, Virginia, where she teaches English literature at Hollins University. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Irvine, and her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Florida. Book publications include **Moses Unchained**, which won the A.W.P. prize in Creative Nonfiction and **Writing Science through Critical Thinking**, a textbook. She has also edited

and introduced a book on postmodern architecture. Her fiction and nonfiction have been published in *The Antioch Review*, *The Antioch Review Blog*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Mondo Greco*, *Nimrod*, *Quarterly West* and other literary journals and anthologies. She has previously won the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for fiction, the University of Utah Novella Prize, and the Peregrine Prize for fiction. Her memoir was a finalist for the 2006 A.W.P. prize in creative nonfiction, and her novel-in-progress, **The Book of Rivers and Cities**, was also a finalist in this year’s Faulkner-Wisdom writing contest.



A HISTORY OF MOTION

By Maurice Carlos Ruffin

Second Place, Essay Category of the 2014 William Faulkner – William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

IT IS A BRIGHT, spring day when Mama brings me to the crack house. This detour is not a first for me nor will it be the last. It is 1986. I'm eight years old.

Along the oak-lined street, late model sedans wait like chained mutts. Mama has just picked me up from school. Instead of bringing me home to the safe hum of our hippopotamus-sized, wood-paneled TV, she sped straight here. We're in the part of town that we call the 7th ward, although decades later its traditional name will return to fashion: Treme. At this time though, I have no name for where I've been left, before a worn, cottage-style house with a rusty exercise bench on the porch. I am, of course, too young to drive and with a very limited sense of things like neighborhoods, cardinal directions, or activities child protective services would frown upon. I divide the world roughly into two hemispheres: places I wish to be and places I wish to escape. And I am on the wrong side of the equator.

Mama, still in her gleaming, white nurse's assistant cap, fled the minivan so quickly that she left the key in the ignition. A wisp of her lingers with me in the cabin, a palimpsest of jasmine, vanilla, and gin. Strangers might think she went in to take someone's vital signs or change a bedpan: a very good person in a very bad place.

She has been in the drug den for quite some time, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, most of my life. Do these windows, soiled by my fingerprints, keep me in the van or the world out? My mind rises like a hot air balloon, and I imagine the city as if seen from the height of a silver-tinged rain cloud, the evergreens like broccoli florets, the whole world a Smurf's village. I don't float for long. The crack house's opaque windows watch me, unimpressed. I search for any sign that Mama is about to return. I see nothing.

I tune the van's radio to **83.3 WRBH**, *Radio for the Blind*. A woman reads from the book review section of the *Times Picayune*. The speakers crinkle each time she turns a page. I am sure that she is a wonderful person, perhaps a doting grandmother, but I can't focus on her words. Her voice is little more than the *wah wah* of a muted trumpet. I just want to go.

Suddenly, two brothers jump into the van; I don't know if they're actually related, but they're black like

me—teenagers about my actual brother's age. One wears a gold chain and striped tank top. The other has a flattop-fade haircut. They're lean and hard muscled, the kind of boys who dash around concrete basketball courts graceful as Olympic ice skaters. Tank Top slides into the driver's seat.

"Hey, her kid back there," he says. The other one looks back. His eyes flash worry, but his concern quickly dissipates when he sees me: a chubby, brown Yoda hunched on the bench seat. I can almost hear the Congress in his brain debating my presence. *He's soft, no threat at all. Probably never thrown a punch. But, Mr. Speaker, what if he wigs out and cries? Then we toss him. Car jacker's resolution number 920 unanimously adopted.*

"Don't sweat him none." Flattop smirks at me. "We good." My family is gregarious. We like people, even people stealing our minivan with me in it. I smile back.

We drive for several minutes, Flattop gesturing and commenting on the corner stores and churches we pass. Eventually, we stop at what could be the very same house we just left, only magically reproduced in a different neighborhood. Flattop gives me a quick look and nods more to himself than anything. In just a moment, they're back, Flattop with a small, paper bag in his lap.

Years later, I'll learn that this adventure is the part of a drug deal called a "rock rental." A dealer procures whatever McGuffin is required to putty the hole in the purchaser's heart: crack, heroin, PCP, marijuana, etc. In return, the dealer receives payment and temporary use of the purchaser's ride. It's a ghetto rental car system, as tidy and efficient a transaction as the trading of banknotes for postage stamps. Only sometimes, a rightfully suspicious police officer might give chase. Invariably, the dealers will run the car into a ditch—for that is the sole purpose of ditches—and escape on foot.

However, this is not my fate today. My chaperones are on the clock, proficient professionals. They bring the van and me back, neither of us ditched or dented. Mama emerges from the house, her nurse's cap slightly askew, a serious look on her face. She could be contemplating a chess move—sacrifice pawn to C4: the Queen's Gambit—but chess is my grandpa's pastime. Mama prefers to play the game where



we pretend that nothing out of the ordinary has transpired. She climbs into the driver's seat and checks her face in the vanity mirror.

"Hey, baby." She pats my leg without looking. "Doing okay?"

Biting my lower lip, I nod, and away we go.

Innocence is a plume of feathers given to all children before we hatch into being. I have not yet molted. Unlike my dad's kin who grew up in the "do not look white people in the eye" South or Mama's family who ran drugs in Harlem, I'm a suburban kid. I spend most of my free time in a small circle of chums riding bikes, playing freeze tag, and joyously skinning my elbows, knees, and other exposed flesh on the world's coarse surfaces. I have much more in common with the children of Mayberry than my child soldier coevals subject to the drug war raging in Detroit, Atlanta, and South Central Los Angeles. I understand as much about Mama's substance abuse as my green-gold parakeet Apollo the Second does about calculus. I also do not understand calculus.

Mama is a petite woman with a big, Kewpie-doll eyes and an uncertain smile. She bears more than a passing resemblance to Diana Ross, but Mama is no singer. To the contrary, when she drinks or ingests a substance (she has enough grace to partake out of sight) she undergoes a transformation that would disturb Mr. Hyde, complete with all the atonal groans of a sick animal. After the metamorphosis, she wanders from bedroom to kitchen to den, grunting under her breath, epithets for the angel desperately trying to hang onto her shoulder.

She sprays air freshener to camouflage the smell of whatever she's had, but there's a neon underscent addicts produce. It's unsavory and raw like boiled sweat. Contrary to her intention, the air freshener becomes a warning signal for me.

She's powerful when she's wasted. The substances stoke violent outbursts, and she is a bull in our porcelain home. Hat racks, lamps, framed paintings, sheet rock, locked doors are all casualties of her rages. My dad, brother, and I are not matadors. However, Dad usually takes the role of rodeo clown, diverting her attention while my brother and I shelter in our rooms.

Mama has no compunctions about driving in her possessed state, a tendency that leads to several encounters with the authorities. Eventually, Dad adopts a sly tactic. Each night, he sneaks out with a set of tools and removes the spark plugs from the cars so that she cannot drive. This does not dissuade Mama from her goal. On some humid nights, she leaves the house in her slip, determined to catch a ride or walk the ten-mile journey into town.

I seek normalcy wherever I can find it. I sleep at friends' houses as often as their mothers will allow. I regress. I revert from a social butterfly performing wheelies on my bike to a bookworm. I plump into obesity, the byproduct of innumerable hours spent

on my belly in the den, reading my way to London, Gotham City, Middle Earth.

However, I'm no latchkey kid, not full-time anyway. On days when she is sober, we are casual and close. I fetch her a soda with headache powder for her frequent aches. For me, she prepares a salad of romaine, boiled eggs, and ladlefuls of Green Goddess dressing. We often sit in her bedroom—she, still in her white, non-slip lace-ups, me, still in my frumpy, white zippered sweater. We snap salty sunflower seeds between our teeth. We discard the shells into a pile on the napkined floor.

I'm a sickly boy, allergic to everything, and prone to catching the flu, sometimes more than once a season. When I shiver on our blueberry-colored couch, I hallucinate that I am on the back of a whale that rescued me at sea and brought me to this place for care. Mama plies me with steaming chicken soup, orange juice, and children's Tylenol, all delivered by her hand to my mouth. If there really are angels in heaven, they are observing Mama from their nebulous perches and jotting notes on their palms.

But some nights I'm alone. I come home to an empty house. Sometimes Dad arrives late from work, and we go in search of her. However, just as often he leaves me behind. Usually, he doesn't find her, and we won't see her until she materializes in the hallway as if she were there the whole time hidden in some velvet fold of reality.

Dad is a car salesman. One of the perks of being the son of a car salesman is that I can see the future. He brings home company brochures. The brochures feature glossy pictures of cars the general public won't see for months, years, or ever. I place myself in these pictures. In my daydreams, my legs are long enough to reach the pedals, and I zip along an elevated shoreline as sail ships shimmer on the horizon.

Shortly after my 16th birthday, my parents call me outside. I know something is up because they're grinning like children. At the bottom edge of the semicircular driveway, adjacent to our neighbor's rickety black mailbox, my future awaits. It's a Volkswagen, but not one of those scarab-shaped Bugs. This car most resembles the DeLorean time machine from **Back to the Future**. Appropriately, it's called a Quantum. The Quantum is lagoon blue. As I run my fingers along the hood, the paint sparkles as if sprinkled with stardust.

Mama stands at the apex of the driveway, one arm folded across her robe. Dad's hands are shoved into his pajama pockets. They both wear cat-that-ate-the-canary smiles, and the little bit of teenage coolness that I've accumulated tinkles away. My cognitive abilities abandon me, and I'm stuck speaking with a three-year old's cadence. "This mine? This mine?"

The Quantum makes me popular at high school, and I am befriended by an array of specimens: basketball players, rappers, sketchers, irregulars. They are like crayons in a carton and on any evening I can choose



what color to shade my world. Regardless of which hue I select, I am pleased. I form a hunting party with one group of dandies and each weekend, shod in our finest military-style boots, we frequent dim auditorium dances in search of our female counterparts. Every weekend, there are late night drag races on Bullard Avenue. I avoid these, fearing a delayed take off will lead to lethal embarrassment. However, alone on the Interstate I stomp the accelerator and don't let up until the car vibrates so wildly it seems it will leave the Earth for orbit. This is the pursuit of happiness Thomas Jefferson was prattling on about in Philadelphia all those centuries ago.

I'm set up on a blind date by a classmate. I pull up to my date's house. She will later admit that I'm the nerdiest boy she ever met, but that my car, which she mistakes as a new BMW, convinces her to give me the benefit of the doubt. None of this matters because I fall in love at first sight. We see each other every day over the next several months. It seems that in the drunken stork's haste to deliver me to my parents' arms he dropped an essential piece of my soul along the way and this girl caught it.

I wake up on a fine, Clinton-era Saturday. My bedroom window open, the room is flooded with a humid south Louisiana outsidersness that suggests shenanigans and making out in spitting distance of placid Lake Pontchartrain. I shower. I eat. The plan is to call on my sweetheart. Maybe go to the arcade by the mall. Maybe play air hockey and don't let her beat me this time. We could catch a movie at the dollar show: **Braveheart, The Usual Suspects, Die Hard with a Vengeance**. It doesn't matter what we do. When I'm on the town with my boo in my car, the sirocco of chaos swirling inside me is hardly noticeable, barely a breeze off the coast of my perception.

I hardly ever think of Mama, her misadventures, her likely death, etc., during these excursions.

My keys aren't on my dresser, not in my tousled covers, not in my faddish jean jacket. I ask my father if he's seen them. He doesn't answer. He frowns. I peer out of the kitchen window at our driveway. His car is there. Mama's car is in its spot, the hood ajar. My Quantum is gone.

Mama reappears one morning days later. When I sense her presence—the hairs on my forearm stand on end as I enter her room—she is almost indistinguishable from the furls of her bed sheets. Her face is bruised, her hair a tangle of thistles. She is semi-conscious, but I've learned by now to differentiate a possible coma from a gorilla-sized hangover.

In the kitchen, I part the blinds. My Quantum is still not there. Did it ever exist? Did I ever leave this place? I've taken her keys, and they are heavy in my hand. By rights, I can go anywhere. I don't ever have to come back.

I set the keys on the kitchen counter and go back to her room with a cup of soda that I've mixed headache powder into. I sit on the edge of the bed.

Mama moans. It's a bright, fall morning. The mixture percolates in my hand. A bubble rises to the surface. The bubble pops. 🌸

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Judge Jane Satterfield's Comments:

In this dark portrait of a mid-eighties New Orleans suburban childhood disrupted by parental substance abuse, healing is a hard-won process. The vivid and resonant prose of *A History in Motion* reveals a writer's fierce ambition to survive and transcend a parent's suffering, as well as heartfelt tenderness and hope despite the disquieting signs surrounding him.

Maurice Carlos Ruffin is a charter member of the



Peauxdunque Writers Alliance, a New Orleans a group formed from the Words & Music Writers Alliance, and a graduate of the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop. He is a winner of the 2014 Iowa Review Fiction Awards Contest, the 2014 So to Speak Journal Prize, and the 2013 Joanna Leake Thesis Prize. His work has been published or is forthcoming in The Iowa Review, Redivider Magazine, Callaloo, the Apalachee Review, and Unfathomable City, a recently published New Orleans atlas edited by Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedecker. Maurice has placed in the competition previously and has read new work at our annual meeting of the Words & Music Writers Alliance. It's never happened before in the history of the William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition, but in three categories of the 2014 competition, including Novel-in-progress, all preliminary round judges selected one entry as the standout, as their first choice. In the case of preliminary readers for Novel-in-progress, all of them sent back words to the effect: "All of the Lights is the clear winner."



OTHER FINALISTS

Other Finalists

- Age Compression*, Anne Webster, Atlanta, GA
- A Trip to the Post Office*, C. W. Cannon, New Orleans, LA
- Desdemona*, Kathleen Nolan Grieshaber, Metairie, LA
- Gathering Around the Table*, Stephanie Bond, Auburn, AL
- Good Fences*, Michael DeVault, Monroe, LA
- Invisible*, Pat Gallant, New York, NY
- Hidden*, Virginia Campbell, New Orleans, LA
- My Father's Sad Story About the War*, Ruth Moon Kempfer, St. Augustine, FL
- Remarry*, Janet Taylor-Perry, Ridgeland, MA
- Remembering Saleem*, Patricia Saik, Bay St. Louis, MS
- Shedding History*, Jacqueline Guidry, Kansas City, MO
- Sincerely*, Mary Bradshaw, Flowood, MS
- Tyrone Power: The Myth Who Dared to Live*, Dr. Henry Hoffman, Gretna, LA
- War Effort*, Lottie Brent Boggan, Jackson, MS
- Without Regret*, Stan Kempton, New Orleans, LA

- Junkanoo*, Karen Eberle, New Orleans, LA
- Mule's Daughter*, Beth Shankle Anderson, Tallahassee, FL
- Shot Heard 'Round the World*, Judy Lewin, St. Louis, MO
- Temporary Milestones*, Lydia Dell, Jackson, MS
- The Decision*, Geraldine Birch, Cornville, AZ
- The Screaming Lady*, Pat Gallant, New York, NY

Short List for Finalists

- Amateurs and Radios*, Mary Rowen, Arlington, MA
- Anatomy of a Wannabe Literary Fiction Writer*, William Coles, Salt Lake City, UT
- Breaking the Law*, Cathy Lepik, Atlanta, GA
- Chinese Laundry*, Pat Gallant, New York, NY
- Hidden*, Virginia Campbell, New Orleans, LA
- Ineloquent*, Nicole Parizeau, Point Richmond, CA
- Lindas of a Certain Age*, Linda Prather, Vienna, VA
- Memoir of a French Flower Child*, Jan Kazmier, New Orleans, LA
- Southern Suttee*, Rosemary Daniell, Savannah, GA
- Salt of the Earth*, Leslie Daniels, Thorold, Ontario, Canada
- The Blue Studio*, Russell Grayson, New Zion, SC
- The Poor Can Become Polarized, Too*, Mary Kuykendall-Weber, Middle Grove, NY
- The Writers Meeting*, Torie Marie Dale, Taylors, Summers, SC
- Yesterday's Tomorrow*, Russell Grayson, New Zion, SC

Semi-finalists

- 911 Bellvue Drive*, Cathy Lepik, Atlanta, GA
- A Pigeon Shoot*, Lottie Brent Bogan, Jackson, MS
- All Good Things*, Lydia Dell, Jackson, MS
- Augustine*, Russell Grayson, New Zion, SC
- Dad's Medicine Cabinet*, Monica Berry, Dallas, TX
- Good Strength*, Petra Perkins, Highland Ranch, CO
- Johnny Foreigner*, Barbara Donnelly Lane, Austin, TX

*The 2014 Prize for Essay was made possible by a grant from the **Mary Freeman Wisdom Foundation**, a private foundation which has long supported the Faulkner Society and its competition, since a member of the Wisdom family, **Adelaide Wisdom Benjamin**, sponsored the first prize for novel the year the competition was founded. Gifts by the foundation have been given in memory of the late William B. Wisdom, who was the world's leading collector of Faulkner documents and memorabilia.*





FLUTTER AND WHIR

By *Claire Dixon*

*The Winner of the 2014 Gold Medal for Poetry
Willam Faulkner–Wisdom Creative Writing
Competition.*

It is responsible to live a serious life. It is responsible to iron white workshirts smoother than a snow-covered plain, to tuck them into tailored pants, anchored to your body with a rich leather belt. It is responsible to edit your smiles on public transit as you edit the length of your fingernails: short, clean, smoothed over. It is responsible to walk hurriedly up the steps, to check your bank balance in the awkward silence of the elevator, to touch a paperweight idly when you'd rather touch the bare underside of your officemate's arm, or yourself.

It is responsible to read the news every day, to keep a running tally of everyone who has recently suffered, to calculate the numbers of those yet to suffer yet more, to check out lists of symptoms upon every discoloration and recurring cramp. It is responsible to admit the world is ending, to boycott everything but the corrupted soil of your tiny back yard, to refuse children, or to at least refuse children TV. To look upon thrushes and hummingbirds and wonder if their wings will still flutter and whirl on the day of your death, a day that you never forget could be this one, or at least the next.

It is responsible to go to the beachfront bar, and sit too close to the person you suspect is interested, to hold a long sip of beer for a rich moment in your mouth before swallowing it down. To press your calf against their calf and go on talking with an unchanged face, scribbling ideas on a wad of napkins about community uplift, awareness campaigns, composting initiatives. It is responsible to get up and dance badly to an exuberantly bad song thundering from speakers so worn, any minute now, they could crack apart and burst. It is responsible to draw the birds you love with pencils, or with your hands, the imitated wings knocking over your glass. And it is responsible to mop up the bulk of the mess yourself, though you are not getting paid to do that, though you may look like a drunken fool. It is responsible to ignore this; it is responsible to understand what you must ignore. 🌸



Claire Dixon was born in Manchester England and grew up in Ontario, Canada. She studied Creative Writing at Montreal's Concordia University, earning a bachelor's degree, then moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to join Louisiana State University's MFA in Creative Writing program. Following graduation from the MFA program, Claire enrolled in LSU's School of Library and Information Science, where she obtained an MLIS degree. Claire has published poetry in journals including *StorySouth*, *The Matrix*, and the *Hobble Creek Review*. She won LSU's William Jay Smith award for poetry in 2007. She has presented academic work at the American Folklore Society's and the Oral History Association's annual meetings, and worked as a librarian before beginning her current position as an analyst on a records management project for a government agency. Claire lives in Baton Rouge with her husband, Rion Wilson, their daughter, Phoebe, and their dogs and cats. Close to completing a full-length poetry manuscript she is "very grateful for the encouragement that this award brings."

Judge Marjory Wentworth's Comments

I admire everything about this poem, starting with the title which is comprised of a combination of words I have never before seen together. I love the sound of the title and the sheer strength of these two verbs. The force and confidence of the first line builds on the sense of strength in the title. If this poem was a story, I would suggest that the details in the first stanza introduce us to our protagonist in ways that anchor us as readers, the same way the "rich leather belt" anchors the "tailored pants." The specific image details are ordinary and universal, but they imply much about the speaker and his sense of responsibility.

Every stanza begins with the phrase "It is responsible," and it is repeated over ten times in the poem. The poem is so beautifully crafted and lyrical that the repetition never seems redundant and is part of the framework that enables the poem to soar.

The second stanza deals with the metaphysical issues of simply trying to live in the world in a responsible way and arrives at the gorgeous image of the "flutter and whir" of thrushes and hummingbirds on the imagined day of the speaker's death.

The third stanza is cinematic in detail and the scene at the bar pulls the personal and the social/political aspects of the speaker together in ways we can all relate to. The last image of mopping up the spilled beer because it's the right thing to do, implies, that at the very least, we must be responsible for our own behavior in all its manifestations.



FOR JOHN PARKER

By Daniel Dwyer

*The First Runner-up, Poetry Category
2014 William Faulkner - William Wisdom Creative
Writing Competition*

Do you still taste
the steel of the gun
the bite of lead
and the iron of your blood
as you wash it all down
with the aluminum of
your Natural Light?
Do you regret or rejoice
the extension of your life lived
out in the extension of the garage
where you previously performed
your .38 lobotomy?
Where, as all feeling flowed out
the hole in your palate
and your eyes filled with blood,
did you find the wherewithal
to stand at your mothers call?
Were you worth all
the extra effort begged
from the doctors who were ready
to just make the death call?
Why, will we never know why?
Your tongue was the only thing
carried to the sky. 🌸



*The 2014 Prize for Best Poem was made possible by a gift from **David Speights**, who annually underwrites the prize in memory of his late wife, **Marti Speights**, who was a member of the Faulkner Society's Advisory Council and tireless volunteer for the Society and its projects.*



Daniel Dwyer was born and raised in New Orleans, LA. After Hurricane Katrina he relocated to St. Louis, Missouri for several years before returning to Louisiana to get his B.A. in creative writing at Southeastern Louisiana University. While at Southeastern, Daniel studied under influential writers such as Dr. Richard Louth, Bev Marshall, and Dr. Jack Bedell. Currently, Daniel has once again moved to St. Louis with his wife Terri, who teaches writing at Washington University. Daniel's poetry comes from a keen observation and love for the infinite facets that make up the human experience. Daniel developed his point of view in practice on numerous writing marathons across Louisiana stage by the National Writing Project. Daniel's poetry celebrates "the everyday events that are the foundation for the towering mysteries of life." He brings these events, thoughts, and images to the page as if speaking to an old friend who asks, "Anything new or interesting?"

Judge Marjory Wentworth's Comments

What a brave poem, so honest and direct. No matter what the circumstances, there is always anger when a loved one attempts suicide.

One is left with such intense conflicting emotions, which are captured perfectly in the tone of this poem. The anger and sarcasm are painfully true to the experience. I admire the poem for its conciseness: the short lines, without a word to spare. Each line reveals a particular detail about John Parker and the method he used in his suicide attempt and the subsequent rescue attempt, until the devastating line toward the end: "Why, we will never know why?"

But what makes this poem soar is the final couplet: "Your tongue was the only thing/carried to the sky." It is the perfect enduring image—at once horrific yet soaring. It startled and surprised me in the best possible way.



✌ flying ✌

By Constance Boyle

*The Second Runner-up for the
2014 William Faulkner - William Wisdom
Creative Writing Competition prize for Poetry.*

1) *making flight or passing through the air*

2) *floating, fluttering, waving, hanging or moving freely in the air (flying banners, flying hair)*

3) *moving swiftly, which she was, by her own volition, she wanted to see everything there was to see*

Visiting her daughters, young women, one in class, the other with friends. The mother has an afternoon. She loves flying to this city, infrequent, she lives across the country. The night before, the three women dined at an Upper East Side restaurant, later, they sipped mojitos with lots of mint on the 12th floor of her hotel. Windowed on three sides, the lovely bar ran the length of the hotel. Overlooking the 59th Street Bridge, bridge, lit with lights.

white

absence of filled with
berries roses
invited death
helicopters circles
unfulfilled unfulfilled
textured paper moonlight walks

~~~

She strolls rose gardens, tight blooms barely open, petals soft, centers of rich perfume. Loves the coast, waves breaking hard near her body as she sits on the wet shore. Reads Neruda late at night, awake past midnight.

Dark coffee from Kenya delights her, especially in intriguing cities, local coffee shops. And philosophizing. Sipping Merlot infused with cherries. She likes to pass through revolving doors. Dark chocolate undoes her. *Fill the tub with bitter chocolate. More than a few almonds.* She loves and dislikes flying. Take-offs, landings, fast, hard, out-of-control. Sound of wheels, incline/angle of departure. Then, the let-down. Her return.

white

cumulous clouds strings, sails  
parachute silk  
lifeghosted  
happiness chalk  
wedding gown veiled song  
washed fences epiphany  
in terror no trespassing

A downpour of flakes fall like miniature parasols. Heavy snow in Manhattan. Late January. She walks blocks, 30, 40, past two-story brownstones with black iron fences. Despite the approach of evening, snow lightens everything, she is flying into white. Doorways darken, but she's warm, in love with world. Alone but not alone. Light suspends time. 🌸



**Constance E. Boyle** was born in Jersey City, NJ, grew up in North Bergen and South Plainfield, and moved to Colorado to attend the University of Denver (BA). She earned an MFA from Goddard in 1994. Her chapbook **Double Exposure** placed first in the 2005 Plan B Press competition. Her poems have appeared in literary journals including *So to Speak*, *poemmemoirstory*, *Sliver of Stone*, *Green Fuse*, and *The Human Touch*. Connie has 11 poems in an anthology, **la forza di vita caffeinated poems**, ed. by Bill Roberts and Karen Douglass, 2011. Her poem *dance 101* won the 2012 Colorado Authors Poetry Award. She was a physician assistant for many years (pediatric and adolescent medicine), coordinating the Lincoln School-Based Health Center her last years. While there, she facilitated an improv theater group. Connie is an Associate Clinical Professor Emeritus at University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Currently, she writes poetry and fiction, teaches writing workshops, and edits, part-time.

Since being named Runner-up in the Faulkner - Wisdom Competition, Ms. Boyle's poem which placed, *Flying*, has been acquired for publication by *So To Speak For That Publications* Fall, 2014 edition.

## Judge Marjory Wentworth's Comments:

*I admire the structure of this poem so much that I immediately wrote it down in my journal and plan to use it as the basis for something of my own and/or a creative writing exercise with my students. The poem is written in three distinct sections; each one begins with a word and its definition, which is paired with a short prose poem describing a moment in a particular woman's life. But the poem is so much more than that. The definitions are unique poems, incorporating breath spaces and numbers like you'd see in a dictionary definition, depending on the poem, suggesting the use of erasure. The definitions are litanies on the words white and flying, and they serve to expand our ideas about each word in a meditative way. These expansive poems are dramatically juxtaposed with the intense details of the prose sections, yielding something entirely new and unexpected. My only suggestion is to delete the last two sentences, but this is quite minor given the sweep of this dazzling poem.*





# OTHER FINALISTS

**Other Finalists:**

*Aftermath – A Soldier’s Story In Three Parts*, Stan Kempton, New Orleans, LA  
*Bummer*, Nettie Parker Bauman, West Hartford, CT  
*Carpe Diem*, M. L. Dunser, Columbia, MS  
*Changing Lines*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA  
*Deadly Dandelion Dreams*, Helen Archeris, Newark, NJ  
*Electric Mail*, Julie E. Bloemeke, Alpharetta, GA  
*First Crush*, Jacob Appel, New York, NY  
*On Your Ninety-Second Birthday*, Count Backward by Ones, Belinda Straight,  
*Grief*, Tina Hayes, Washington, DC  
*Imagined Chaos*, Jennifer Moffett, Ocean Springs, MS  
*L’Ombre De L’Avenir*, Stephen Thomas Roberts, Lagrangeville, NY  
*Lost Love Lounge*, Cassie Pruyn, New Orleans, LA  
*My Inner Child*, Leslie Daniels, Thorold, Ontario, Canada  
*Of Cork and Feathers*, Melinda Palacio, Santa Barbara, CA  
*Presence*, James Bourey, Dover, DE  
*Returning to that Mineral State*, Nancy Dafoe, Homer, NY  
*Saturday Stops*, J. Ed Marston, Chatanooga, TN  
*Sleep on a Clothesline*, Faith Garbin, Ocean Springs, MS  
*The Catch*, Mary Louise Nix, Mandeville, LA  
*The Homeless Trilogy*, Pat Gallant and Paul Saluk, New York, NY  
*The Kiss*, Petra Perkins, Highlands Ranch, CO  
*Thunder on the Edge of Silence*, Edward Greer, New York, NY  
*Lo Que Queda/What Remains*, Maria Beruvides & Maria O’Connell, Lubbock, TX

**Short List for Finalists**

*Acorn Caps as Metaphor*, Susan Terris, San Francisco, CA  
*Alive, Alive O*, Marylee McCarthy, Venice, CA  
*April Shower*, Pat Gallant, New York, NY  
*Aunt Jemima*, Candace Wiley, York, SC  
*Being Known*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA  
*Central Time*, Ralph Adamo, New Orleans, LA  
*Coping with Humans*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA  
*Dancehall Rendezvous!*, Andrew Gregory Krzak, Chicago, IL  
*Dancing on the Brink*, Mark Gaffney, Chiloquin, OR  
*Flash*, James Bourey, Dover, DE  
*Grackles*, Colwell Snell, Salt Lake City, UT  
*Hold That Thought*, Colwell Snell, Salt Lake City, UT  
*Just Before the War in Europe*, Stephen Thomas Roberts, Lagrangeville, NY  
*Liminal Women*, M’Bilia Meekers, New Orleans, LA

*Life Sentence*, Jacqueline Summers, Narberth, PA  
*Mother’s Day*, Rebecca Mitchell-Dhillon, Richmond, Surrey, UK  
*Not Knowing Whether Echoes Go or Come*, Pat Barone, Fridley, MN  
*On the Wings of a Trumpet*, Ed Greer, New York, NY  
*Orient Obscured*, Laura Hausman, New York, NY  
*Perfection*, Colwell Snell, Salt Lake City, UT  
*Reverberation*, Nancy Dafoe, Homer, NY  
*Soul Mates Inverted Crown*, Manfred Pollard, New Orleans, LA  
*The Camp*, Nettie Parker Bauman, West Hartford, CT  
*The Disappearing Mother*, Jacqueline Summers, Narberth, PA  
*The Soul Is An Albino Alligator*, Amy Trussell, Santa Rosa, CA  
*Travelers*, Yvonne Ellingson, Mill Valley, CA  
*Veteran*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA

**Semi-Finalists**

*A Heidelberg Home*, Andrew H. Oerke, Miami, FL  
*A New Day*, Duane DeRadd, El Prado, NM  
*Bayou Ghost Trees*, Amy Pence, Carrollton, GA  
*Better Living Through Technology*, Stephen Thomas Roberts, Lagrangeville, NY  
*By Chance*, Pat Gallant, New York, NY  
*Chuck Brown : Marvin Gaye :: What’s Going On : the Soul*, Emanuelle Smith, Cheverly, MD  
*Communion with America in the Smoky Mountains*, Mary Louise Nix, Mandeville, LA  
*End and Begin*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA  
*Final Lesson*, Craig Black, Darrow, LA  
*Flight 962 to Denver*, Colwell Snell, Salt Lake City, UT  
*He said, She said*, Joan Russell Gilkes  
*Holy Work*, James Bourey, Dover, DE  
*If you live near a river by the sea*, Tori Marie Dale, Taylors, SC  
*In Physics, It’s Friction*, Beth Hall Thrasher, Athens, GA  
*I See Paradise*, Maxell Schrage, Tucson, AZ  
*Oblations*, Stephen Thomas Roberts, Lagrangeville, NY  
*Outside the Law: 1966*, V. R. Waters, Gulf Breeze, FL  
*Prologue to Act 4 Scene 3 from Othello*, Salma Abdulkader, San Jose, CA  
*Racing on a Carousel*, Edward Greer, New York, NY  
*The House*, Reem Hijjawi, Long Beach, CA  
*Untitled (Haiku)*, Jacqueline Summers, Narberth, PA  
*Wine Tasting*, James Bourey, Dover, DE  
*Writers Lament*, Tina Hayes, Washington, DC  
*Younger Woman with Older Man*, Nancy Dafoe, Homer, NY



# PHASES

By Adia Hessler

## *The Winner of the 2014 Gold Medal for Short Story by a High School Student.*

IT FIRST HIT you how bad it was when you went into the kitchen one day and found that the milk had spoiled two weeks ago. Your mom had been staying out later and later for the past few nights, but you didn't think much of it at first. You planned on telling her when she got home that she needed to go to the grocery store because there wasn't a lot of food left and the milk was spoiled. But she didn't come home that night. You were used to her long hours at the office, but she never stayed out this late before. So you called her cell phone and when she didn't answer you called her work phone. Then you texted both phones, but an hour later when she still hadn't responded you called each phone three times. You considered calling the police, but you knew she'd have an un-deserved bitch fit if you did. So you took your comforter and fell asleep on the sofa. The next morning you woke to an empty house. You went for your phone to call your mom, but you noticed a text from her saying to get ready for school; she would be back in time to bring you; she had just run to the grocery store. You were satisfied with this, that she wasn't deserting you completely, but when she pulled up in front of the house twenty minutes late and yelled for you to get in, you noticed her uncombed hair and pajamas and felt stupid for believing her. You never got the chance to tell her about the milk. Instead you and your mom began communicating with sticky notes left on the fridge. It started out with you making a shopping list for her, but ended with her just leaving money and a spare key on the counter.

You remember the first and, formerly, last time you ever stayed here. Your mom wanted to visit her brother and so the two of you were staying for a week. You wouldn't get out the car when she hopped out to say hi to your cousins, who were scattered on the porch. You hated the thought of being here. It made your palms sweat and you didn't even notice when you bit down so hard blood drew from the insides of your cheek. Your mom signaled for you to get out the car, but you didn't move. As your cousins took you and your mom's bags from the trunk, it set in that you would actually have to stay here. Tears started involuntarily gathering at the outer corners of your eyes. Your mom started walking toward the car to coax you out. But when she opened the door, you turned away and wouldn't speak to her.

You hate it here, with this damp ass air and hick ass people. You don't understand why you have to come here. You haven't even seen your uncle since you were a kid. And this time it's just you. Your mom is throwing you off on anybody just to get some time away from you and with

her on-the-DL-boyfriend. Somehow, she magically got a conscience about leaving you home alone all the time. You think it's because there was a break-in down the street, but it's no news that you live in a terrible neighborhood. Still, you'd rather be there alone every night than here.

You swear you don't care that she leaves like this all the time. That it doesn't bother you and you like you're independence. But I know that how sad you really are. She, your mom, wasn't always so fleeting. So in the beginning, when her late nights first started, you weren't so reserved with your feelings. You would even write out letters about how neglected you felt that you would plan to leave on her pillow in case she came home that night after you were asleep. But your mom's stubbornness was nothing unfamiliar to you and so you always lost your nerve. After you gave up trying to talk it out with her, you decided to just feel sorry for yourself. You would lie down and think about how much you and your mom used to do together until you could bring yourself to tears and cry yourself to sleep.

You swear no one but you can really understand how you're feeling. You walk out to the porch and see Tracy, your only cousin you actually spoke to more than once during your childhood. You try explaining to her that you understand your mom needs a life, but you need a mom

You tell her that it doesn't matter how old you are because you still don't feel safe alone at night. You explain to her everything you find wrong with your mom's behavior. And you give her reasons as to why you have every right to feel this way. And when you are done talking you look at her for an answer of any kind. You'd rather she agree with you and not say that you're being needy or selfish because you tell yourself that enough, but at this point you'd accept any answer. You look at your cousin, prepared for any opinion she gives you. She places a hand on her jutted out hip, looks you dead in the eye, and says, "I don't know what to tell you, cousin."

Whenever she is home, she's never in a good mood. This makes you wish that she would leave and so you edge on an argument until gives up on you and goes to her boyfriend's house.

You don't think you would hate him as much if you'd actually met him. And you don't think that it should be up to your mom to introduce him to you. Any man that thinks he can date your mom should be man enough to meet her kid.

You and your cousin, Toddy, go fishing in one of your



uncle's many fishing boats. Toddy is much older and doesn't talk to you much. You don't take it personally. No one ever feels welcome around Toddy, just tolerated. You hear a motor boat somewhere near and look over to Toddy. There's a grin on his face, which the reason for becomes apparent when that same motorboat pulls up next to yours. It's some of Toddy's friends, inviting him out to the city. "Seriously? The city?" Toddy says. This is the first time you've ever seen him excited about anything. He turns to you. "You know how to get back by yourself, dontcha Lil Bit?" He asks and hops into their boat, driving off before you can tell him you have no idea how to get back.

It never occurred to you how much you would actually miss her being around. You used to beg her for more freedom. Once, you even wrote up an outline on why you should be able to go out more. Now you just want her back.

You're sitting there in that damned boat, trying to find a cousin or anyone in that big ass muddy swamp. You yell out for someone, for anyone at all, but all you end up doing is scaring away some herons in a tree nearby. You cut your hand trying to open a can of sardines Toddy left behind and even when blood starts to run heavy down your arm, it still isn't thicker than the humidity.

Luckily one of your uncle's friend found you before anything else did. Toddy got chewed out by your uncle when he got back. You doubt he'll be talking to you ever again.

Lately you've found yourself planning out your future. You picked out your possible colleges, found a potential car and apartment, and even found a dog that won't shed all over your 800 thread count, Egyptian-cotton comforter.

Even with her inattention and all day and night excursions, it's not always bad blood between the two of you. Sometimes you can sit down, watching TV together, and talk over a bowl of ice cream, but these don't last long enough.

Your mom said she would be back in three weeks, but so far it's been almost five. You keep asking your cousin when she's coming back, but he says he hasn't heard a word from her. You decide to ride out to the town with your cousin so that you can call your mom. The closest town is two hours away, but even when you get there the signal is too weak to make a call. So you and your cousin drive another hour in his godforsaken truck. Finally you get bars so you instruct him to pull over. You take out the giant phone your cousin lent you since your phone was dead and their electricity never stayed on long enough for you to charge it. You dial up your mom's number, which you have memorized by heart. There is a static ring and then you hear a click. "Hello?" you say. You hear a fuzzy voice on the other end. "We're sorry. The number you have dialed is not in service. If you feel you have reached this recording in error, please check the area code and number you dialed and try again."

You hate how sticky everything is here and you hate that all your baths are room temperature. You hate how many people there are in this house and you hate that there's nothing to do, but fish. You hate that you have to share a room with Tracy and Rosie and you hate that the electricity never stays on for longer than an hour. You hate that the

closest store is two hours away and you hate that no one but you has a problem with that. But on top of all these things you hate so much, you decide you hate your mom the most for abandoning you in this godforsaken place.

While fishing with your cousin the other day, you started to daydream. It was more of a memory. It was some day in summer when you and your mom rented one of the paddleboats in City Park. You got it for an hour and so you and your mom went off farther into the lake than you usually did. The water got more brackish as you went on and every log you saw looked like an alligator. You tried to find excuses to turn around, rather than admit you were afraid. But your mom found solutions to each one and so finally you just told her. She laughed like you expected and asked if you knew how to wrestle an alligator. You said no and so she told you how.

You don't believe your mom would leave you here and you start to worry that maybe she's dead or in the hospital like you used to when she first started not coming home. You ask your cousin if he thinks something happened to her, but he's younger and doesn't really care much for worrying. "Just let her alone. Let her have some fun," he advises you and runs off after the other children.

You've decided that when your mom comes back for you, you'll tell her that you don't want to go anywhere with her. You'll say it exactly like that because, see, you've done the math. You've put a two-month estimate on your mom. When she comes for you in two months, that'll mean you only have three years and five months until your eighteenth birthday. Since you'd rather die than go to any of the schools here, that'll give you enough time to get a job working the nets for one of your cousin's friends. You'll stop working after there's only eight months left until your eighteenth birthday. Then, with the money you've saved up from working, you'll buy yourself some books and homeschool yourself on everything you would've missed out on. Then you'll go to the closest library you can find and use the computer to apply for every scholarship and loan and grant you're eligible for. And then you'll leave this godforsaken place on the next train out (no trains except cargo ones come anywhere near here so the train is only for emphasis, unless Toddy teaches you how to hop one). Anyways, after you're richer than your mom ever was, you'll hire somebody to search her out and bring her to your mansion where she'll realize how stupid she was for ever having abandoned you in the first place. You go inside and dig a small, smudged mirror from under your uncle's bed. You look into it and try to focus on your pupils. You take a deep breath and began practicing how you'll tell your mom you're not leaving with her. In the middle of a voice change, the thought hits you that she'll be more pissed about having wasted gas to come get you than you not leaving with her. You throw the mirror onto the floor and it shatters. You run back outside before anyone can notice you left.

You've decided to sleep in late today and miss the family trip to visit the neighbors. It's been seven weeks since your mom dropped you off here and, despite her two-month estimate, you've given up on her ever coming back for you. Last night you went into the living room. Your uncle was





sitting on the sofa, cleaning one of his guns. He didn't have a lamp on. The moonlight pooled in so thick through the screen door he didn't need one. A long time ago, when your uncle first moved out here, he did something to the trees that made them stop growing back permanently for about a twenty foot radius all around the house and so when the moonlight shined down, it filled like a pool around the house since there was nowhere else to go. Your uncle's head snapped up when he heard your footstep on a creaky floorboard. "Don't you know not to sneak up on a man with a gun?" he asked, chuckling at his own jokes as he always did. When you didn't laugh he got quiet. "Feel like talking, Lil Bit?" he asked. He goes quiet and you're startled to notice the hum of crickets that bothered you so much when you first got here.

"You know, at night, I don't even notice the crickets anymore," you say.

"Yeah, that happens after you been here a while..." Your uncle trails off, realizing your point. Then he doesn't say anything and neither do you and the both of you sit there listening to the hum of the crickets fade.

You're sitting on the old, splintering dock with some of your cousins. A few of them have fishing poles, but you weren't up to it today. You're sick of fish. And you're sick of crawfish. And you're sick of crabs and anything else that

Candice is two years older than you, so when she invites you to ride you the town with her to pick up a few things you're surprised. But you hastily accept. Candice makes the trips to the town whenever your uncle needs something from the market. Usually Candice makes her trips with her twin sister, Paige, but you think they've gotten into a fight about something. Candice lets you chose the radio station in the car. Only one of them plays clear enough to hear the song and so you put that one on. You don't recognize the song, but it sounds like every other sad song you've heard out here. You roll down the window and lean your head out. The wind is warm, but it's refreshing against your face. Candice turns on the windshield waterworks and some of it splashes on your cheeks. You laugh or maybe you cry, but at least you're doing something.

It is the day after you and Candice went to the store and so you wake up early because you know Tanya is going to be making cinnamon buns for breakfast. Your mouth waters at the thought of them and you laugh at your eagerness. You hop out the bed and run outside, where you imagine everyone will be. But you are halted in the living room. All the family is there and you think that they've eaten the cinnamon buns without you. You feel disappointment coming over you when you notice the solemnness on everyone's face. Your younger cousins look at you sadly whereas some of the older ones look at you pitifully, even Toddy who you figured at this point could care less about you. When you meet his eyes he jerks his head away, but you follow his expression to the figure in the door. It's your mom. She smiles at you, but you just stand there. You notice her hair is a little longer, and her skin looks tan. She's wearing eye make-up, you notice. You've never seen her wear anything but lipstick before. She stops smiling and you wonder if it's because she's noticed anything different about you. You have gotten taller and maybe your skin is a little darker. Your mom puts down her bags and brushed her palms against a dress you don't recognize. It looks expensive and you immediately feel angry because you know she can't afford it; it must be from her boyfriend. The thought of him causes a heat in your chest and you are about to turn away from her and go back to bed when she crouches down in her new heels and says, "Aren't you gonna give me a hug?" Every resentment you had vanishes, and you run to her, nearly knocking her over. You start to cry and laugh, causing you to hiccup. She laughs, confused, at your tears, but all you say is, "Take off those stupid shoes and let's go home." 🌸



*The 2014 Prize for Best Short Story by a High School Student was made possible by **Nancy Moss**, shown here with her late husband, businessman and philanthropist **Hartwig Moss, IV**. The prize was given by Nancy and her children in memory of Hartwig, one of the founding patrons of the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society.*

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doesn't have to be mass-produced in a factory with added hormones and preservatives.



### Judge George Bishop Jr.'s Comments:

*Phases* immediately jumped out as being an accomplished and satisfying example of what a good story should be. By that I mean an interesting conflict is set up right away, the details are well observed and original, and the voice sounds real and convincing, almost breathless in its urgency to tell what happened. The plot of *Phases* is simple enough: a young adult named Lil' Bit, the "you" of the story, is sent away from the city by his or her mother to live with an uncle in the country. Lil' Bit hates life in the country—hates the "damp ass air and hick ass people." She (or he: Lil' Bit's gender isn't clear) both misses his/her mother and resents her for abandoning him/her. At the end, Lil' Bit is reunited with his/her mother. The telling of the story is clear and artfully managed—which might sound easy enough to do, but as writers we know how very difficult it is to put together words and sentences so that they sound pleasing and make good sense. Moreover, the story feels economical and purposeful. It accomplishes this through well-focused paragraphs, each one detailing some observation or event. The effect is as if the author is laying out a series of photographs that, taken together, tell an entertaining, compelling narrative of a young person caught between a wish for independence and a yearning for home.



*Adia Heisser is a Level IV student in the Creative Writing Program at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. In her free time she enjoys reading and writing. Some of her favorite books are *Ada* by Vladimir Nabokov, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, and *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner. Aida enjoys the freedom writing gives her to explore the world through*

*different perspectives. "Writing provides a personal connection between writer and reader and I am honored that the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society has given me the opportunity to build that connection with a larger audience."*

## RECYCLING ROMANCE... ...IS GREEN

There is no better way to conserve the resources of the planet than to reuse the houses, furnishings, and treasures of yesteryear instead of opting for everything new. Houses of other centuries were built to last, as the residences of New Orleans and Charleston, for instance, bear witness. Their furnishings were intended to be handed down and reused, generation after generation, with these old dwellings and antiques acquiring a lovely patina that can not be duplicated overnight. Our ancestors understood the wisdom of building with the environment in mind, and their old ways are now the best new ways. Let us help you recycle the romance of the past for a glorious and responsible future.

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Rosemary James, Owner



*Bedroom created for a very good writer with romantic taste, using antique furnishings.*





# FLY AWAY

By Kimberly Pollard

## Judge George Bishop Jr.'s Comments:

This is a delightfully weird story. What could easily be a silly or just plain bizarre premise, is immediately complicated by details of the couple's prior relationship. At the end, the mystery of how Ava turned into a fly, or even if she really did turn into a fly, is left unsolved. I liked this story especially for the details of the fly's behavior and the couple's prior relationship; whether invented or real, both seemed utterly believable.

## *The 2014 First Runner-Up for Short Story by a High School Student.*

I woke up every day of that month and wished I were dead. I'd look at the fly sitting on the pillow next to my head, and excuse myself to the bathroom so Ava the Fly couldn't hear me while I went over the situation. She used to be my wife, I used to be her wife, and maybe I am still her wife, even now; I just don't know anymore. She turned into a fly, after I yelled at her. Because she got her period. We didn't have enough money to try again. She was there to blame. I saw her. Heard her bones breaking and bending, skin hardening and turning colors, wings sprouting from her otherwise clean back. I could barely move the first day, because I couldn't accept that the fly was her; I just laid on our bed and yelled for her, I wore her pajamas and swatted the fly away. Like I had done with her. Before. On her second day as a fly, she sat with me on our bed as I dialed her friends, boss, and mother. No, sorry, Ava can't come in today, yeah, sorry, no, you don't have to come over, I can take care of her, thank you. Loud, static voices thanked me and asked if I were sure. Voices that wanted to speak to her, me telling them no. Too sick to speak. When the phone calls were done, I picked her up on my index finger and raised her to eyelevel, told her that her wings looked flimsy, and I was worried. She danced in the air, supporting her entire roundish body with the lacy transparency attached to her back. She sat back down on my finger and looked up at me. I told her to stay in our room, I went in the kitchen, took down all the flypaper.

There are hundreds of different types of flies, and they all have different life expectancies. Later on the second day, I added up the numbers, and cut out the impossibles (we had passed the mayfly mark) and the unlikelies (she wasn't a horsefly or damselfly) and figured out that we had about twenty-five days together. I circled twenty-five three times on the receipt paper I'd written the math on. When I read it, in my own handwriting, in bright baby blue ink that Ava loved to scribble with so much, I coughed. The pen fell. The first thing I wanted to do was kiss her, and tell her that everything would be alright, because four years ago, when her cat died, that's what I told her, and things were, after a while. My chest hurt. Ava the Fly sat somewhere next to the computer and I

focused: Do not cry. I didn't want her to see me sad. I cried when I yelled at her. Before. I wasn't yelling at her now. I didn't cry until that night. Couldn't let her hear.

Ava's mom, Rebecca, called three times after I called her the first day, she and Ava talked to each other at least once a week, sometimes more, when Ava was... Rebecca's voice was so quiet, and it shivered when I told her that Ava was away for work. "Wasn't she sick?" I told her that she was still feeling low, but had to work. She tried to make small talk after that, oh Amelie how have you been, I told her I was fine and I didn't ask how she was because I knew she was lonely without Ava and I remembered the way the two of them held on to each other when Ava and I had to leave the state and I remembered the nights when Ava found it absolutely necessary to be on the phone with her mother the entire night even when she had to get up early in the morning for work and I remembered all the times Rebecca told Ava she was "so worried" and I remembered Ava's eyebrows touching each other, the first Thanksgiving I spent with her family, because she didn't know I could see her, she thought I was inside, I just wanted to bring her a drink, and she was defending me but she didn't want to say that Rebecca was wrong. No, Amelie's just nervous in big groups of people, she's not always like that, Mom, I promise, you worry too much. I felt really sick, and I looked at Ava the Fly's little body on the edge of the stove, circling a strawberry I left out for her, and then told Rebecca that I was tired. She said she had to ask me something, I told her to go on, because I didn't want Ava the Fly to think I was getting hostile with her, last time I snapped Ava got upset, and she slept on the couch. She landed on the strawberry and stabbed her face into its flesh, sending three of the little charcoal seeds flooding down the edge. Rebecca was quiet on the other line but I could hear her doing Ava's breathing exercises, three deep inhales, then three slow exhales. She asked me what I've been up to, since Ava left for Utah. I looked at Ava the Fly again, standing in the berry's maroon blood and licking it off her legs. Rebecca then asked, very slowly, taking smooth breaths every other word or so, "I've been talking about this with Ava, of course, she's explained the process,





it's been what?" She paused, and lowered her voice to almost a whisper. "Almost two weeks?" I was silent. "Is Ava okay?" Her voice cracked. I assured her, Ava was fine. I told Rebecca that we had already started looking into adoption, because if we went through certain agencies it would be a little cheaper than going through the other process again, it would still take a couple of years or so to save up. Three deep breaths in, three slow breaths out. I swallowed. Rebecca said something about luck, and something about giving Ava love from her. I hung up. I left the phone off the hook because I was afraid to listen to the woman's voice any longer. I picked up the strawberry that Ava was perched on, and brought her into the living room. I told her I loved her and that I was sorry she couldn't talk to Rebecca; I knew she would have wanted to. I put the strawberry on a paper towel on the coffee table in the living room so I could watch her and still be away from the phone.

I just kicked the back of my desk. My toe hurts.

We moved to be closer to the museum about six months before Ava turned into a fly, because as director of external affairs, Ava had to be as close as possible. In our half of the duplex, two bedrooms, one full bath and one half, we picked out the paint swatches for the room that could've been the baby's nursery, *Sigh Blue* and *Homestead Resort Antique Lace* yellow, before we even scheduled the first appointment with her doctor. She wanted *Champagne Glee* pink for one of the walls too, but I convinced her we only needed two colors. I didn't like *Champagne Glee*, I thought it was too rosy and if we were going to put the burgundy crib we'd seen at Baby's "R" Us when we went with our friends Jackie and Katelyn less than a year earlier in that room, we couldn't have any rose. If Ava had gotten pregnant and it had been a boy, we'd have named him Warren. If it were a girl, we'd name her River... Her doctor's nurse called on the thirteenth day, to let me know that Ava had missed her follow-up. I told the nurse she was at work, they'd have to call back in a few days, because Ava was actually away from home, in Utah, doing some emergency museum thing. Sorry. Thank you for calling. I put the cream phone on its hook and watched Ava's little fly body flutter around, circling the puddle of Sprite I'd dropped onto the kitchen table.

On the fifteenth day, I left one of those old plastic bug-holders people buy their children that I found in the attic out on my computer desk, with a little bit of *Cool Whip* and strawberry preserve inside, because on our first anniversary seven years ago we ate strawberries and whipped cream, and she loved it. She flew into the container, I apologized, but I think the sound got lost in the wind tunnel created by me closing the lid; she seemed so angry at me after that, but I wanted her to understand, I couldn't take a chance on her flying away from me while we were out, I was going to lose her soon enough. I went to put on her jacket, because she always let me wear it when it

was cold, but it wasn't on the hook like it always was. I almost bought her a ticket at the booth in front of the zoo. We had a membership; we didn't use it enough. Ava loved the zoo. She also loved parks, dogs, ceiling fans, hand warmers, memory boxes, cheap bottles of water, trinkets at thrift stores that belonged to very, very sad people before they belonged to her, extension cords, those weird pet shops that sell horse feed in the middle of the city... The first things I showed her, on this day out, were the elephants. I chose them first mostly because they were the animals closest to the entrance. I saw so many flies around their tails. I was so scared one of them was actually her; I had to keep checking the box, even as I held it up.

The whipped cream had melted into the preserve at that point. I was worried she was sad. But what if there was a big wind? Or, some sudden rain? What if another fly hit her, hurt her, killed her? I couldn't let that happen, I had to protect her. I held her up the entire trip, so she could see everything. We stayed longest by the sea lion tank. Ava loved the sea lion shows. I had a snowball. Strawberry. I dripped some of the reddish purplish syrup into the container, and watched her flutter to it, lick it, and climb to the side of the container, towards me, and almost ask "More?" "More?" I gave her an entire straw full of the juice and watched her land in it, lick it off her legs, and repeat for what felt like hours, while sea lions squawked and splashed in the tank, doing some flip and staring at cold metal buckets of dead fish while crowds clap and think they're doing it for them. And that I didn't understand. All the people really thought that the sea lions had nothing better to do than sit in a tank and do a flip for a cold dead fish. So many of them acted as though the sea lion liked doing this, that they spent their whole lives waiting in the callback tank of Sea World and ended up here, at this Oregon zoo, performing for snotty kids, flipping through a hoop for a small dead fish. I grabbed the handle to the container after the show, and carried Ava the Fly to the big cats. First, I tried to hold her up so she could see the lion exhibit, but they were so far away, I'm not sure if she could see them. The jaguar's slept; there were more flies in their exhibit. I got very worried about Ava the Fly in that moment. Because I suddenly remembered that flies are attracted to meat. I left the zoo. In the car, I told Ava the Fly I loved her three times.

I heard a cat meow outside.

Then I went back to our house, and made baked chicken for me, and cut up chunks of the raw stuff. I put one chunk in the container, the rest in a Ziploc and the fridge. I opened the container after checking to make sure that every door was sealed and every window was locked. We ate dinner together, I think. Only tiny bits of her pinkish brownish raw chicken were gone when I finished, so I picked up the cube and put it in its own Ziploc and put it in the fridge.

Most of the days passed like that. I'd take her some place after making sure she had some sort of snack in



her container and then I'd get too scared of her getting out, so I'd run home, lock all the doors and windows, and let her out. Then I would take a shower, then go to sleep. I went to sleep with my hair wet almost every day that Ava was a fly. She loved it when I woke up with a cow lick, or something, and I just hoped that, if she turned back into a human, if she woke up next to me, with my hair out of control, it would make her smile. I would have given anything to see her smile one more time. Or even to see her angry. To see her brown eyes show any sort of emotion instead of the red bubbles on top of her head that said nothing to me.

By day twenty-three I began talking to the walls, because it seemed that Ava the fly was becoming less and less herself as the days went on. She stopped responding, began almost ignoring me. When I would say something important, your mom called again she's worried, on the first few days she'd fly almost in a perfect circle before landing and I took that as no; by day twenty-three she wouldn't even sit in one place long enough for me to finish my sentence. She started flying more and more as well. She became skittish around me. She stopped letting me hold her, and wouldn't sleep next to me. On day twenty-five, I looked everywhere for her, and was so scared that I'd find her little carcass somewhere, whether she had been squished in the night or if her time was just up... I stopped taking her out after the twenty-fifth day because she was already leaving. On the twenty-sixth day I locked her in the bug carrier, and left her alone at the house in it, while I bought a box of screws and a cheap power drill and adhesive-back weather stripping. When I got home, I used every screw between all the windows. I made sure no draft would come from under the door. The Fly was still in the container, although her flight had become erratic, and she was slamming herself against the plastic walls before I let her out, after finishing the revisions to the house. Nothing could hurt her after I did all that. Except for her own body and I was never able to protect her from that.

The sun's going down.

Every day after the twenty-five day mark, four days, I kept her in the container, and let her feed off a chunk of chicken. I was worried about her laying eggs and attracting maggots, but I figured that was a stupid thing to worry about. What I should have been worrying about was that I had to pay each bill by myself at this point, and the first of the month was coming up soon, and I hadn't been working because I had to take care of her, and I couldn't bring a fly into the office, no one would believe me that it was a pet, or something. Everyone knew that Ava and I didn't have kids; I couldn't say that it was a science project for them, because they didn't exist. So I took two week's vacation, and then a week of health days, and then I asked my boss for another week because Ava was so sick, and he gave me the vacation without pay.

The twenty-ninth day I was with the fly, she was

completely unresponsive to me and everything I tried to entice her with. I dropped bits of fruit in the container after I took out the chunk of chicken (which had started to grow mold, and stink) I put whipped cream, dripped juice and soda, anything I could think of, but after a while she wouldn't even eat. I started to get worried. What if she was in pain? What if she was screaming and I couldn't hear her because flies are on some higher, different frequency that I couldn't hear? I shook the plastic bug holder because I wanted some reaction out of her. I wanted the fly to be Ava again. I hated that she was a fly. I yelled at the fly again. "How could you leave me like this?" was something that I repeated. I hit the table the container rested on. Because I wanted to know how she could just leave me all alone. Rent was due three days from then, and I didn't have all of it. I was mad at her. I yelled at her more. I told her it was her fault she was a fly. I asked her to change back. I begged her to change back. I screamed for her to change back. Change back. Ava please change back. She didn't do anything. No flutter of her wings, no licking her legs, nothing. She wouldn't change back for me. So I opened the container. The fly didn't leave immediately, but by then it was dark outside, so I went to lay down in bed. I cried.

When I woke up the next morning, the first thing I did was go to the container, which was still sitting on the coffee table, with no fly inside. I made coffee. No fly. My head hurt. I took three Tylenol. No fly. I looked around the room and didn't see her, three deep breaths in, three slow breaths out, three deep breaths in, three slow breaths out, and sipped my coffee; it burned my mouth; I switched on the overhead light; it hurt my eyes. 🌸



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*Kimberly Pollard is a 15-year-old sophomore at the New Orleans Center For Creative Arts, where she studies Creative Writing. She lives in Belle Chasse,*

*LA. She also won a silver medal for a flash fiction piece in Scholastic's Art and Writing competition in 2014.*

*She enjoys writing, listening to music, and walking around New Orleans.*





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# AND SO HE DRIFTED

By Rachel Marbaker

## *The 2014 Second Runner-Up for Short Story by a High School Student.*

Peter still wore his lab coat every day. On a good day someone would mistake him for a doctor. “Doctor,” someone says, approaching Peter from behind. Sudden youth reshapes the old man’s face as he smiles, turning around. The nurse almost always looks up from her clipboard, pausing in surprise. She is puzzled by the the old man’s genuine delight. “Oh... uhh, hello, sorry, um...sir.” Then she hurries away, flustered, in search of a doctor. The smile lasts a second, eyes crinkled, cheeks full; then it fades, replaced again by the face of an old man.

Most days, Peter wanders the white-tiled halls. He is remarkably spry for his age, but still feels handicapped when he walks. It is as if in some forgotten time, he was not dependent on the floor, that the law of gravity could not restrain him. He walks, searching the white walls and thick windows again and again, until the aching of the handicap, an unfamiliar heaviness on his feet, the depressing sensation that he had once walked on air, is too much and he returns to his room. Sometimes he stops at one of the many doors lining the hallway, the second door to the right, and stares at it, brow furrowed, trying to grasp a melancholy absence that lingers just out of comprehension.

In his glory days, he had been famous. His smile had been seen everywhere, by men, women, children, on posters, and pamphlets, and television. A great smile, a knowing, understanding, brilliant smile. He had been working to save them all, and they loved him dearly for it.

Charisma coupled with passion revolutionized his career in cosmetics. He developed creams, pills, sprays, lotions, supplements, anything to keep one young and beautiful. The people loved him, loved his products; mothers could extend their loveliness; girls could grow into it; fathers could retain their pride and their hair; boys could enchant any girl with a single, blinding white, toothy grin. Peter was his own poster boy, the face on the billboards and the speaker at conventions. He had the perfect story: the orphan who made himself a millionaire.

And his good looks lasted. Again and again, he was approached for movies and book covers. At nearly fifty-three, as his peers gave into wrinkles and receding gray hair, Peter’s smile still made millions. The only

wrinkles he ever had were crow’s feet from grinning.

At fifty-four, Peter rewrote cosmetics forever. He changed himself from a representative of science, from a façade obscuring the messy trial and error of reality, into the ultimate discoverer, the man of the moment. By discovering a protein that could visibly reduce aging overnight, Peter made himself famous. His popularity surged; Peter’s name echoed in the households. They thought he had saved them from aging, saved them from dreadful evil, one that crept up as fearful and inevitable as the tide approaching a bound man on the shore. They would have offered him the Nobel Prize.

But then the strange feeling began, the taste of something missing, like a constant forgotten sweetness in his mouth. It was familiar, yet foreign, as if the flavor of his mother’s cooking were on his tongue, though she had been dead over a decade. Whatever it was, the undefined memory haunted him. It tickled at the fading edges of his consciousness, blurring into darkness as he strained to comprehend it. His work became more haphazard, colored by his desire to taste that forgotten flavor.

Straying from science, Peter’s studies became entangled with the supernatural. He began to read books about Ponce de Leon and Alexander the Great, anyone who had ever searched for the Fountain of Youth. Piles of notes covered his lab, crisscrossed with scribblings from Herodotus and Homer, any description of the Youthful Spring or of its properties. Development of the new protein, driven by a product hungry public, fell to the wayside. As the external pressure mounted, Peter’s privacy disappeared in a flurry of tabloid articles and flashy headlines. The guess and check reality of science, freed of its façade, bred impatience and anxiety in the masses: the tide was rising; the people were still bound. They complained when Peter was spotted scouring ancient texts and tablets instead of formulating a magical paste that would revive the best years of the consumer’s lives. To them, his drifting interest was betrayal and it felt personal and cruel. Rumors spread that he had developed the products only for himself, damning the rest of the world to wrinkles and gray hair and damaged skin.



But Peter was immersed; he scarcely noticed the consumers. Scribblings turned to calculations. The walls of his lab were papered with versions of equations with slightly altered constants and assorted added variables. His waking hours were spent hunched over a lab counter, calculating, always calculating. Habits that had protected his fragile, artificial youth fell away and inky sleepless bruises joined the wrinkles beneath his eyes.

Critics had begun to talk of asylum long before, *all that popularity*, they said, *the smiling must get to his head*. The public never took them seriously; their idle was untouched by the stain of insanity. But all their admiration was cast away for questions when Peter made a single assertion.

*The Fountain of Youth—it exists. I’ve found it.*

This time, the twinkle in Peter’s eye could not grab them; the people did not seize his words like a life buoy, but instead bobbed, untethered, uncertain corks in an ever-aging sea. They were struck silent, speechless. It was as if the world had slowed down, skirting a traffic accident with caution, but ever rampant curiosity. Across the globe, the people were looking at each other, waiting for others to speak. All it took was one loud voice: *gullible old man, you have fallen into a fool’s trap. It’s a myth, old man, a myth*. A single outcry shattered the floodgates of uncertainty; a few people asked where, a few people asked why, but most condemned him for falling for an ancient conspiracy, scoffing, *the Fountain of Youth is no more real than magic or fairy dust*.

But *it is real*, he insisted. His affirmations faded as he was drawn quietly away from the public world, receding from the limelight, one day an emblem, the next day a ghost. His lab grew musty and dust settled on the sills; his calculations began to peel from the walls. Day after day, he could only stare at the final page, the final calculation for the location of the Fountain, the proof, his proof. The page, once crisp, was creased and smudged, the corners softened by Peter’s fingers. He clung to the intangible, impossibility of youth as if he believed even the intangible could be an anchor. And so he drifted.

Someone arranged for a place in a mental hospital. *He just needs a little time to think*, she said, *when I come back next week I am sure all of this nonsense will be forgotten*.

Peter never forgot, the tartness of longing remained bitter on his tongue. The forgotten sweetness receding ever further in his memory, even as he tried to reach out and grasp it.

\* \* \* \*

When Peter isn’t walking, he sits in his room and tries to recall something, anything to rid him of the unknown handicap, anything to rid him of that absent taste. Days are lost in reminiscing, sifting through convoluted memories, examining each for clues through the glimmering lens of retrospect. Nothing ever reveals itself, frustration blossoms, but it is

quickly smothered by longing, or at least the habit of longing. He sits in a stiff chair, contemplating his few possessions, all of them brought by the woman who brought him here. She still visits every week.

But who can make sense of such a collection: an old, chipped flute; a tattered top hat; a well-loved teddy bear, permanently stained with grime; a blue hair ribbon.

He sits there, staring, pondering, an action so familiar that even the musings have become perfunctory, when a woman peeks in the room, rapping her knuckles in the door to let him know she is here.

She is pretty, but aging, her hair has long gone mousy and turned gray, though it is still long, and curling around her shoulders like when she was young. She enters the room, slowly, watching Peter as he murmurs to himself staring at the objects arrayed on the table.

“Hi, Peter.” A hesitant pause, she is standing nearby now, but Peter continues to gaze at the collection. She bends down in order to speak more to his face, “How are you today, Peter?” No response. She straightens, biting her lip. After a moment’s pause, she reaches into her purse. “I brought something for you today, Peter.”

Carefully, she places a tarnished thimble on the table with the other objects. Peter blinks, looks up at her, some distant sparkle reignited in his eye, as if someone had given him a kiss. That brilliant smile creased his face.

“I remember youth, Wendy,” Peter said, his eyes alight, “I remember youth, it was mine on the second start. 🌸



### Judge George Bishop Jr.'s Comments:

In *And So He Drifted*, an old man named Peter wanders the halls of an asylum, crippled by a peculiar heaviness. The story flashes back to details of his glory days as a famous maker of cosmetics who becomes obsessed over finding the formula for eternal youth. A friend eventually arranges his stay in a mental hospital, where, as the story returns to the present, we see him fingering relics from his own youth: a “chipped flute; a tattered top hat; a well-loved teddy bear, permanently stained with grime; a blue hair ribbon.” The ending of the story is a nice surprise—unexpected and charming. One of the best aspects of the story, aside from the ingenious set up and ending, are the sharp, moment-to-moment details that breathe life and believability into the writing:

*“Doctor,” someone says, approaching Peter from behind. Sudden youth reshapes the old man’s face as he smiles, turning around. The nurse almost always looks up from her clipboard, pausing in surprise. She is puzzled by the old man’s genuine delight. “Oh...uhh, hello, sorry, um...sir.” Then she hurries away, flustered, in search of a doctor.*



*Rachel Marbaker, Third Place for **And So He Drifted**, is an avid academic, a high school senior who divides her time between two passions—mathematics and writing—along with marching band, choir, and environmental stewardship. Rachel is “thrilled to receive recognition for this story because its theme, Alzheimer’s disease, is a topic too often ignored.” **And So He Drifted** is Rachel’s first nationally recognized piece, and she would like to express her gratitude to the Pirate’s Alley Faulkner’s Society for giving her this opportunity. Additionally, Rachel would like to thank her teacher and mentor, Ms. Marisa Foltz, for helping her to develop her prose and voice.*

*There is a certain part of all of us that lives outside of time. Perhaps we become aware of our age only at exceptional moments, and most of the time we are ageless.*

-Milan Kundera





# THE MONSTERS THAT LIVE IN TIN HOUSES



*By Luis Bermudez Ham*

*The 2014 Third Runner-Up for Short Story by a High School Student.*

**T**HE KID IS CREATED. The Kid's name is Gerry, and Gerry is a mistake. More specifically, Gerry is Kris' second mistake. Kris is the designer, the one in charge of making people. There are thousands like Kris, underpaid and overworking, sketching faces in the middle of the night and filling out personality forms. They create characters out of blank space in their heads, canvases to splash with pure imagination, and for more than a hundred years these characters have always been over 20 years of age. This is where Kris made this second mistake and accidentally created the Kid, or the first child the world has seen in a long time.

One would've expected the future to be much brighter. Or cleaner. And in a way it is, only not here. Here, the houses are made of tinfoil and the roads are made of dirt. Here, living grounds stack on top of each other, and though people have begun resembling boxed matches more than people in homes, loneliness can be felt thick in the air, dense. No one says hi to another, and everyone minds their own business. It may be what was longed for before, something to resemble privacy, but as it turns out having everyone completely consumed by their own situation without jumping into others' problems every once in a while is not only a perfect way to create selfish beings of a nature almost anti-animal, but also a perfect petri dish to harvest isolation and dislocation from societal norms and interaction: a perfect place for an artist to destroy himself. Because at the end of the day that's exactly what Kris is --an artist. Only being an artist is no longer considered a rare occurrence. Artists are no longer outcasted or made unique because, well, when you can harvest them, design them by the dozen, there is no need for anything or anyone to be particularly unique any more.

The media makes the birth of the Kid look like outrageous sacrilege. No one knows why he is so small or why he smells like he does, or why he can't seem to act the same way everyone else does. The Kid doesn't just walk places, the kid runs. The Kid not only talks, he screams, cries his words out, even sings them some times. The kid not only eats, the Kid mashes his face into his food. And no one knows this, but the Kid is

afraid. A lot of people are afraid too --the uncertainty of what a new sunrise might bring almost feels like a monster that might arrive at any moment, to take all it wants and without paying, too. This is not the only monster people are afraid of, or for that matter the Kid. But the Kid believes that every monster has a weakness, and he is determined to find every monster's weakness. The Kid also does not understand why no one calls him by his name and everyone refers to him as "The Kid". For most people, the Kid is too odd, too rare. A piece of black or white in an all-gray world. No one wants to see him in the street. So Gerry is forced to live with Kris, or rather the general public forces Kris to take the Kid into his home.

It's a dirty house, and Kris is not sure if he would call it a home, but it's a first floor residency and at least the room doesn't feel like it's going to fall apart at any given moment, or fall from the building. This has happened before, and the tin rooms almost never leave survivors. Kris hopes no tin rooms fall anytime soon because it usually takes about a week for anyone to come and clean it up and its a nasty sight and with the sun shining hot on the dirt road it is a nasty smell as well.

The Kid has an amazed expression in his face as they are walking from the laboratory and towards the residential area where Kris lives for the first time, the only time the Kid will get to walk this far. People have compared this area to ruins or a ghetto or both, for the rusty tin structures stand alone and isolated from the rest of the cities, their foundations resting on dirt roads, but for the Kid everything is new. Even the buildings that have miraculously stood still in their place for twenty-odd years are new, and this amuses him. It makes him smile. The Kid is different than other people in that new things make him smile. Different things make him smile. Different things are another kind of monster that scares people. The Kid doesn't know this, but if he did, he wouldn't understand. As the pavement reaches a railroad and then fades into dirt roads, the kid begins kicking up dust. Kris is intrigued by this, and he isn't sure if he likes it or not until the dust gets in his face and makes his eyes hurt and makes him cough and sneeze and this is when he tells Gerry:



“stop!”  
...but Gerry doesn't know what this means. Not yet.  
Kris says again  
“stop!”  
...and this time his word comes accompanied by his hand laying on Gerry's shoulder as he crouches down and looks into his eyes and says again  
“stop!”  
And this time, Kris is almost sure the Kid knows what stop means.

The Kid was Kris' second mistake. His first mistake was one often made by designers. He made the blueprints for a human he considered perfect, who in this case turned out to be Sya, a 27-year old woman with dirty blonde hair and pale white skin. Sya thought that she had had a healthy relationship with her parents and that she was capable of caring for people in a way that was not understood by many. This was obviously a lie, since Sya was born with the physical structure of a 27-year old, and the mental age as well. It was only thanks to Kris' design that she thought all the things she thought: in reality she had had no life. No one has a life anymore. Everything the “clones”—as people called them before everyone was a clone—remember is only thanks to designers imprinting memory into their brains. The designers read literature and plant those stories in the clones. Mac Beths, Val Jeans, Pippy Longstockingses are born as flesh people. Other times, designers create their own stories. Sya is an original, taken straight out of Kris' mind. If Kris were to tell Sya that he made her, she would not be able to give a response without involving laughter. The irony is that Sya works as a receptionist for the same company that Kris works for, the one in charge of making the clones. Every Monday and Friday Kris goes up to her desk and hands her the sketches he has made that week with the character profiles he has created, and every time he has to stop and admire (or despise) the designers that came before him and made him, for the feeling that Sya's face evokes in him is so complex that Kris sometimes thinks he'll burn his brain. In spite of this, he carries on a formal relationship with Sya, perhaps a bit more than what would be called professional, but not quite friends, not good ones anyway.

The Kid is slowly getting used to the house. He calls Kris “Lazy” because Kris always makes him cereal for breakfast, and when The Kid asked what the people that made cereal were called, Kris said Lazy. Cereal is the Kid's favorite food. The Kid used to look up every time one of the upstairs neighbors makes Kris' ceiling sound like someone's bowling, almost as if he could see through the thin tin roof and find those responsible for the noise, but now he knows he has no x-ray vision. The Kid is getting used to the place. He can't leave the house, and Kris has been very strict and clear about what he can and can't do while he's not there. And

even though Kris prohibited it, The Kid sometimes goes outside. Not very far, just right out the front door, where the dirt road is. The Kid will kick up immense amounts of dust and then run back in.

Kris comes back and his eyes are red. He has been crying and he is not sure if the Kid understands this and even if he did, he's not sure if he wants to show him. So he's been crying, yes, but he's also been holding tears back for the last fourth of the walk back home. His eyes are puffy. He holds a cigarette in one hand, which occasionally moves to his mouth, and a wedding invitation in the other. As it turns out, he's a good enough friend of Sya to be invited to her wedding, which is next week. When he reaches the front door, he sees Gerry standing there. He's not really outside, he's just there watching. They look at each other. Gerry's stare is slightly confused, as if he's trying to figure out why Kris looks like he does. Did he kick dust up in the air while walking back home and got it in his eyes? No, it's different this time. His mouth doesn't look like a flat horizon like it usually does. Instead he's wearing a half moon on his face. He looks like something that Gerry doesn't have a name for. Gerry tries to figure it out, anyway. Maybe Kris feels like being poked on the insides by a sharp needle. Or maybe someone tied his stomach into a very tight knot, so tight it hurts. Or maybe he is on fire and he can't put himself out and no one can see the fire but him. Kris is about to move the Kid out of the way so he can come in, when suddenly the Kid does something that Kris hasn't got a name for. The Kid wraps his arms around Kris' legs—he is a bit too short for it to work properly, but it works regardless—and holds on tight. Not tight enough to hurt, but tight enough to make Kris feel warm. They stay like that for a while, and then Kris goes in and goes to bed and tries to hide from the monsters he feels are after him.

Kris stays like that, thinking for a very long time. He thinks about Sya, he thinks about what the Kid did to his legs, he thinks about being alone. The Kid figures out how to make himself cereal while Kris thinks. It takes him a few tries, but he gets it eventually and before the floor has had too much milk to drink. Kris' thoughts are interrupted only when there is a knock at the front door. Even then, it takes maybe ten minutes for Kris to get up from his bed and go open the door. The Kid is standing in front of the door, watching, wondering at the sound coming from it. Kris wonders who this could be, and it is not until the instant before his arm opens the door, by which time it was already too late and his arm was set on opening the door, that he realizes who it must be. He is right.

Kris McAugh?

Yes, why?

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So what will I do now?

That's not New Life's business, nor ours. We're only here to inform you.

It is the New Life agents that close the door, leaving Kris and the Kid in their own darkness. Kris turns around and sees the milk on the floor. He is not sure why, but the same arm that opened the door just moments before slaps the Kid across the face, sending him to the ground. The Kid does not understand, and neither does Kris. They look at each other, pain building in each their faces as the news sink in, as the skin regains consciousness and feels the outline of a hand. The Kid begins crying. It is an awful sound, high pitched and loud enough for the selfish neighbors to give some attention to this particular box. The Kid cries and cries. Kris cannot bear to hear it, so Kris slaps and slaps. Neither stops until they are both tired of themselves. The Kid sleeps in the kitchen tonight, and Kris goes out drinking.

It is the day of the wedding, and the Kid has woken up by himself. Kris is where the dirt roads meet pavement. He is sitting on the train tracks, drunk, and although it is cold enough for him to see his own breath, this is not why his hands are clenched into fists. He sits in the same way that he's done before, when he feels like the loneliness is too much and that nothing will change anyway. He sits also perhaps because he can't get up. Alcohol is flowing through his body, not yet quite processed by the liver, the hangover still hours away. The train tracks are starting to lightly buzz now, but Kris doesn't notice. Instead, he looks at the dirt road and thinks that somewhere, the perfect girl is getting married to someone else. He thinks that it's a tragedy, that she is perfect for him, but he knows that he could never explain to her. He knows that the one piece of knowledge that would save him cannot be spoken. He hopes to visit the girl in dreams.

There is an empty seat at the wedding reception. It has the name Chris on it. No one knows any Chris, and the bride doesn't notice the empty seat. She's too busy having the time of her life.

The tracks are shaking now.

The Kid pours himself some cereal. He is able to do this without spilling any milk now. He taught himself. He explores the house, leaving his bowl of cereal alone for a few minutes. He likes his cereal soggy. He walks into Kris' room and this is when he notices he is not there. There's a sketchbook by Kris' bed, and it's opened to a page where a beautiful girl with blonde hair looks into the eyes of the viewer. The way she's drawn makes him forget he is alone for a minute. Sixty full seconds.

Kris looks down to in between his shoes, where his last cigarette is still a burning butt. The butt is moving. This is because the tracks are vibrating in such a

way that they make things around them vibrate and therefore move. Kris looks up. There's a train in front of him.

Sixty full seconds pass and the Kid remembers he is alone. He is about to make more cereal to fill his stomach and maybe even smile a little, but he realizes there is no more cereal. This is alright, though, because there is no milk either. The tin house is slowly emptying itself, the Kid thinks. No Milk. No Cereal. No Lazy, even. Only monsters are left, and the Kid's not sure if he can find their weaknesses. 🌻

### Judge George Bishop Jr.'s Comments:

This story is a masterful foray into speculative fiction, a science fiction approach to the themes that are on the minds of all of us these days, regardless of age. Themes like the one-percent and the rest of us, privacy and invasion of it, lack of engagement with others, fear of losing self-identity, fear of becoming just one of many, fear of what scientific research in such areas as cloning will do to humanity. It's an unusual, imaginative look at what we may become in the not too distant future.

*Luis Bermudez Ham, raised in the picturesque (and often exhausting) Guadalajara, Mexico, had a childhood filled with ambiguity. Torn between soccer or martial arts, he*



*quickly turned away from both when his eyes gained control and his mind turned to art and appreciation of it. Although his appreciation of all forms of art began somewhat late, he is now making up for lost time. He enjoys music, photography, and writing and wishes that he had the talent to*

*become a painter. Instead, he has he has learned to be happy producing images with words. To him, New Orleans and the American South, though wholly different, represent the cusp of American culture. New Orleans has welcomed him, if only for a couple of weeks, and he looks forward to visiting again soon. Currently, he is a Creative Writer at the Idyllwild Arts Academy in California, where he enjoys romanticizing the impossible while sitting on a tree reading Neruda.*





# OTHER FINALISTS

## Other Finalists

- A Dead World: Val*, Hannah Lam, Metairie, LA
- Andre*, Sarah Rolinsky, Covington, LA
- A Rural Recalculation*, Laura Hausman, New York, NY
- A Shooting Star Runs Through Everything*, Knox Van Horn, New Orleans, LA
- City in the Sky*, Lisa Jackson, New Orleans, LA
- Defiance*, Anna Marie Beard, Collierville, TN
- Empire*, Helen Lovett, New Orleans, LA
- Haunt*, Peyton Brunet, New Orleans, LA
- Money Road*, Alex Gracen Hendon, Mandeville, LA
- Monochromatic*, Magda Andrews-Hoke, Philadelphia, PA
- Oh Writers, Writers*, Ana Maria Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, Mexico City, Mexico
- Puzzles*, Marisa Clogher, New Orleans, LA
- Sententia*, Jordan Blanchard, New Orleans, LA
- The Deadbolt Man*, Kinsey Presley-Horning, Bloomington, IN
- Settling Dust*, Emily Cameron, Idyllwild, CA
- The Extra Closet*, Genevieve Lovern, Abita Springs, LA
- The Peephole*, Madeleine Granovetter, Glen Ridge, NJ
- The Pretty One*, Claudia Leger, Slidell, LA
- Those Girls*, Taylor Triplett, New Orleans, LA

## Short List for Finalists

- 18*, Julian Lombard, New Orleans, LA
- A Bloody Sunday for L'Amour*, Alaina Kiffer, Starr, SC
- A World Alone*, Diana Arreaga, Metairie, LA
- After*, Madeleine Granovetter, Glen Ridge, NJ
- Between Covers*, Eleanor Stern, New Orleans, LA
- Cold Weather*, Layne Kieschnick, New Orleans, LA
- Dear Stella*, Tracy Geng, Eden Prairie, MN
- Foreign Relations*, Alexandra Gulden, New Orleans, LA
- Guts*, Marielle Meyer, Los Angeles, CA
- Jury of Maggots*, Chandler J. Chamberlain,
- Learn to Fly*, Gabriela Igini, Tucson, AZ
- Lost Within My Greed*, Sun Ho "Tim" Kim, Pottstown, Pa
- Matthew Madison*, Johnny Freiberg, Metairie, LA
- Nerves*, Brianna Breaux, New Orleans, LA
- Poker Game*, Jackson Mierl, Mandeville, LA
- Radioactive*, Arthur Pembroke, Sky Valley, CA
- Siri Isn't What She Seems*, Simone Becnel, Metairie, LA
- Stripes and Masturbation*, Sabrina Melendez, Idyllwild, CA
- The Epiphany*, Sarah Gamard, New Orleans, LA
- The Jewelry Box*, Nicola Preuss, New Orleans, LA
- The Recorders*, Helen Lovett, New Orleans, LA

- The Woman and the Ocean*, Margot Rieth, New Orleans, LA
- What Hangs From the Trees*, Kathleen Johnson, Idyllwild, CA

## Semi-Finalists

- Adira*, Megan Bott, Metairie, LA
- A Few Tales*, Jada Smiley, New Orleans, LA
- Blood on the Sand*, Nicholas Taylor, Idyllwild, CA
- Death to Plastic*, Alexandra Gulden, New Orleans, LA
- Disease*, Sumner Skelding, New Orleans, LA
- Effects of Piracy to Records Store in Indonesia*, Haryo Asmaperdana
- Elephant Love Medley*, Clara Souvignier, New Orleans, LA
- Found: Away From Mummy*, Mary Dillon, Metairie, LA
- Grand Isle Beach*, Siobhan Kelly, New Orleans, LA
- Jack and the Rabbits*, Leah Bordlee, New Orleans, LA
- Keeping the Balance*, Mariah McKnight, Metairie, LA
- Merry Go Round Madness*, Tristan Sather, Idyllwild, CA
- Mumbling in My Ear*, Sophia Alexandria Parandian, Madisonville, LA
- Peter's Suicide*, David Schneider, New Orleans, LA
- Steps*, Allison Negggers, Evanston, IL
- Tests*, August Gibert-Hock, New Orleans, LA
- The Arsonist, the Astronaut, and the Artist*, Brittany Grady, Morris, MN
- The Day*, Avery Owings, New Orleans, LA
- The Eraser*, Tori Lambert, Metairie, LA
- The Execution*, Parisa Sheikholeslami, Idyllwild, CA
- The Pursuit of Happiness*, Amoi Lyons
- Why*, Callie Levan, Idyllwild, CA
- Vaccine*, McKenna Olson, Glendale, CA



# ALIHOT



*Every year, we honor a select group of people as Legends in Their Own Time, or ALIHOT (A Legend in His/Her Own Time). In 2014, we were pleased to honor Moira Crone, Darrell Bourque, Luis Alberto Urrea, Stanley Crouch, and Randy Fertel, whose contributions to the world of literature are rivaled only by their contributions to their communities.*



## ALIHOT AWARD FOR FICTION, 2014:

# Moira Crone

**Moira Crone** has published three novels and three books of stories, including **What Gets Into Us**. Her work appears in *Oxford American*, *Triquarterly*, *Habitus*, *The New Yorker*, *New Orleans Review*, and *The Double Dealer*, and some 40 other journals and 12 anthologies. Crone has been an active participant in the Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society since 1993, when she won the first ever Short Story gold medal in the Society's *William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition*. The winning story, *Dream State*, later became the central piece and title for an eponymous collection of short fiction. The book was well received, and called "utterly sui generis" by *New York Times* book critic Gary Krist. She later won the Society's gold medal for her novella, **The Ice Garden**, which was expanded into a novel, released this fall.



One of the founders of the nationally recognized MFA program at LSU, Crone has been an ardent supporter of the Society's endeavors on behalf of developing writers, including several programs designed to help writers improve their work, find and get their work published. When she was director of the MFA program at LSU, she regularly encouraged her MFA candidates to volunteer their services for *Words & Music*, a *Literary Feast in New Orleans*. She also conceived many joint, mutually beneficial ventures, including appearances by such notable authors as Alan Garganus. She has frequently judged the novella category of our competition, contributed to our journal, *The Double Dealer*, and has served as a literary presenter almost every year since *Words & Music* was founded. And is the matriarch of a literary family, including her husband, bestselling poet, non-fiction author, and dream analyst, Rodger Kamenetz, and two daughters, Anya and Kezia, both writes, who have worked in Faulkner Society projects.

After building a career as a well-respected author of literary fiction, she took a leap into writing science fiction, which proved to be a turning point. In an interview with *BookSlut*, Crone says of science fiction:

*When you want to write a novel of ideas in this country, sci-fi is pretty much the way to go. Our best science fiction or speculative works... have had a lot to say. Possibly in the future, people will say, "Wow, sci-fi was where the ideas were really being discussed."*

Moira's 2012 novel, **The Not Yet**, imagines a dystopian future 100 years after Hurricane Katrina, in which the wealthy *Heirs* have figured out a way to live almost forever, in gated communities far removed from the poor, who struggle to survive. Malcolm de Lazarus is a *not yet*, who will one day join the elite. But when his fortune mysteriously vanishes, he is forced to sail to the New Orleans islands to solve the mystery. On his journey, he encounters the dark side of the life of the *Heirs*, questioning everything he has learned about the society in which he lives. The novel was released to glowing reviews. Roy Blount calls it:

*A vivid, suspenseful, and (literally) layered imagining of what's to become of New Orleans and humanity (a new kind of love?) in the 22nd Century.*

Tim Gautreaux writes of the novel:

*Moira Crone's **The Not Yet** is as thought-provoking as a novel can get. Set in a future dystopian New Orleans that is run by people who think they have figured out how to live forever, the story contains echoes of Jonathan Swift. It's a captivating meditation on the curious way love springs out of what we give up in life, not what we gain.*

In 2009 Crone received the Robert Penn Warren Award for Fiction from the Southern Fellowship of Writers for her body of work. Allan Garganus calls her "a fable maker with a musical ear, a plentitude of nerve, and an epic heart for her beleaguered, if often witty, characters".

In her latest novel, **The Ice Garden**, Crone turns back to literary fiction, writing a captivating coming of age tale set in the stifling environment of her native North Carolina in the 60s. Lee Smith calls **The Ice Garden**:

*...her finest book yet, a story as dazzling and dangerous as ice... a heart stopper. This may just be the most haunting and memorable novel you will ever read.*

We agree. and we are proud to present the 2014 ALIHOT award for fiction to Moira Crone...  
*...A legend in her own time*





## ALIHOT AWARD FOR POETRY, 2014:

# Darrell Bourque

**Darrell Bourque**, a tireless champion of the Louisiana poetry scene, has been named Poet Laureate of Louisiana by two different governors and served multiple terms. This fall he was named 2014 Louisiana Writer of the Year by the Center for the Book of the State Library of Louisiana, an award which recognizes outstanding contributions to Louisiana's literary and intellectual life. The 15th recipient of the award, Bourque's contributions are exemplified by his impressive body of work. Bourque went above and beyond the duties required of state Poet Laureate, using his position to advance the cause of universal literacy, using poetry as a teaching tool in K-12 classrooms around the state. He founded the "Just Listen to Yourself" program, which yearly brings together poets from around Louisiana to read to a public audience in the State Library. State librarian Rebecca Hamilton said of the initiative,

*This program is so wonderfully characteristic of Darrell Bourque's selflessness and dedication to the art of poetry, Though he easily could have presented solo as one of the last appearances of his poet laureate commission, it was his preference to let the spotlight shine on his fellow poets. It also speaks volumes about how much he is admired to see the number of highly regarded poets from across the state who responded to his call.*

Bourque was also created of the Louisiana Poetry Project website, which features a daily poem and a corresponding lesson plan, free to use for teachers in Louisiana and elsewhere. He is currently working with "Degrees of Separation," a two-year exchange program between artists and writers from Louisiana and France.

Bourque grew up in a rural community near Sunset, LA. He was graduated from USL and then received a master's and a Ph.D. in creative writing from Florida State University. He is Professor Emeritus in English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as director of the Creative Writing and Interdisciplinary Humanities programs. He was appointed Louisiana Poet Laureate by Governor Kathleen Blanco in 2007 and, then, reappointed by Governor Bobby Jindal in 2009. He has published nine acclaimed collections of poems:

**Plainsongs** (Cross-Cultural Communications, Merrick, NY), **The Doors between Us** (Louisiana Literature Press, SELU, Hammond, LA), **Burnt Water Suite** (Wings Press, San Antonio), **The Blue Boat** (University of Louisiana Press), **In Ordinary Light: New and Selected Poems** (UL Press), **Call and Response: Conversations in Verse**, a collaboration with Louisiana poet Jack B. Bedell (Texas Review Press of the Texas A&M Press Consortium), **Holding the Notes** (a commissioned chapbook, Chicory Bloom Press, Thibodaux, LA), **Megan's Guitar and Other Poems from Acadie** (UL Press) and, most recently, **if you abandon me, comment je vas faire: An Amédé Ardoin Songbook** (Yellow Flag Press, Lafayette, LA).



Bourque's poetry often is a translation of the oral history of his Louisiana's Acadiana culture into the written word. He grew up in a culture of storytelling in a place where his own French language ancestry was suppressed. **if you abandon me, comment je vas fair**, his newest book, is a symbolic reclamation of the story of Creole musician Amédé Ardoin, who was one of the first musicians to make a recording of Acadian music.

Ardoin was murdered, likely in a racially motivated attack, and buried in an unmarked grave. Bourque seeks to bring this story back into the light of day, celebrating a Louisiana cultural hero. His poetry is a tribute to a culture that has never been quite welcomed into the larger framework of the United States. His aim is to use Louisiana poetry and Acadian history to combat harmful stereotypes that persist even today. In an interview for *The Double Dealer*, Bourque states:

*I want people to know that these people who are often regarded as backwards, and ignorant, and reduced to absurdities in reality shows are people who read Tom Stoppard and Plato, who become neurosurgeons and social activists. I hope my work contains intelligent surprises. I hope it informs a readership in unexpected ways. I hope it contains elements that make others understand that we are like the rest of the world in the ways that matter.*

It is our honor to present the 2014 ALIHOT Award for Poetry to Darrell Bourque...  
*...A legend in his own time.*



## ALIHOT AWARD FOR LITERATURE, 2014:

# Luis Alberto Urrea

**Luis Albert Urrea** is a prolific and acclaimed author of 14 books, including poetry, narrative non-fiction, essays, and novels. Born in Tijuana, Mexico to a Mexican father and an Anglo mother, Urrea's work is inspired by his cross-cultural upbringing and unique perspective of life on both sides of the border. His mastery over multiple genres marks him as one of our most talented authors working today. Of genre, Urrea says, "As for genres, to me it's all writing. And the writing tells *me* what it wants to be."

Urrea earned his undergraduate degree in writing at the University of California at San Diego, and completed his graduate studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. He has taught writing workshops at Harvard University, the Massachusetts Bay Community College, and the University of Colorado. Today, he lives with his family in Naperville, IL, where he is a professor of creative writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

His ability to explore the human element behind the tragic and intimate stories he tells of Mexican immigrants has won him much praise in the literary world. His first book, **Across the Wire**, draws from his experiences working with Tijuana garbage pickers as a missionary in his early 20's. It was named a *New York Times* Notable Book and won the Christopher Award. His 2009 novel, **Into the Beautiful North**, imagines a small town in Mexico where all the men have immigrated to the U.S. A group of young women, after seeing the film **The Magnificent Seven**, decide to follow the men North and persuade them to return to their beloved village. A national bestseller, **Into the Beautiful North** earned a citation of excellence from the American Library Association's *Over the Rainbow Project*. He has also won an Edgar award from the Mystery Writers of America for best short story (2009, *Amapola* in **Phoenix Noir**). Urrea also won a 1999 American Book Award for his memoir, **Nobody's Son: Notes from an American Life**, and was voted into the Latino Literature Hall of Fame in 2000, following the publication of **Vatos**. His book of short stories, **Six Kinds of Sky**, was named the 2002



small-press Book of the Year in fiction by the editors of *ForeWord* magazine. He also has won a Western States Book Award in poetry for **The Fever of Being** and was included in **The 1996 Best American Poetry** collection. Urrea's other titles include **By the Lake of Sleeping Children**, **In Search of Snow**, **Ghost Sickness**, and **Wandering Time**.

Among his most celebrated works is **The Devil's Highway**, for which he won the Kiriyama Prize and was nominated for a Pulitzer. The book is a revealing non-fiction account of 26 Mexican immigrants lost in the torrid, desolate Arizona desert. In this book, Urrea explores the human cost of an issue which is all-too-often represented in the media as purely political.

Urrea excavated the history of his ancestor, the legendary healer Santa de Cabora, Teresa Urrea. He spent his childhood hearing of her in family stories but did not realize his great Aunt was a real person until later. After the revelation, he devoted 20 years to discovering and telling her story. The final product, **The Hummingbird's Daughter**, was a critically acclaimed release.

NPR's Alan Cheus says of the book:

*The novelist conveys his own sense of wonder about a Mexico in which all Mexicans still dreamed the same dream. They dreamed of being Mexican. There was no greater mystery. Mexico was too big. It had too many colors. It was noisier than anyone could have imagined. Yes, a lot of color and a lot of noise. This gifted novelist has portrayed his ancestor and her life and her country with a vividness that is masterful.*

Of the sequel, 2012's **Queen of America**. *Los Angeles Times* book reviewer, Carolyn Kellogg said: *Imagining the story of his great-aunt Urrea might have chosen to make her a hero; that would have been easier. What we get is more complicated, more modern. Hers is the story of what it means to have a gift, and how a talent can also be a burden.*"

He is a literary hero and it is a distinct honor for us to present the 2014 ALIHOT Award for Literature to Luis Alberto Urrea...

..A Legend in his own time.





## ALIHOT AWARD FOR MUSIC CRITICISM, 2014:

# Stanley Crouch

**Stanley Crouch**, author of the long awaited new biography of famed jazzman Charlie Parker, **Kansas City Lightning**, has been writing about jazz music and the African American experience for more than 40 years. He has twice been nominated for the National Book Critics Circle award, for his essay collections **Notes of a Hanging Judge** (1990) and **The All-American Skin Game** (1995). His other books include **Always in Pursuit** (1998), **The Artificial White Man** (2004), and the novel **Don't the Moon Look Lonesome** (2000).

His writing has appeared in *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Downbeat*, *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere. He has served, off and on, since 1987 as artistic consultant for jazz programming at Lincoln Center and is a founder of the jazz department known as *Jazz at Lincoln Center*. He is also executive vice president of the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation. On television, he has appeared in the Ken Burns documentaries **Jazz** and the re-mastered DVD edition of **The Civil War**; has guest-hosted *Charlie Rose* and appeared as a commentator on *60 Minutes*; he has been twice profiled by C-Span and has appeared as a guest on many radio and television shows. A winner of the MacArthur "Genius" Award, he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is a regular columnist for the *New York Daily News*.

Those are just the fundamental highlights of a distinguished career in music criticism and literary and social commentary.

What we must add to these basics are the fact that Stanley Crouch has read everything and thinks deeply about everything he reads and is, therefore, fully equipped to improvise on the spot an erudite monologue on almost any subject you might care to introduce into a conversation.



When we first began looking at a theme of *The Art of Improvisation in Words, Music, and Life*, the first name of a possible presenter which popped into our minds was Stanley Crouch.

Stanley, who some years ago on commission from the Faulkner Society, created with trumpet artist and composer Irvin Mayfield a new suite of music based on William Faulkner's work, which they called *The Wild Palms Suite*, after Faulkner's great work of literary art. Stanley wrote the libretto and Irvin wrote the music and Stanley performed

the libretto with Irvin's orchestra for a *Words & Music* event in 2004. That weekend, he upset the applecart of narrow-minded academy viewpoints of Faulkner with his discussion of how Faulkner's experimental style of writing in the 20s was inspired by the jazz improv riffs he heard while living and writing in New Orleans.

Whenever you start a conversation with Stanley, in fact, you might anticipate having the applecart of your own literary notions toppled. He is an innovative thinker and he understands that there are others like him...not the least of which were William Faulkner, our literary icon, and Charlie Parker, the great music genius noted for creative improvisations

on the traditional forms. Like Faulkner and Charlie Parker, Stanley uses his God-given eyes, ears, and memory to observe, store, and re-engineer at some future dates.

We are pleased to have him in our number again this year.

And we are honored to present our 2014 ALIHOT award for Commentary to Stanley Crouch...

*...A Legend in His Own Time.*





## ALIHOT AWARD FOR Philanthropy, 2014:

# Randy Fertel

**Randy Fertel** was awarded the Faulkner Society's 2011 ALIHOT Award for Narrative Non-fiction in recognition of his book, **The Gorilla Man and the Empress of Steak**, ostensibly a family memoir but in reality a book of profound insight into the unique character of New Orleans, his hometown. In making that award, we said it could just as easily have been made for his enormous contributions to his city as a philanthropist supporting all branches of the arts and for his creation of new initiatives to improve quality of life.

Randy has taught English at Harvard, Tulane, LeMoyne College, the University of New Orleans, and most recently in the Graduate School of New School University. His Ph.D. is from Harvard, where he received a teaching award bestowed by student vote. A specialist in Vietnam War literature, he created a major conference, *My Lai 25 Years After: Facing the Darkness, Healing the Wounds*, at Tulane University in 1994. The initiative received a Special Humanities Award from Louisiana Endowment for Humanities and an Addy Award for promotion of it. Randy has been a faculty member for *Words & Music* on many occasions and always has brought to our stages new insight into age-old literary themes.

He is President of both the Fertel Foundation and the Ruth U. Fertel Foundation. The Fertel Foundation has a special interest in initiatives from which new communities and new insights may emerge and initiatives which challenge entrenched communities of power. One such project, the Ron Ridenhour Prizes for Courageous Truth Telling, is co-sponsored by the Nation Institute. Award ceremonies are held every spring at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. The foundation, also supports projects to rebuild a better New Orleans – and create national models – in a post-Katrina world. The Ruth U. Fertel Foundation, named for his late mother, is devoted to education and has long been a patron of *Words & Music*, which offers continuing education in

the literary arts for developing writers of all ages as well as literacy initiatives for at-risk youngsters.



A notorious “foodie,” it is not surprising that he is a member of the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee, which has a mission to improve the local food system. He leads the task force that brought the Edible Schoolyard, founded by Alice Water, to in New Orleans. The First “Edible Evening” was a smashing success with more than 600 supporters turning out. The proceeds help ensure sustainability of this nationally acclaimed garden and kitchen model program at Green Charter School..

Randy also chairs a task force for Artist Corps, which is putting musicians back in the schools of New Orleans.

During his 40-year career of teaching and writing, Randy has been dickering with the importance of improvisation in our lives and in the arts. He collected research, writing notes, interviews with others over the years and, finally, for two years, closeted himself to, write the book. It will be formally launched soon but some of us have had the pleasure of reading his several versions of it in advance. The book, **A Taste for Chaos**, is the definitive work on improvisation in every aspect of our lives and will entertain you mightily.

So, this year, we might just as easily have decided to give Randy the Society's ALIHOT Award for Narrative Non-Fiction.

It is high time, however, that this generous and talented innovator is recognized for his contributions to a better life for all of us.

We are honored and delighted, therefore, to present our 2014 ALIHOT Award for Philanthropy to Randy Fertel...

*...A Legend in His Own Time!*