

San Antonio Review

Summer 2020 | Volume III

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San Antonio Review is
~~San Antonio's~~ Texas'
international
literary, arts and ideas
journal.

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Invocation | Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Our pens should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes. At the very least the pen

should be used to “murder their

sleep” by constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people, and making them know that

they are being seen. The pen may not always be mightier than the sword, but used in the service of truth, it can be a mighty force. It's for the writers themselves to choose whether they will use their art in the service of the exploiting oppressing classes and nations articulating their world view or in the service of the masses engaged in a fierce struggle against human degradation and

oppression. But I have indicated my preference: Let our pens be the voices of the people.

from *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (Africa World Press, 1983), as quoted in *Social Poetics* by Mark Nowak (Coffee House Press, 2020)

I'M NOT
SICK

BUT I'M
NOT WELL

Publisher's Note | William O. Pate II

Readers and Contributors,

There's too much to say.
I'm writing on a much longer
piece to include as our next
issue's introductory note that
expands upon the tardiness of
this editor reaching your hands.
You've waited long enough, though.
So, I'll stick to the facts:

I San Antonio Review founded
during a psychopharmacological-
and environment-induced breakdown
while living in San Antonio
in 2017. Thus, the name. In
mid-2018, my wife, son, dog, and
parent and I moved back to

Austin. I considered changing
the journal, but was ultimately
dissuaded by Giana, our new
poetry editor who takes over
from Alex Z. Salinas, who is
focusing on his own publications.
(I am using the title I feel
you instead as the name of
a new publishing imprint for
book-length works of fiction,
and nonfiction: SPRING point.)
That's all to say that our name
doesn't reflect our location —
nor does it reflect the work
you'll find in these pages

and on a quite-lively and
recently refreshed site (sareview.org)
While we certainly are interested
in elevating the voices of our
havesake city's artists and
authors, as an international
journal, we in no way limit
ourselves to publishing writers
or artists residing from a
specific location! In fact, now
that Alice has drifted away, no
member of our current editorial
collective currently resides in
San Antonio. Brian, who lives
closest, is studying in the

Czech Republic. But the cultural, ethnic, racial, national and other interrelations apparent in San Antonio's population we do hope to better reflect in our pages. This is a continuing journey that demands the effort of thoughtful consideration as to how we accomplish that goal. And how well.

You'll notice two new names on this issue's masthead: Paul Petersen and Peter Bunker. I met Paul at Epoch Coffee as North Loop is Austin about ten years ago. When I threatened to shoot SAR down earlier this year due to

overwork and time constraints
he offered to help out. He now
regularly handles our weekly
digital publication strategy and
execution. He's the one to ask for
publication dates and to complain
to if there's a typo introduced
into your digital piece. His help
is also responsible for keeping SBK
alive when I was pretty certain
I'd finished with it. Instead,
he invested more time, effort
and money by moving it to
the new MIT Media Lab -
birthed and recently independent
online publishing platform, Publish

Run by the folks at Knowledge Future Group, PubPub matched my desire for a platform dedicated to open-access scholarship, users' privacy and collaboration with partners. PubPub has given SAR unique capabilities we sorely needed, including an all-in-one submission, review and publication system; the ability to issue DOIs to authors for their published pieces. Further, it removes the necessity of me (or Paul) maintaining the backend capabilities of the platform by cobbling together widgets and third-party extensions to

provide the rather basic functionality
required to run this journal.

Thus, the capabilities are built in
and far more secure than I, in
my limited technical knowledge, can
provide.

I stalked you (a constant
retrain- from me) Peter ~~James~~
reviews while reading comments on
Goodreads a long while back.

I've long enjoyed reading his work
on his blog, Too Much Ink and,
(and now at substack) and
publishing some on our site. I'm
very happy he agreed to join an
editorial collective on our chapter

book review editor. I'm also
excited to present it this issue -
as one of several treats I've
added while you've waited - Peter's
review of Dr. Margaret Hageron's
White Kid, recently placed
in paperback from NYU Press. I
suggested he read and review
it, as I've suggested to many
others they should read it.
Peter and Maggie are two
writers I look forward to
seeing new from, and sharing.
Indeed, our next print issue
will include an essay by
Maggie relating her research

an current mid-2020 Conjuncture
I was informed by the Director
of Open Access Journals (doaj.org)
that SR seems to be more of
a magazine than an academic
journal with regards peer review.
I suppose that's partly correct. As
usual, it depends on one's definition,
I guess. B.t., if the DOAJ is
limited to academic journals, SR
by intention wouldn't fit.

San Antonio Review, as a venture
funded from my own pocket but
I "dispassionately" incorporate into my
day-job what had, I think, been
and renewed by an all-

Volunteer editorial collective (most of
whom have never published in the
page), it is meant to serve as
a digital and print gathering
space for the global commons. It
invites work - artistic, written, musical,
scholarly, whatever - from anyone
seeking to share in building
an emancipatory, just and
respectful collective future. While we
write - and I can admit to having
guilt in pursuing - the often
thoughtful and thought-provoking submissions of
academics, it would incredibly narrow
an audience (of readers and writers) were
we to be led by a whimsical
director.
I'll close with a brief debate

that started shortly after the last journal
A critical collage. Speaking on
behalf of all of us who have eagerly
awaited this print edition, Paul agreed
that he felt the print edition is what
gives us legitimacy. I would agree
that whatever legitimacy we have
gained over the past three years is
due to the excellent submissions we've
always received, the openness to
change and experiment many of the
artists we work with are willing to
approach their work and the
growing community of support
visible wherever you see a copy
of this journal.

Thank you.

Yong Wang
6 AUG 2020
2:54 PM CT
AUSTIN, TX

**PLEASE
DON'T
MAKE
ANY
SUDDEN
MOVES**

How to Swim with Dolphins |

Jennifer Hill

First: Just don't.

Dolphins don't have bucket lists.
They don't care about yours.
They get a little depressed
when you look timid
and scrunch up your shoulders like,
"OMG. I am so proud of myself
for doing this."
Then jump in
feet first.

Afterwards,
when you tell your buddies,
you roll your eyes
and say,
"It was no big deal."
And they press you,
asking if it changed you.

Because social media
tempts you with the treasures
of trips to Helsinki or
learning to play a banjo
or getting a civics award or
swimming with dolphins.
You want all of this.

But be warned:
Afterward, you'll question
the arc of your life.
You'll start dreaming
of the one who got away
near the beach

in Oregon
when you were barely 22.
A boy.
Not a dolphin.

After you swim with a dolphin
you may Google
“Dolphin Trainer Certification Program”
even though
you live
200 miles
from a beach.

Then you’ll get depressed
and make a list of
the pros and cons
of getting rid of it all
and buying a tiny house
which you can drive
to any beach you want.

It’s all so much to think about.
So you get bold and
go down to the tattoo shop
that you’ve passed every day
for the last four years
on your way to work.
And you get your first tattoo —
a little one —
of a dolphin
inside your left wrist.

Mostly, don’t swim with dolphins
because they shouldn’t have jobs.
They should be with their friends,
not stuck inside a lagoon
becoming lazy and dependent
on a lousy-but-steady meal
of tasteless-but-plentiful fish.

If you meet a dolphin
someday,
you'll make a connection.
But it's not what you think
it probably is.

You think the dolphin
sees your soul.
You can finally say,
"I have a soulmate
who lives in the sea,
and who is very happy
to see me."

You don't realize
that it's an *Office Space* dolphin
who thinks he's made it to the big time,
hanging out with executive humans.
Everyone in this equation
seems to have made it big.

If you must swim with dolphins,
go 400 miles out to sea
not totally sure
if you'll ever see one,
let alone meet one.
Go blind from
the water's reflection
and sink under the weight
of a billion stars.

You still haven't seen a dolphin.
But if you don't head back
right now
you'll die.
Because of weather,
and your poor lack of planning,
and the probability of panicking
if you actually get what you want.

So you make your way back to land
and then burn your stupid bucket list.
You've thought about this
way too much and
linger
on the thought that you could have stayed longer.

You come to your senses
and realize that you would have been
a true-blue castaway,
and the only thing you could do,
if you met a dolphin,
would be to kill it for food.

But none of that happened.
The list is gone.

There is a barbeque on Saturday.
If you don't go,
people will stop sending you invitations
on Facebook.

You go because the host will fill you in
about his trip to Ecuador
where he ziplined
and drank hallucinogenic tea
that made him forgive his parents.

And you'll go
because the invitation said,
"We've got *tampenades*!"
And that's sort of your thing now.
You like taking pictures
of all kinds of *tampenades*.

But once you get there,
you're obsessing
about your fucking bucket list
and you jump into the pool
to escape the chatter
and a 25-year-old woman

in a tankini
hands you her baby
so she can get a beer.

“My baby can swim,”
she says.
“Even if I throw him in the pool,
he’ll float right to the top,”
she says.
“Don’t worry,”
she says.
“He’s had lots of lessons,”
she says.
“You know, for safety.”

You smile nervously
and stick your hands flat
under the baby’s armpits.
But he wriggles.
He’s strong.
And then he kicks away from you,
smiling and flapping,
going underwater,
popping up for air.

He looks you in the eye
and you reach for him —
his skin is slick and cool,
vibrating with joy —
glowing in the sun.

If someone says Catalina |

Margot Kahn

I think of this Janis Joplin
longhair, low-slung corduroy,
California flip-flop,
cello-playing boy.

His hair swung
like a tiki bar curtain,
the fringe of a flapper dress
across my leg.

Together in a twin bed
that hair was a shade
and I was a window
and the tassel, from my neck to my navel,

pulled
itself
down.

How many one-night stands do you remember?
How many do you care to recount?

That boy played like nothing we could afford.
A hundred-year whiskey on the rocks.
The melt of a glacier
pooled at our feet.

Now someone says Catalina or cello or cancer
and I'm there again, singing over his requiem.
Tassel and tongue.
Shade and shroud.

Was it the hair, or the hands?
The sound, or the shape of the sound?

I'm saying this so that you remember him.
So his mother knows that night is accounted for.

The Falls | Larry Smith

Out my old new road, past Rocky's junkyard
overflowing with rusty cars and barking dogs,
round the bend at Ottie's chicken farm,
across the old stone bridge, along a grassy field
that winds along a small stream
to our falls at old Cross Creek.

And you journey here in couples or groups,
intent on wading out into my waters,
risking rapids, you step on slippery rocks
like Jesus on the waters. And the sun
warms you enough so you slip off shirts and blouses,
roll up trousers or lift skirts up the thigh.
Together you laugh and call out, at last
immersed in earth's sweet baptism.

Giving the Finger to Mr. Death |

Larry Smith

Once a week it seems
I drive past St. Peter's Church
and catch a parking lot full of cars.
No, not for the church but a funeral.
And each time I'm reminded of my age
and that this is how it will be.

I try to tell myself, I am ready
as I dart past the crowded lot.
Only lately a suited man
stands out on the street
offering purple death flags
to all who must pass.

I swerve to avoid him, only
this time he stares right at my face
and I gush a breath then thrust
my middle finger up and curse,
"Get back, you prick, Mr. Death!"

At the corner I'm stunned at myself
and know I've miles to go before I sleep.

Mingo Dreaming | Larry Smith

It's hard to be a city at night, sleeping along this big river. So much wakes you from slumber—mill whistles, sirens, dogs barking, people falling up and down stairs, babies crying to be fed or changed, couples in bedrooms or cars making loud love. When it comes down to it, I wake even when doors slam and when people shout too loud and long.

Oh, I still watch over you—mother and father to a tribe awake or asleep. And yes, I worry about floods and fires, heart attacks, and car accidents. I'm also there for all births and deaths. I count you all as precious, though I do accept nature's course—*Flow like a river, open like a sky./ Feed the heart, yet bow the head.*

Sometimes in night's quiet middle, I dream of fish flying about the room, trains climbing up my back and arms, skirts twirling, golden hair falling over milky breasts—*Yes, I'm alive!* And sometimes nightmare phantoms swirl in mill light, then creep along streets to peep into windows, carrying guns and knives.

In one dream, our mill rolls up like a newspaper then drifts away downriver. We all stand mute like at the end of a long movie. As it fades to darkness, I jerk myself awake, then lie there 'till breathing softens and I reach over again to turn on the lights.

I rise to the rich smell of coffee being brewed in houses, the sounds of people showering, dressing for work, getting kids off to schools, maybe saying a few silent prayers for self and others. All of us meeting the day, all of us working through our dreams.

The River | Larry Smith

And we went down
boys and girls together
in our school clothes
along the smelly creek
all the way to the river.
Brambles and stones
beneath our feet,
we passed rails and mill gates.
And there we stood
looking out in silence
at the great river
too wide to swim across
though some might have tried
and drowned too young.
And our teacher stepped in
allowing her skirt to rise
to her hips like a cloud
with her inside, and
lifting her arms she beckoned
one by one to her side
where she blessed aloud
our baptism, not to God,
but to the waters,
and we the fish
that lived inside
and it inside of us,
"Forever and forever,"
she simply said,
"You are one."
And some laughed for joy
and some bowed their heads
and cried.

Waiting for the Coming Storm |

David Prather

There will be some pain.
For me, a demon in the lower spine,
a jab and a pinch, the body's prophecy.

My grandmother has needles in her hands,
and I'm not surprised.
Most of her life has been scissors and thread.

There will be a change in the light,
a body rushing between the sun and home.
A giant bird, perhaps, a cryptid, maybe.

I have come to the age where I feel the blur of seasons,
that indefinite sway of sadness and otherwise.
A certain weight in the atmosphere

pushes down upon my roof and makes these walls
creak and moan, an ocean of pressure
begging to be let in. But I will not let it in.

My sister's knees, my mother's teeth, my father's heart—
all of us have our warnings. Even my lover complains
about the weather. My grandmother says I must learn

the song of the rain crow,
turn my back to the wind, like leaves. She says
I must never look into the eyes of the monster

that drags thunder on its wings,
for I would surely live with lightning,
a demon that dances up and down the spine.

Banff | Joyce Schmid

Once it was a gradual thing to leave a place.
Today a whoosh and everything is gone—

the Rocky Mountains with their snowy glaciers
melting into lakes and rivers, preternaturally
blue-green, the skinny spruce and fir trees
threaded tightly in a tapestry, the unseen
presence of black bears and wolves
and wolverines—

all disappeared, and we are back
among our shaven hills,
beside our faded bay,
as if the startling waters
and the castellated mountains
never were.

And yet they are.
Somewhere in a country we can't see,
glaciers still are blending into clouds
and melting to the earth without us standing
on the shore of Lake Moraine,
amazed.

Watching a Train Go By | Glover Davis

Dreaming some huge, incomprehensible words
a man who'd be an artist made them writhe
on boxcars flashing by us as we wait.
One blood-tipped consonant cuts like a scythe,

others are crushing loops the vowels print
on metal roughened by heat and flecked oils.
He'd trace smoke flowing back from the engine,
wielding his spray cans, making fat, gray coils.

His public art, as flawed as it might be,
perhaps drew energy from a desire
for rituals whose painted symbols are
smoke swirling from a brief, oracular fire.

Flight to Managua | Neysa King

He wasn't there at the time we said.
Someone, a woman, told me he had been
called to work. I asked for him through
the orders window at the Short Stop.
Beside grey Chryslers he asked

if he could make me a hamburger.
I said no, I was alright. The bent
manila envelope had enough
for a plane ticket. *I wish I had \$300*
to give Enrique, someone had said.

He cried like men cry: inside themselves.
I wanted to cry, too, but I was thinking
about red rice in Haiti, how in Cuba
every day is the cigar festival.
My chest was empty as a glass.

I wrote down my number, but I never
heard if he made it. I think of him,
in an open-air house, birds of paradise
spread warm along mascarpone walls, sipping
coffee tart as a dried cherry, a son in medical school.

I wish I had let him make me a hamburger.
We could have sat and talked a while,
grease and salt on our pillowing fingers,
our lips slick, our skin softening
in the asphalt's black, residual heat.

The tree line distant and still |

Nicolas Visconti

Closer than what I remember as the edge
of the earth with a sail cast out on string,
wavering in the wind, barely blowing
my father teaches me to fly.

I'm beneath a gnarled contortionist, shade
sporadic, sunburnt holes in leaf cover,
chain-link backstop all that's left of childhood
on this old diamond where I grew wanting
to learn to fly with the alloyed birds
leaving Love Field. To leave I had to let
go and watch my sail sail over the forest
trim into memory, cry my father
next to me. The trees, the kite, the empty
spool, strung out of my hands. Sun has melted
all the way through. I am becoming less
in this crabgrass field of trinkets.
My kite's tail shivers up the canopy.

Two Covid-19 Poems |

Alan Altimont, Ph.D.

1

We keep our distance.
We need our space.
We work in separate rooms,
but we can zoom
right up to your face.

We are building up resistance
to each other. The diet
is what you would expect.
The streets are so quiet
you can hear the silence

buzzing like an insect.
We know how to protect
our face, our hands, from you,
an acceptable level of violence.
What else are we supposed to do?

2

I wish I could wash my hands
of you, grief, I wish
you came off with soap
and water, no longer
sickening, no longer
death I can hand
to stranger, or friend,
saying, "Hello, I share
this grief with you,
unaware that I do. There
it is, along with all it may
or may not do to me,
to you, yet to be."
I scrub and scrub as if
this were dirt, not skin,
till I hurt, certain that,
grief, you are still
and always will be there.

**YOU
DON'T
KNOW
THE HALF
OF THE
ABUSE**

Kings in Exile | Robert McGill

My folks sent me away to live with my Aunt Charlene and Uncle Bud in eastern Colorado the summer of 1969, praying I'd come back a reformed boy. I'd gotten into trouble at home, and my old man figured some hard time in corn country would straighten me out.

"You're a lying little sneak," is what he said as we drove up the highway out of Pueblo, toward the National Grasslands. "But guess what? Your Uncle Bud was a lying little sneak, too, when he was your age. So, there won't be any pulling the wool over his eyes. He knows all about deviant behavior."

Uncle Bud was a farmer, and a tough sonofabitch. Being stuck in a house with him for three months was going to be as close to hell as I'd ever get on this side of the dirt. The old man made that sparkling clear.

"You can have your guitar back when the summer's over," he said, glancing into the rearview, a smirk in his voice. "Same with your hi-fi. But right now, you're cut off. You hear? There'll be no camera, no transistor radio, nothing. You're going to spend your time getting reconnected—with the *world*. Maybe a jolt of reality will straighten out your thieving little ass."

The old man thought he was pulling a fast one, but I saw through the stupid stunt the instant he laid it on the table. He was hoping his lard-ass brother would do what he couldn't. Namely, make a man out of me.

They'd cut me off from my friends, my girl...the works. I had nothing left. Not even the stuff I stole. They'd found it all and confiscated it, and they were sending me off to a place where people hunkered around the radio at night, drinking warm milk, listening to Milton Berle.

Cruel? Unusual? What punishment isn't? But what made mine particularly hard to swallow was its naked contempt. My folks had no interest reforming me. They were nothing more than a couple of sanctimonious hypocrites whose only intention was to torment their tormenter. In other words, they were out to get even.

“And don’t go blaming anyone but yourself for this, either, wise guy,” the old man added when he saw me staring at the back of his Brylcreemed head. “It’s your own damned fault. Every bit of it. So, take your medicine like a man.”

We both knew the reason I was being punished, and it wasn’t because of what I’d done. It was because I’d gotten caught. The old man didn’t give a rat’s ass that I’d been pinched shoplifting that leather jacket. He was ashamed of me for being too stupid to get away with it. For making him look bad in front of his friends.

“Nice going,” he’d said, driving me home from the detention center that night. “Your mother’s so humiliated, she had to drop out of bridge club.” He cuffed the back of my head, then shook his finger like it was on fire. “Christ,” he snarled. “You’re a rotten son, you know that? You’re a bad seed.”

It was all BS. The old man wasn’t the least bit sorry for my mother. He was sorry for himself. If my mother dropped out of bridge club, it meant he’d now have unwanted company on Thursday nights. The ball games he liked to watch on TV? The beer drinking? Sitting around in his underwear, scratching his nuts while he thumbed the latest issue of *Playboy*? It was all coming to an end. From here on in he’d be stuck listening to the non-stop drone of her motor-mouth gossip. Tittle-tattle chatter about Clyde Sosinski’s affair with his secretary . . . Betty Antolic’s naughty lingerie, hanging on clothesline . . . the drunken bender Bob Ratz was on the night he crashed his Chrysler into the Piggly Wiggly sign on the corner of Main. Hell, yes, he was sorry. His summer was going to be as miserable as mine.

A herd of antelope rose from the grass and raced alongside the car at a gallop. They kept up pretty well for a while, then slowed and veered off toward the horizon and finally ambled to a stop. It was like they’d seen my face in the window and thought, *Oh, wait, wait! Whoa! Never mind. It’s just Casey on his way to the work farm. Poor kid.*

The old man looked into the rearview, trying to gauge the level of my misery. He wanted to make absolutely sure the *fuck-me* needle was taching at high end. When he saw my worried face, he eased back and smiled, breathing the whole thing in with sadistic glee. He could have saved a few bucks shipping me out to Uncle Bud's on a Greyhound, but that would have been too easy on me. He did it this way instead, so he could get in one last kick. Rub my nose in the dirt for a couple hundred miles.

Good God, Hal, my mother whined when he unveiled his big plan to her on Saturday afternoon. *Do you really have to waste the weekend driving that little brat all the way out there?* But the old man puffed up and got tough with her. He said he didn't trust me. He made up this cock-and-bull story about my "suspicious" behavior and convinced her I'd make a run for Denver if I got the chance. Jesus. I half expected him to tell her he'd caught me squirreling a c-note up my ass, too, and armed myself with a dangerous-looking pistol, carved from a bar of soap.

What a *douche*! No, he told her, puffing out his chest and raising one brow with Eliot Ness grittiness. He wasn't going to risk anything like that. Not at this point. He was going to make goddamned sure I got where I was supposed to be, even if he had to sit on me the entire way.

The antelope stared at me from the hilltop as if they knew what I was in for and somehow felt sorry for me in their softhearted antelope way. I raised my hand when they looked at me again, but they got smaller and smaller, and after a while they disappeared into the shimmering heat.

"You have no respect for other people," the old man droned, climbing back into his pulpit. "Why? Because you have no respect for yourself." His eyes were back in the mirror. "You understand this, right?"

I tugged down the bill of my ball cap so I wouldn't have to look at him.

"I'm talking to you, mister!"

I ignored his ridiculous tough-guy blather and closed my eyes. The sun was hot coming through the window, and I stuffed my hands in my pockets and huddled against the door like a man battling sub-arctic winds.

He saw I wasn't listening and started in with a brand-new arsenal of threats, but I blocked them out the same way I'd blocked out the others, thinking, *Live it up, man. Enjoy yourself. Because payback's coming for every last one of you bitches—including Uncle Bud, if he screws with me.*

I was trying to wish myself somewhere else. A future that didn't include parents or relatives or teachers or ministers. But it didn't work. The reality of where I was, where I was heading, was too strong to be denied or even deflected. Truth was, I was screwed. The summer was lost, and for the next three months I was my Uncle Bud's personal butt-boy. What they were doing to me was beyond the pale, and the only way I could get through it was to remind myself that the show wasn't over. I wouldn't be fourteen forever, I told myself. I'd outlast the you-know-what's. I'd lull them to sleep, and when they least expected it? *Thud*—a boot in the nuts!

I drifted off after a while, slipping into this deep dream where I was walking down a railroad bridge on a sunny morning with a bindle over my shoulder and a cigarette dangling from my lip. My crinkled eyes were smiling at the horizon, my mind alive in anticipation of the adventures that lay ahead. There were holes in my brogans, but each one was a badge. A happy reminder of all the places I'd come and gone.

When I woke up, I was sweating. I glanced out the window in a panic, wondering where I was, and noticed that the landscape had changed for the worst. There was no bridge. No railroad to hobo heaven. Just the endless, empty prairie, flat as a pool table, brown and all but treeless.

The old man was whistling away, tapping his fingers on the wheel. I thumbed up my ball cap and sneaked a look over his shoulder through the dusty windshield. I'd hoped to see something that might cheer me up, but instead my stomach dropped in a freefall. We were coming up on Uncle Bud's farm, the ass end of nowhere. The place of my summer detention.

The old white Victorian my aunt and uncle lived in sat high on a stubbled field with nothing around it for miles except a barn, some outbuildings, and a grove of gnarled cottonwoods. The driveway must have been half a mile long. The longest half-mile in the world, and the old man drove it good and slow, grinning the whole way. I'd seen the old prison movies, so it didn't take much to imagine the role I was about to play in this miserable drama. I was Casey Carlin, as myself, the young inmate falsely accused of high-crimes and misdemeanors, and what lay ahead of me were the cruelties of a life sentence in the bowels of the state penitentiary. The only question to which the plot begged an answer was, Would I survive? Would my time here break me? Or would I live to exact my revenge?

When we pulled up to the front of the porch, the old man started to say something important and redemptive. But I figured, *screw it!* I'd had two hundred miles of his rambling bullshit, and that was enough. So, as a last bit of defiance, I snatched my duffle and punched open the back door, and, when he demanded to know what I thought I was doing, I ignored the question and stomped across the dirt yard, his ball-less threats bouncing off my back.

The old man went on yelling as I trudged up the front steps to the house. But I pretended I couldn't hear him. Aunt Charlene was standing on the porch, and she held the screen door open as I walked into the kitchen then closed it again gently behind her. The old man kept up his squawking, I guess because he thought it was getting him somewhere. But all it managed to do was rankle my Uncle Bud, who'd been busy working on a piece of machinery behind the tool shed, and who stormed around the corner barking some choice words of his own.

"Who's the fuck's making all the racket, goddammit!"

Bud had a long heavy wrench in his hand and murder in his eyes. The second he started yelling the rest of the world went silent.

It was another scene out of the movies. The old man's eyes went googly-moogly when he saw his oafish brother lumbering out from behind the building, and he grinned, sheepishly, waving from behind the wheel like some runaway idiot who'd stolen a car. Bud, recognizing who the loudmouth was, lowered the wrench and hove up. His shoulders sagged and he shook his head, and the rest was two brothers trying to believe they were actually blood related.

"Come," Aunt Charlene said, putting her hand on my back and directing me away from the screen door. "I'll show you your room."

She led me up the back staircase to the attic where somebody had set up a cot. Next to it was an old end table on which sat a pink hurricane lamp. There was a wooden desk pressed against the wall and a straight back chair that should have matched but didn't. The rest was boxes and crates full of dusty books and old clothes and magazines.

I walked to the window, the plank floor creaking under my feet. Through the dirty glass I could see Uncle Bud and the old man exchanging words. I breathed in the musty, lung-cancer scent of the rafters, my chest tightened, my heart shrank, and I wanted to die.

I suspected the old man was warning Bud about me. Laying it on extra thick so there wouldn't be any doubt about how to manage my delinquent ass. But I knew from years of family gossip Uncle Bud wasn't the type to scare. So, if the old man was trying to make me look bad, it was only to prime the pump. Sharpen Bud up so he wouldn't think twice about clocking me if I got out of line.

You have my permission to come down on that little shit like a ton of bricks whenever you need to, I could imagine the old man saying. Hit for distance if you feel like it, Bud. You won't hurt my feelings.

I watched them talk. It was all business. I wondered what sort of deal the old man had struck to set up this knuckleheaded prisoner exchange, knowing there had never been any love lost between him and Bud. It had to be more than just a favor, I thought. The old man was desperate to get rid of me, and, though I couldn't be sure, I suspected he was paying Bud for his services as a jailer.

I watched them nod and shake hands. It was awkward, and there were no smiles. Just a lot of serious, meaningful looks. They spoke a moment longer and then it was over, and afterward the old man climbed back into his car. He didn't waste any time with niceties or long goodbyes. Nor did he bother to come looking for Aunt Charlene and me. He just cranked the engine, put the car in gear and sped away, hightailing it back to Trinidad, the same way we'd come. The dust raised by the wheels hung in the air, thin and brown like a stain against the sky.

Aunt Charlene still had her hand on my back, and I looked up and our eyes met through the thick lenses of her horn-rimmed glasses. I'd forgotten she was even there. I'd been so caught up with my own troubles I hadn't noticed the ugly little bruise on the side of her neck, blue leaning toward a funny shade of khaki. She asked me if I was hungry. I lied and said yes. I was afraid they'd put me to work if I wasn't busy doing something constructive, and food seemed the easiest way out.

Downstairs, Charlene showed me the chair that would be mine for the rest of the summer. It sat at the small, square kitchen table, between hers and Uncle Bud's, facing the big double sash window over the sink that looked out into the dirt postage stamp she called a yard. Her chair and Bud's chair were made of unvarnished wood, like the table. But mine, mine was chrome. Chrome with a vinyl seat covered in tiny pink flowers.

"Go on," she said, kindly. "Sit."

I did, wondering without hope, what had become of my life.

The kitchen windows were dressed in lace drapes with pull-down shades to soften the afternoon sun. The shades were yellow from all the years they'd hung there and decorated with braided drawstrings from which little red watering cans dangled. I stared at the watering cans as the terrible weight of exile settled onto my shoulders and the bitter taste of self-pity filled my mouth. My eyes started to well, but I refused to cry.

Charlene arranged a corned beef sandwich on a plate and put the plate in front of me. I picked it up just as Uncle Bud walked into the house.

"What the hell's this?"

He spoke to Aunt Charlene but nodded at me. Or the sandwich. I couldn't tell.

"I'm feeding the boy some lunch."

"Lunch!" Bud was a big man, tall and heavy and deeply tanned, and when he walked into the room it shrank by half its size. He considered the sandwich in my hand then raised his eyes to the yellow clock over the stove. "Lunch was three hours ago."

"I know, but—"

"You'll spoil his dinner."

I half-expected my uncle to snatch the sandwich from my hands and toss it to the dog. But they had no dog, so I was allowed to keep it. At least for the moment.

Still eyeing me, Bud went to the cupboard and took down a can of Bugler tobacco and a metal rolling machine. He set the items on the table and drew back his chair. But before he sat, he pulled a small sheaf of cigarette papers from a drawer under the sideboard. Soon he was churning out cigarettes like a factory worker. He was acting as if it didn't matter that I was having lunch when it wasn't lunchtime. But you could tell it did. You could tell it mattered a lot by the way he worked that machine. He cranked out those home-rolleds, one after another. But between finishing one and starting the next, he would sneak a sharp glance my way and give the machine a brutal, almost sadistic squeeze.

A month into my stay it occurred to me I was going to survive. It turned out that Uncle Bud, while every bit the hard-ass I'd pegged him to be, had no real interest in "straightening me out" as the old man would call it. We got along well, my Uncle Bud and me, and if my old man had seen us together, I'm happy to say he'd have shaken his head in despair. Yeah, I missed my guitar. And my girlfriend. But really, that was the worst of it. I had it easier here on the farm than I'd ever had it at home, so I tried to look at my time away as a kind of unexpected vacation.

Bud and Charlene weren't big talkers, but that was all right. I wasn't much of a listener. They both had health problems—Bud took blood thinners and walked on a cane when it suited him (favoring one leg one day, the other leg the next), and Charlene had vision problems that had her forever stumbling into walls or falling down stairs. So, they spent most of their time worrying about themselves, not me. Which, again, proved better than anything I'd ever had at home.

Now and then I'd picture my old man sitting in front of the tube with a smug look on his face, thinking I was out here doing hard labor on his brother's farm. But what the clueless sonofabitch didn't know (because Bud had never told him) was that the farm wasn't a working farm anymore and hadn't been for years. Yeah, Bud still kept a few chickens around the place. And a milk goat and a horse. But otherwise the barnyard was deserted, and the fields were unplowed owing to the orthopedic problems that kept him off his feet. Which meant, instead of waking up at the crack of dawn to slop the hogs or buck bales, the two of us would fuck off most of the day, fishing and shooting guns, or driving around the countryside with our elbows out the window, listening to hoedown music.

Turned out Uncle Bud was a big outdoorsman. I didn't know that before I came here. He owned a boat, a canoe, waders, fishing rods, a whole cabinet full of rifles and pistols and other backwoods crap. He laughed the first time he took down one of his guns, an old Marlin .22 carbine, and saw the greedy look on my face.

"You know anything about the woods, Klepto?" he said. "You ever shot a gun before? Pitched a lean-to? Made fire with a bow drill?"

"Klepto" was his nickname for me. He called me Klepto, and he called Aunt Charlene "Queenie Charlenie." I didn't like my nickname any more than Charlene liked hers, but with Bud there wasn't any point complaining. If he gave you a name, it stuck.

I shook my head.

He laughed and stuffed one of his home-rolleds between his fat, chapped lips. "You know anything about *anything*?" He watched me over the tip of the burning match. "Or was your old man, right?"

It was a deliberate attempt to tick me off, and it worked. Bud laughed all the harder when he saw my face darken. I stomped over and yanked the rifle from his hands and made like I could have shot him if I'd had a mind to, but all he did was double up and laugh. I stood there like some ball-scratching numbnut while tears streamed down his face. He laughed so hard he started to cough, then choke. Then he sobered up and pressed his sleeve to his eyes.

"Sit down," he said humorlessly, lifting the gun from my hands. "Before you hurt yourself."

It was our first breakthrough. Bud and me, we understood one another in a whole new way after that episode with the gun, and it wasn't long before we were close friends. The sky opened, just like the guy in the Bible says, and a shaft of light came down and threw itself over us in a bath of glory and we saw for the first time who we really were: brother and son to a clueless jackass. A man who considered us both losers.

Bud took me out plinking that weekend. He couldn't stand the thought of a boy my age not knowing how to handle a firearm and he was determined to rectify the deficiency. My old man would have blown his stack if he'd seen me with a gun in my hands, but Uncle Bud was different. Uncle Bud trusted me. I think he even believed in me.

We walked out to the fence line and set a bunch of rusty cans on the top rail and Bud handed me the .22 and encouraged me to blast away. Which I did. I didn't knock over a single can, which was embarrassing given my uncle's expert, if impatient, marksmanship advice. But all the same, he didn't give up on me the way my old man would have. He just kept on trying.

The next afternoon we abandoned the firing range and went out on the water in Bud's canoe. We were floating down a slow brown stretch of the Wagon Tongue River with fly rods in our hands when he looked over at me rather glumly and said, "You ain't any good at this here, either, are you?"

I couldn't blame him for being disappointed. We'd gone the better part of three hours without a strike, and it was clear I was some kind of serious bad luck charm. Bud said he'd never witnessed anything as pitiful as the likes of me and made a strong argument that even a retard could catch a fish if you put the worm on the hook for him. Harsh words, but I knew he meant well when he said them. I shrugged and told him I'd never been fishing before. I said I was as surprised as he was to find I wasn't any good at it.

"I ain't sure a single summer here is enough to save you, Klepto," he said, wearily, casting out his line. "But I guess we gotta try."

The next time we went fishing we dispensed with the finesse gear. The fly rods and canoe went back in the shed for safekeeping, and we rolled out the heavy artillery: Bud's beloved bass boat, *Cirrhopis of the River*. In his infinite wisdom, my uncle had come to the conclusion that I couldn't be taught a sophisticated art like fly fishing in a single summer, and that the natural world would be better off if I learned to spin cast instead. He soon learned I was as bad with a spoon and plug as I was with a fly.

The boat rocked at edge of the lake. The sun was hot, and Bud's straw hat sat low over his eyes. "You know, Klepto," he said, "your piscatory skills ain't worth a good goddamn, but I will say this—" He raised his rod and cast the shiny Panther Martin at the water. "You're all right company." He turned the crank. The bale clicked and he retrieved the line. He reeled the lure in slowly, jigging every couple of turns, then glanced at me and said, "You ain't half as bad as your old man says you are."

I made a visor of my hand. "You either."

Bud smirked, but the look on his face soon curdled and he set down his rod and pointed to the cooler at the back of the boat. "Fetch us a beer, smartass."

I did like he asked but hesitated at the last second wondering if he'd actually meant it when he'd said "us." He frowned. When he gave an order, he expected it to be carried out. He wasn't a man who asked twice. "Are you deaf, goddammit? What did I just say? Fetch us a goddamned beer!"

I dredged a can out of the cooler and he snatched it from my hand, brushing away the ice. He popped the tab and shoved it back at me.

"Suck up that foam before it spills, dipshit. I don't want jizz all over my boat."

I slurped at the side of the can while he grabbed a cold one for himself.

"Keep that container low, between your knees," he warned, sitting back against his seat. "John Law motors this way to pay us a hello, you hand it back to me, pronto. Got it?"

He closed his eyes and rolled the can across his forehead. His hand paused as if he might say something important or engage me in some man-to-man instruction regarding fishing or drinking. But then he just sat there, eyes shut.

The look on his face was like nothing I'd ever seen before, a kind of small but sublime smile, and when I understood what it was—complete and utter contentment—I couldn't help but be jealous. Uncle Bud was The Man, lord of his own domain, subject to no one. What's more, he knew it. He may have been my dad's younger brother, but he played second fiddle to nobody.

We finished the first beer and Bud collected the empties and sank them in the water, directing me to open two more. I did, and while I was working on my second, he had a third and a fourth.

The beer was good. It came on in an electric buzz, and lit up all the dark, empty places in my head. I closed my eyes and laughed, thinking about the old man, how he'd once said me and Bud were a lot alike, both thinking we were smarter than everybody else. He'd meant it as an insult, but I'd never been prouder of anything in my life.

"What's so fuckin' funny?"

I looked over. Bud was staring at me.

"Nothing."

He belched, fat lips flapping. "Goddamned blockhead." He shook his head. "Fruit didn't fall far from the tree, did it?" He snorted, raised the beer can to his mouth and paused, chuckling. "Your old man couldn't hold his liquor either."

I laughed along, and why not? I'd come to enjoy his insults. I didn't know what he had against my old man, but when it got right down to it I didn't particularly care. He was wrong about me, though. I wasn't at all like his dimwitted brother. And I'd prove it to him, too. I was serious about being somebody in this life. Being my own man, like he was. I just needed someone to come along and show me how. And now I had. I'd get better at fishing and hunting. Holding my liquor, too. He'd see. I'd show him I was more *his* nephew than I was *my father's* son. All I needed was a little practice.

By the end of July, the summer had begun to move too fast for my liking. But there was no slowing it down. With every passing day, I longed for the return of the one before, and every night, after I'd turned out the light in my attic bedroom, I'd lie awake on my cot, hands behind my head, dreading the time I'd be returned to my worthless parents.

One sweltering August afternoon out on the lake, Bud tossed me a home-rolled, and told me I'd done well that morning “ . . . *for a pussy-boy from the city.*”

He was referring to the snapper I'd killed with the fillet knife. We'd caught a stringer of yellow perch and tied them to the gunwale, and while we were lounging in our chairs, drinking beer, it attacked. The boat began rocking, for what seemed no good reason, but Bud knew right away it was a turtle. A big one.

“Sonofabitch is after the fish!” he cried, dropping his beer and stumbling over me to save the catch.

He grabbed the stringer chain with both hands and hoisted it dripping from the water, his face taut and red. He hadn't intended it, but the snapper came along with the half-eaten stringer of fish. Mauling the chain with its jaws, its huge claws raking at the air.

Bud dropped the line and the snapper hit the deck, going after him in a savage charge. I'd never seen a turtle so big or vicious in my life. It lunged at him, striking here and there, but missing each time, and it was luck—pure luck and nothing more—that I found the unsheathed knife near the tackle box, and even bigger luck that when I took a wild slash at its neck I hit home, all but decapitating the thing. Bud had been fending the prehistoric monster off with an oar, beating it about the head and shell to no effect, and somehow, in my panic, I saved the day. I struck the fatal blow. I'd acted out of fear, not courage. But afterward it didn't matter, and I didn't care, because I'd never felt so good in my life.

“Next time you hear me preaching about a sharp knife, you'll know why,” Uncle Bud said, kicking the dead animal in the snout with his steel-toed boot. He laughed like a madman. “Hell, boy, you dealt this sonofabitch a good one! Drove his nasty old self straight down to Turtle Hell! Woohoo!” He settled down, running out of breath. Shoulders falling flat and even under his fat, beet-colored head.

“Fetch us a couple of cold ones,” he said, reaching for a smoke, face going suddenly sober. “I believe the moment demands it.”

I did, and we knocked cans in an informal toast.

Bud chugged the first few swallows, then took a drag off his cigarette and lowered the can. He jutted his chin at the dead snapper. “We'll butcher that ornery fuck when we get home tonight.” He looked at me, a weary smile. “You ain't lived,” he said. “Till you've eaten turtle.”

I lit the cigarette he gave me and fanned out the flame, flicking the spent match into the river. I was feeling pretty good about myself. I'd never gotten into a fight with a wild animal before and killing the snapper had changed me in a way I couldn't explain. Made me stronger, somehow. Surer of myself. Or that's what I believed, anyway, and I was determined to hold onto that feeling as long as I could. I drew down hard on the smoke and let the nicotine infuse my lungs. Kept it there a moment, then breathed it out again. All that thrashing and snapping. Those flailing claws. Blood, spraying across the deck and Uncle Bud swinging that oar. Hell. It had all gotten to me. Hit me where I lived. I suppose I should have let the feeling settle and enjoyed it as long as I could. But the second it was over I wanted more. I wanted to kill again. Only something bigger this time, and even more dangerous.

After a long spell of silence, I confessed to Bud that I wouldn't mind coming back again next summer if he and Aunt Charlene would have me. But he was slumped in his seat with his hat pulled low over his eyes, his half-empty beer can propped on his gut, and I realized as soon as I said it, he hadn't heard me. He was passed out in the bow, snoring.

When we walked through the front door that evening, Aunt Charlene stepped away from the stove and looked at us timidly. "That fella come around again today, Bud?"

"What fella?"

"You know." Her voice went soft and secretive. "The disability fella."

Charlene was a nice lady, but she had two annoying habits. One, she was a klutz who couldn't stop stumbling into things. And two, she was pathetic.

Bud, who'd just lit up a smoke, pulled the burning weed from his mouth and frowned. "You tell him what I told you to tell him?"

"I did."

"And?"

"He said he needs to talk to *you*, not me."

Bud let go an exasperated sigh. "Goddammit, Queenie. Can't you just once handle things the way I say?"

"I tried, Bud, but—"

Bud mashed out his smoke in the tin ashtray on the sideboard and plopped down next to me at the table. His silence was always worse than his ranting, and it pissed me off that Charlene had put him in a mood over this insurance business after the outstanding day we'd had on the water. I wanted to talk about the snapper. Hear Bud tell how I'd saved him a gruesome mauling. But now the whole evening had all gone to hell, and when it went to hell with Bud, there was no saving it.

He pushed the plate away when Aunt Charlene set his dinner in front of him. So, we all sat there, saying nothing. Staring at three steaming piles of food as they went cold under our eyes. Bud eventually drew the plate back, and when he did, he dug in, attacking the roast beef and potatoes with an unhinged savagery. He stabbed and cut and sliced, and when he was finished gorging himself, he shoved the plate away, demanding Aunt Charlene clear it from sight so he wouldn't have to look at it.

I knew it was going to be a long night after that, so I asked if it would be okay if I went up to my room.

"Aren't you hungry?" Aunt Charlene asked.

I looked at her.

"Go," Uncle Bud said, "Get your worthless ass out of here."

I went upstairs and laid down on my cot and sulked. I didn't blame Uncle Bud for getting overheated about the insurance man. He'd told Charlene what to do, and she'd ignored him. You might not like what Bud told you to do, but you didn't ignore him. Not if you knew what was good for you.

I got out of bed and went to the window and looked down at the yard. It was blue in the moonlight. I pushed up the sash and stuck my head out and took a deep breath and closed my eyes. When I opened them again, I thought about my parents, wondering if they'd even recognize me anymore?

My attitude would throw them off, that's for sure. I was happy now—happy for the first time in my life—and for that alone they probably wouldn't believe what they saw. Yet, here I was, the boy they'd betrayed and sent away, *reformed*. Or, changed anyway. I still missed my guitar and my girl (though I suspected Caroline had given up on me by now and moved on to someone else), but that aside, I didn't care if I ever saw Trinidad, Colorado again. I was beginning to figure out who I was, and where I was going in this life, and all I knew was that by abandoning me to my Uncle Bud, my old man had made me stronger. Helped me see the world for what it truly was.

When I straggled downstairs the next morning, still half asleep, Aunt Charlene was cooking breakfast. She was wearing a pink robe, and there was an iridescent bruise under her left eye that I didn't notice until she turned to serve me my bacon and eggs.

"What happened to you?" I said, dragging my napkin across my lap.

"She tripped," Uncle Bud answered, peering over the top of his newspaper. "On that butt-ugly rug she insists on keeping in the bathroom." He looked at me. Sneered. "I kept telling her one of us was gonna break his neck someday. But she didn't believe me. Ain't that right, Queenie?"

Aunt Charlene said nothing. She slid Bud's bacon and eggs in front of him and stirred up a cup of instant for herself. When she sat down, she looked out the window with sorrowful eyes, as if she were nursing some terrible secret the rest of the world wouldn't understand. Not to be mean, but sometimes the way my aunt shuffled around the house, indulging her endless bruises, wearing her sad lost looks, I wanted to smack her a good one. Say, *Shape up, will you, Charlene! You're making everybody miserable!*

"Me and young Klepto here are going out to the lake again today," Bud said, rattling the paper. "You think you can get through the morning without falling down the well?" He drank from his coffee cup. "I can install a set of curb feelers on your shoes, if you like."

I laughed, but Aunt Charlene didn't find it funny. Her response was a grim, lightless stare.

Bud and I took off after breakfast and spent another quiet afternoon out of doors, away from my aunt and the rest of the world. But when evening fell and we were driving back home, the “disability fella” my Aunt Charlene was supposed to be holding at bay ambushed us a mile out from the farm. He’d parked behind a patch of ditch weed on a little-used side road. When we drove past, he cranked up his engine and pulled onto the gravel behind us, following our pickup at a polite but steady distance. Bud pretended he didn’t notice, but his movements grew more and more stiff.

“Klepto?”

“Yeah, Uncle Bud?”

“Reach back there and fetch me my cane.”

“Yessir.”

His hickory cane was in the rifle rack. I took it down and propped it beside his leg. When we pulled up to the house a couple of miles later, he checked the rearview and spit out the window. “Get your skinny ass inside,” he said. “And don’t come out unless I say so. Hear me?”

I nodded.

“Go.”

I went inside and watched from the kitchen window. The insurance man stepped out of his car and fit his fedora on his head and walked up to the pickup. Before he got there, Bud knocked open the door and thrust out his cane and made a mighty struggle of getting down out of the cab. The insurance man stopped and put his hand on the bed rail, unimpressed by Bud’s efforts, but still trying to be polite. He began saying something, falling back on expressive gestures to make his point. But Bud just stood there, staring at him like he was speaking a foreign language.

The insurance man paused to gather his breath and when he did Bud held up his hand. More words were exchanged, and Bud came out with something that took the man aback. Something hard, I guessed. Hard and ugly. The man straightened and started in again. But Bud was finished jawing. I knew the look, and I knew what it meant. He turned his back and hobbled away.

I rushed to the pantry and rifled the shelves, sorting through cans and boxes and sacks of flour, until I found what I needed. Aunt Charlene was upstairs in the bath, trying to take the swelling down in her legs, and that was probably for the best, given Bud's attitude. There was a lot of unpleasantness going on and getting caught in the middle of it wouldn't have done any of us any good, especially Charlene.

I went to the window and peered out. I didn't see Bud or the insurance man, and that was exactly what I'd hoped for. They must have wandered into the shed, the insurance man refusing to be dismissed. But it didn't really matter to me where they were or what they were doing as long as they stayed where they were long enough for me to do what needed to be done.

"Sonofabitch," Bud muttered when he bulled into the house fifteen minutes later, screen door clattering behind him.

"Sonofafuckingbitch."

He hauled up and went to the window, fingering back the lace curtain. He didn't see me standing by the stairs, but I could see him clearly. His face was red and swollen, and his shoulders were trembling with rage.

"Goddamned, pencil-necked bastard," he swore under his breath. "You ever come back here—"

He flung his cane and across the kitchen and it struck a cupboard and clattered to the linoleum.

I stepped forward, cautiously. "He *won't* be coming back."

"Eh?" Bud wheeled and locked his eyes on me. He was simmering with rage.

"He won't be coming back," I said, voice low so Aunt Charlene wouldn't hear. "Not anytime soon, anyway."

Bud kept staring at me, lips curled back on his ugly yellow teeth.

"His fuel line's gonna clog up," I said, producing the empty jug of corn syrup I'd hidden behind my back. I held the jug up so he could see it better. "Most likely out on the highway. Before he ever even gets home."

Bud blinked, and his expression softened.

I told him I wouldn't be all that surprised if the insurance man's car ended up in the shop needing a valve job. Or worse. I told him I thought it would probably be a good long time, if ever, before we saw the jerk again.

Bud broke into a broad hateful grin. Then he laughed. He strutted up to me and gave me a hard but affectionate punch in the arm. Still laughing, he snared me in a headlock. "You're all right, Klepto," he said, rubbing his thick knuckles on my sunburned skull. "You ain't half the peckerhead your old man says you are."

Those were the nicest words I'd heard all summer, and I loved Uncle Bud for saying them. They were, in their own way, the nicest compliment anyone had ever given me.

There was a hardware store calendar hanging from a tack on the landing of the back staircase. It featured colorful photos of implements every sensible farmer would want to own if he had the money. When I first moved in with my aunt and uncle, I checked this calendar every morning on my way downstairs to breakfast, calculating with brooding anger the days until my release. But then, over the months, the impossible seemed to happen. I began to enjoy my life with Uncle Bud and Aunt Charlene, and after a while the days I despaired over were the ones that lay ahead, the worst of them the day I would be repatriated with my parents. So, when Bud blundered into the kitchen that evening with the news my father would be coming for me the following day, I nearly cried.

"Just got off the blower with your old man," he announced blandly, trying to sound unconcerned. "Tomorrow's your last day here. He's coming to pick you up sometime late in the afternoon." He dropped down in his chair, passing his hand over the bristle of his short gray hair. "Time sure flies," he muttered. "Don't it?"

Aunt Charlene was in the yard, taking the wash off the clothesline. When she backed through the screen door carrying her wicker laundry basket and turned and saw our faces, she came to a quick halt and asked what was wrong. "Has something happened?" she said. "What's the matter?"

Bud dismissed her with a wave of his hand. "*Harold* called. Says he's comin' for Klepto tomorrow."

"I thought it was supposed to be next week."

"It was. Somethin' come up in the meantime, I guess."

Aunt Charlene made one of her sad faces and began to tell me how sorry she was. How much she and Uncle Bud would miss me, and what a good time we all had while I was here. But I didn't want to hear it. She was blubbing up a storm, talking all kinds of embarrassing stuff, and the more she said the worse I felt. I did my best to play it cool, like Uncle Bud would have. But everything inside me was going *whapatanwhapatanwhapata*—like cement in a mixer. I wanted to kill my old man. Strangle him with my bare hands.

"Piss on it," Bud said, abruptly. "If it's the boy's last goddamn night on the spread, I, for one, ain't gonna sit around moping. Get your melancholy asses up off those chairs. Let's get the hell out of here. Carnival's still in town, ain't it? Let's go have some fun."

I thought he was joking, but I should have known better. Uncle Bud wasn't clever enough to make a joke that good. He told Charlene to run upstairs and put on something presentable then turned to me and asked if the shirt I was wearing was clean. I told him it was, it had just come out of the wash, and he said good and pronounced me fit for travel.

We waited. But when Charlene reappeared, Bud winced.

"That's what you're wearing?"

Charlene lowered her eyes. You could see she wasn't sure where the outfit had taken a wrong turn. She was dressed in a print smock and tennis shoes, her gray hair knotted up in a blue scarf. "If you don't like it," she said, modestly, I can change into something else."

"Please do." Bud snorted. "Change into Gina Lollobrigida, if you don't mind!"

He thought this remark funny and laughed a good one over it. I laughed too, though inside I was still fuming over the news of my old man's unexpected return, cheating me of my last week here on the farm.

Aunt Charlene dragged a shawl over her shoulders, which made her look even more pathetic than before. But Uncle Bud had already lost interest.

"Pile into the pickup!" he ordered, rising from his chair. "We're leaving."

I palmed the wristwatch when the carnie turned his back. It was on display with at least ten others, all similar in style and color. I slipped it in my pocket when he glanced down to rummage through the change he kept in his canvas apron. The sign next to the watches said, “Win a Watch! Four Plays for a Quarter!” and he was breaking a five for this sucker in a ball cap and windbreaker standing next to me.

The watch was Jap junk—the kind of garbage they wouldn’t even sell in the dime store back home—but it didn’t matter. I had to have one.

I was in and out before anyone knew it, and the second the watch was in my pocket, I strolled off down the midway with a lazy smile, as if I’d lost interest in the game and decided to move on. I was sure I’d gotten away clean. But then, out of nowhere, the carnie came up and grabbed my arm and twisted it behind my back. I turned, and he smiled, meanly. Like he’d caught a great big fish that he meant to gut and fry over an open fire. He tossed back his long oily bangs. Laughed as I tried to lurch free.

He raised his chin and shouted to one of his carnie buddies.

“Hey, Buzz! Lookie here! Caught us a little thief! Sneaky little thief!”

The second carnie, Buzz, was working the Zipper ride. He had his hand on the lever that guided the speed of the machine. He was smoking a cigarette. A real cigarette with a filter. He spoke through clenched teeth, which were stained and broken, and the store-bought smoke rode up and down on his lips.

“Whatcha gonna do with him?”

“I dunno.”

The carnie was twisting my arm, all the while trying to sink his hand in my pocket so he could retrieve the watch. I tried as hard as I could to escape, but the bastard had me dead to rights, and all I could think was, *This is it. They’re gonna throw a burlap sack over your head, Casey, nail you up in a painted box and haul your sorry ass away to the salt mines. You’re done.*

The noise and music and metallic cries of the heavy machines were so loud in my ears, I couldn't hear my own screams. But then the noise died, and the crowd scattered, and I looked over my shoulder and saw my Uncle Bud charging toward me. Knocking people aside. There was a murderous look on his face, and I knew the goodwill I'd built up over the course of the summer had just flown out the window. My uncle had seen me for what I truly was, and he was going to teach me the lesson the old man hoped he would.

But I was wrong. It wasn't me Bud was after. It was the carnie, who had also seen him, and who had ceased smiling, and was in the midst of explaining how I'd stolen a watch when Bud dropped him with a stiff crack of his fist. The carnie crumpled to the grass, conscious but only just so, and only for a moment because Bud wasn't finished. He mauled the carnie, first with his fists, then with a barrage of savage kicks, laying into him the way he did the corpse of the dead snapper. When it was over, the other carnies had to lift him into a wheelbarrow and roll him away.

I'd never seen a man so blind with rage as my Uncle Bud. The ground underfoot trembled as he beat the carnie, and people screamed and ran off in all directions when he rose, sweating, and glared at them. It was a terrible thing to witness. Terrible.

Uncle Bud said nothing the whole drive home. Aunt Charlene put her shawl around my shoulder and held me close. She said nothing either.

Back in the house, Uncle Bud broke the impasse. "The nerve of that sonofabitch. He's lucky I didn't break his goddamned neck."

Bud had broken everything else on the carnie, so I don't know why he was worried about the man's neck. But he was right. The guy was lucky.

Aunt Charlene asked him please not to talk that way, but her back-sassing only made things worse. He shot her an unforgiving glare, mouthing something I couldn't quite make out.

"The boy doesn't need to hear language like that," she stuttered, holding her ground.

"Oh, really?" Bud propped his elbows on the table. His face turned different shades of red. "You're an expert in this now, too, huh? Well, what does the boy need to hear? Huh, Queenie? Why don't you inform my ignorant ass?"

“He needs to hear we’re his friends.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“It means he needs to know we love him but can’t have him breaking the law. He shouldn’t steal and be left to think he can get away with it.”

The meaning of the conversation seemed to reach beyond the watch, and Uncle Bud fixed on her the same way he’d fixed on the carnie. The same murderous way he’d looked at that nosey insurance agent.

“Go to bed, Klepto.”

I went.

Their voices fell then rose; whispers turned into shouts. I’d never heard my Aunt Charlene get up on her hind legs the way she did that night, and I might have admired her moxie if what she was saying hadn’t pissed me off so badly. She accused me of being a thief, and a delinquent, and said the carnie hadn’t done anything wrong. She said I’d stolen the watch and deserved to be punished, and that I needed to be punished if I ever hoped to learn anything. But Bud only hollered for her to shut up. *SHUT UP!*

She brought up the insurance man, the disability checks. Tax returns and other stuff. Money matters I knew nothing about and had no wish to know anything about. I lay on my cot in the dark, fingering the stolen watch as they tore into one another, and finally I couldn’t listen anymore. I pulled the pillow over my head and closed my eyes.

The next morning when I wandered into the kitchen for breakfast and saw Charlene’s split lip and black eye, I knew I should have felt bad. But I didn’t. Whatever she walked into after I went to bed was her own damned fault, and she could learn to live with it the same way she learned to live with all her other miserable accidents. She’d talked dirt about me. Come down all judgmental and sanctimonious on Uncle Bud. I felt sorry she was a klutz and couldn’t keep from falling down stairs or tripping on rugs, but that was as far as my sympathy went. I had my own problems to deal with now. There was no room in my heart to feel sorry for anybody else.

Getting it Down | Anna Schott

An essay in two parts: the first, written by my friend Ken, is about me. The second, written by me after he died, is about him.

Anna at Four Years of Age
by Ken Ellyson
Spectrum, 1978

"She was a little bright wave of willfulness, so abandoned to her impulses, so white and smooth as she lay at rest, so startling as she flashed her naked limbs about. But she was growing too old for a young man to undress."

—D. H. Lawrence *"The Old Adam"*

1.

Anna stood at the window, resting her head at the sill. I came and kneeled beside her. "What are you doing?" I asked. "Calling Mischa," she said – then called "Mischa, Mischa," in a tiny voice.

"He can't hear you unless you call louder," I said; I yelled "Mischa" as loud as I could, then we listened, but no one answered.

Anna gazed out the window with an abstract look in her eye, and said dreamily, "Maybe he's dead."

"Maybe," I said, "but I doubt it."

She held that dreamy look for a moment, then grinned slyly and looked at me from the corner of her eye.

"He's not dead, Ken," she said, and hit me on the shoulder and ran.

2.

For a long time her favorite trick was to pull her pants down and waggle her butt in my face – nothing delighted her so much as a little slap on the butt, or an ogre-ish spanking from me with lots of noise and yelling. But one day, in an excess of excitement, while I was sitting in the front yard of her house, she ran out and pulled her pants down. I ignored her, and she said “Watch, Ken, I’m going to pee on the sidewalk.” I said “So what?” and looked away. She said “Did you pee on the sidewalk when you were little?”

I said “No.”

“Would your mommy get mad at you?”

“If I had done it she would have been mad.”

“Look,” she said, “I’m peeing on the sidewalk,” and I looked and she was. She wasn’t looking at me, she was watching the pee run down the walk. I allowed myself to look away, embarrassed.

She stood up and pulled up her pants and then we went into the house.

3.

Once when Anna’s grandmother was over, there was an argument about grandmothers. Her grandmother had had strokes and was in a wheelchair; her memory was very faulty. While Anna’s father was talking to her grandmother, Anna came in. She listened for a bit, then in a pause she asked her father “Do *you* have a grandma?” He said “I had a grandma but now she’s dead.” Anna began to ask “how did she die?” but her grandmother cut her off, saying irritably “she’s not dead, she’s not dead.” Anna looked at her, then back to her father, who said “She is dead, Mother; remember? She died 15 years ago.”

“She’s not dead.”

“Yes, she is dead.”

“She is *not* dead.”

Anna turned her head from one to the other, looking frightened. Her father said to her in a quieter voice: “My grandmother *is* dead, Anna,” and though Anna looked at her grandmother, there was no more argument. Anna left the room looking worried, and there was no more heard on the subject that day. But late at night she came crying into her parents’ bedroom, and would only be comforted by her mother, and said she had had a dream about her grandma being dead – “A big dog took her away,” she said.

Getting it Down

Ken moved into my parents' house in 1977, when I was four years old. He must have been about eighteen. His own parents, back in Georgia, had kicked him out after he told them he was gay. He moved to California and enrolled as a writing student at the small college where my father was a teacher. He was one of the brightest students at the college and a brilliant writer. It was an unusual school in some ways, where students and teachers often became friends. My father brought Ken home one day to meet the family, and not long afterward he moved in. He lived with us, in the spare room downstairs, until he graduated.

I remember him at first as being full of fun – almost too wild, unlike other adults, and more like me. I remember how I would prance naked in front of him, begging him to chase me, which he did—tackling and tickling me until I wept with exhaustion. It occurs to me now that some might think he was a bit inappropriate in his physical dealings with a four-year-old girl.

We were too alike. In our wildness, we indulged every impulse. It was exhilarating, but as a little kid I couldn’t self-regulate, and Ken didn’t regulate me at all. Finally, to my disappointment (and secret relief) my mother told him that he shouldn’t be so rough with me, that though I

screamed in delight I was also afraid . . . and there was an end to our fun.

Ken moved to San Francisco after college. This was in the early '80s, during the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the Castro. After a few years in San Francisco, when I was about eleven, he moved back to our town.

He came over to the house one afternoon. I was shy to greet him at first, but his loud laugh and affectionate behavior soon put me at ease. Besides, he was someone I had lived with, and loved, growing up.

My mother served some food. We stood around on the patio and ate. We joked around for a while. Ken told wild stories about all the boyfriends he'd had in the city, then became quiet.

"Pleasure has its price though right?" he said. Then: "I got the virus."

My parents looked grim. I didn't understand.

"A disease for faggots" he explained. "Punishment for giving good blow jobs. I'll die of it, someday, but not for a long time."

I looked at him. He was smiling.

"A long time," he said again, "and definitely not until after you're all grown up, which is like, *forever*, right?"

I smiled back.

We spent a lot of time together after that. I was glad to have a grown-up friend who took me seriously, although he would often tease me, in a softly mocking tone, with his barely discernible Georgia accent. But he was big-hearted. Physically he was slight and wiry, but everything else about him was big. The way he'd throw his head back and laugh, a huge, loud laugh. He was quick and bright and loved to talk. And when I talked he'd lean in and listen, giving me his full attention. He was affectionate and persuasive and flirted with everyone. Sometimes, as a kind of game, he'd try to convince his straight male friends to fool around with him. Sometimes he'd succeed, too.

My parents would give dinner parties for the teachers and students at the college, where Ken's genius – not as a seducer – but as thinker and writer, was widely acknowledged. Everyone would come over. My mother would cook. There would be wine. The adults ate and drank and talked about music and movies and books and art while I sat and listened. Mostly everyone was staid and well-behaved, but then there was Ken. He was never drunk but was invariably loud, almost wild. He laughed and made everyone else laugh. One night he came over for dinner with some other students – a couple. They had given him a ride in their truck.

"I got to sit in the middle," said Ken, as they came into the house. "I gave them both handjobs on the drive here." He threw back his head and laughed. The couple looked startled, a little embarrassed. I stared, embarrassed myself. I wasn't sure if he was joking, but I hoped not.

I guess Ken was something like a big brother, one who doted on me. When I went away to violin camp in the summers he would send me cards – one card a week for the eight weeks that I was gone. Inside the cards, he would write about what he'd been doing that week, often with little cartoon-like drawings to illustrate. His words (and drawings) were silly and sometimes obscene, but his tone was always lively and affectionate. I was touched by these efforts to amuse me; I felt the luck of it.

And he was generous. Later, when I'd gone off to college, he insisted on sending me fifty dollars a month of "free" money. "It's for you to do whatever you want with," he said. "Throw it away, burn it, I don't care. I'm just sorry I can't send more."

As I grew older our relationship changed a little – I thought he was cute and he knew it. He started holding my hand when we walked or putting his arm around me. "Can I be your *boyfriend*?" he'd say, mercilessly, as I blushed to my ears and stared at the ground. I hated him then, because I knew, as a girl, how safe I was. For a few years, I wanted nothing more than to be a boy, a cute one, who Ken would actually be interested in.

In junior high, I was learning that to be anything other than homophobic was unacceptable. I found that I couldn't relate to the

other kids. I started cutting classes. Some stoners had shown me where there was a hole in the fence behind the track field. At lunchtime, I'd make sure that no one was watching, then squeeze through the hole and walk downtown to the library where Ken had a part-time job doing something that didn't seem to require much attention. I'd hang out in his cubicle, talk to him about boys, or read if he had work to do. On weekends, we'd go hiking. Later, in high school, I had boyfriends. I'd bring them over to Ken's apartment. I wanted to show him off. And it was a test: "This is my cool, cute, brilliant – *gay* friend. If *he* doesn't love you then I certainly can't." I was proud and defensive of him when it seemed like everyone in the world was a bigot. Alone with Ken, I'd ask: "Well? Isn't he cute? Will he do?"

Ken despised officiousness and taught me to laugh at prudery. We would act deliberately obscene if we sensed a prude or phony in our midst. He might say something like: "So, I was making out with my boyfriend last night . . ." and then wink at me. In the mid-eighties, this was provocative enough to get him beaten up.

"Did you blow him?" I'd ask, thrilled at my own audacity. We'd stop talking and watch for a reaction. And sure enough, expressions would harden – eyes would narrow, lips purse in disapproval. It was confirmation that they deserved it. It was fun and kind of pathetic all at once for us to do this but, most important, it was defiant. An attempt to "own it," when owning it meant being attacked, ostracized, despised.

That kind of goofing around was in more or less innocent fun, but as Ken got sicker he started to become unpleasant. His personality, or the part of his personality that might depend on being in good health and not being in pain had changed. He grew thinner and more and more irritable.

But his laugh was still loud. And he still showed me flashes of his old affection.

He was very thoughtful and deliberate about dying, or the process, which took several years, of coming to die. And he was thoughtful and deliberate in the ways that he tried to prepare me.

I remember one time when we were hiking up in the mountains a couple of years before he died. We were halfway up a switchback on

Rattlesnake Trail and had stopped to catch our breath. We sat down on a large rock that looked out over the canyon. We sat close together. I leaned my head on his shoulder. He was quiet for a moment, then pulled out his wallet and started looking through it.

“Look, I’m a member,” he said and handed me what looked like a business card. I looked. The card had a drawing of a tree on it, and said “Hemlock Society.”

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“It’s a pill to help me die,” he said.

“Oh.”

“It’s the only club that would have me,” he added and laughed.

Eventually, he began to get really sick. The disease was attacking his nervous system. But he continued to work at the library while living, very thriftily, in a room that he rented from a friend. He had plenty of friends who would have helped him, but he was adamant about being self-sufficient. He was saving up to buy a motorcycle. Something he had always wanted. He brought it over one day and gave me a ride around the block. It was a big, red, ugly thing. Expensive. He looked like hell, sitting on it, weak and emaciated. I was afraid we’d fall off. After a couple of months, he became too sick to ride. He still worked at the library, though. He wanted to keep working as long as he could, he said, so that he could “pay off the bike in time.”

Ken went downhill fast after he paid off the bike. He was dizzy, in pain, could barely stand. He was thirty-six. I was nineteen and had just gone back to Ohio for my second year of music school. I had been unsure about leaving. “No,” he had said. “You go. Maybe I’ll come visit. We can molest all of the cute boys.”

Back at home, my mother had started to make the rounds of her doctor friends, one of whom agreed to give her some morphine, which she delivered regularly to Ken – sometimes along with soup. It wasn’t long before he was beyond the soup. Finally, he called me at school to say goodbye – although he didn’t say it – not in so many words. I

pretended not to know why he was calling. I asked if I could come home and see him.

"I'm too sick," he said. "I don't want you to see me like this. And I don't want to see anybody anyway."

"Well, I'll be home for spring break," I said. "Maybe you'll be feeling better by then."

He said something, jokingly – that stranger things had happened, maybe – and we hung up.

The next day, he wrote a – very affectionate – note to my dad, who he had made executor of his will, asking him to call the funeral home, where he'd already arranged things. He waited for his friend to go out. Then he lay down on his bed with the note in his hand and took the pill.

I tried then, and still do try although without much success, to imagine what that must have been like – how he could have had the wherewithal to put things in order, to pay off the bike, to obtain and set aside the pill, to arrange with the funeral home, to write the note to my dad, to wait until his friend went out, to think of everything . . . but most of all, and what troubles me the most, although I admire it too, is how he did *it* – how he died, entirely alone.

My dad told me recently how a couple of guys from the funeral home had come in a big car to take Ken away. They put on their gloves before touching him, but even then they were uncomfortable, because they knew he'd had AIDS. "It was very awkward," said my dad. "I can still remember the look on the younger guy's face."

When Ken died, I sort of dissolved. I dropped out of school and went home. Some days were harder than others. At night I would write. I wrote down every conversation with Ken that I could remember. To my surprise and relief, I could still hear him speak, his voice, as I wrote.

I wrote about him for a few months and then stopped. There was a lot to think about and write and remember. It hurt when I realized that I couldn't remember anything more. The memory is finite, I guess, in the way that a person can live on in your mind, but only up until a certain

point. I had a good fifty pages though, now lost, of him – everything I could remember.

I'd gotten it, too. I'd gotten him down.

Santa Always Blows His Cover |

Alex Z. Salinas

It was Christmas 1995 when Mom burnt the bacon and Dad was just getting home. I tore open the packaging to the *Mortal Kombat*-brand plastic ship and Ray pulled a puppy out of a box.

“Ruby!” he announced, holding up the furry dog he’d dreamt of since summer.

“Where’s Liu Kang and Raiden?” I asked out loud, the question meant for Mom. For a child on Christmas day, what are toy vehicles without action figures to steer them?

“Your mom shopped around everywhere for that thing, so knock it off,” Dad answered in his oil-stained uniform. “Now let’s eat.”

After breakfast—about 45 pancakes Mom had stirred up for us since she fed us like linebackers—we were corralled to the garage where there were two new bicycles, mine jet black, Ray’s bright green.

Fifteen seconds later Ray crashed into the oak tree in our front yard. He came away with scraped knees, a split lip, the indignity of knowing that the next-door neighbor girls had watched him cry.

I was older than him by three years, so I stayed outside riding in circles, round and round, *wheel!* I showed off the training I’d received from my best friend, Jordan, who was white. Of course, that fool had had a bike since the age of three.

The thing about Christmas, for the longest time, was how Mom always burnt the bacon and how now, no one’s around to do it, so I burn my own. I know my wife hates it, barely tolerates it, but she understands the fragile thread that’s there. The smell.

Ray and I send each other \$50 gift cards every year. We believe it an even exchange, efficiency at its finest, although last December I texted him what’s the point if in the end there’s a zero balance.

“Good point,” he responded. Followed by a thumbs-up emoji.

A shrugging-man emoji.

I know he gets torn up about the holidays the same way as I do, Ray, but this year I’ll send him \$100. Surprise him.

He’ll spend the extra dough on booze, maybe new shoes, videogames. Most likely he’ll save some of it. His wife manages their budget.

And then in a few months, probably in March, when the sun starts frying us, I'll wonder to myself during a quiet stroll, *Hey, man, why the hell didn't you just buy him a plane ticket? Invite 'em over. It's the least you could've done, you cheap, lazy bastard. Mom and Dad would be so proud of you right now. So proud.*

Maybe next year. Yeah, definitely next year.

Remember Goliad | Luke Neftali Villafranca

The wind is subtle. I imagine her whisper as I stand alone in Goliad Plaza. I remember the press of her hand against my chest after we danced. We trusted each other a little more each second as people watched her spin again and again to a Tejano song whose name I wish I knew, today. I'd sing it to myself, now.

But nevermind me.

It's quiet, this afternoon. On the oak dance-floor that Saturday night, too long ago, her voice sounded like music after the song. Her voice still sounds that way in my dreams. Her walk had rhythm — perfect purpose, purity.

People say it's getting more dangerous each day, everywhere, especially along the Rio Grande of the Texican Border. That's what our fathers and our grandfathers have said at the barbershop on Main Street.

I just say so because I've been there — to the classic barbershop with its jazz on the radio and its "Texas Tales" on the bookshelf — as well as to Progreso, Reynosa, Piedras Negras, Mexico — for a prayer, for a party, for a prize-fight or two.

But I haven't heard from my dance-partner in years. I won't say her name. Names are too important to even write down, sometimes.

Sometimes, I wonder why I ever talk at all. No one's ever here long enough to understand, anyway. Thank God.

Treehouse | John Bonanni

I look at the ten-inch bolts I just purchased. They are heavy, rust resistant steel rods with a screw end with octagonal nuts and a square head on the other end. I wonder if they are strong enough to hold the four-by-four posts that protrude past the back end of the two door Jeep Cherokee. The vehicle that delivers the children to hockey practice, playdates, church, school, and baseball is unique. It is one of the last Cherokees made with a manual transmission. One of the last vehicles that celebrates the indomitable character of adventure.

I walk the two acres of wooded area past the clearing where the house was built years before me. I step over fallen trees, rotting trunks, tons of leaves dead from countless seasons of winter. I search for rocks, boulders really, large and heavy enough to use as a base to prevent the posts from shifting once they stand rigid and strong. I find them, one by one, and place them in the wheelbarrow I purchased when I first bought the house. Every homeowner needs one, I figured, just like a lawn tractor, power washer, hedge trimmer and a host of various garden tools. Suburban living encourages cautious jaunts into agriculture, forestry, conservation, all supported by house accounts with Home Depot and Hollandia Nursery.

I am building a playground from scratch. I don't want the prepackaged, precut Gymboree available to be delivered and installed by a professional. I want permanence, a claim to settlement, a stake in destiny.

I am building a presence of my fatherhood.

I slide the sheets of exterior plywood that will become the subflooring of the treehouse from the Jeep. I unload bags of quick-dry cement that will form the pilings into which the posts will rest. I cut sailing canvas in triangular shapes and tie them to available branches of the three swamp maple trees that will form the outside perimeter of the treehouse. I drill holes into the posts to accept the bolts, pour mixed cement into the holes I had dug earlier to fit the posts, level and secure them with temporary lean-to supports until the cement cures. I place the heavy boulders at each post, making sure they rest against them to

secure their move even more. I secure two-by-six boards on the sides near the tops of the posts to form a box ten feet high. I add more joists and lay down the exterior plywood sheets. Once I can stand on the new floor, I secure a rung ladder for access to the floor. I add more exterior plywood sideways to create a barrier where my son and my daughter could peer out safely. The canvas canopies move as the swamp maples bow to the wind, but the treehouse stands, rigid and strong.

I dig a trench from the back deck of the house to one of the posts of the treehouse. I lay a PVC pipe across the length of the trench and thread electric cable through the pipe. I connect the cable to the outlet near the deck and install an exterior outlet on the inside wall of the treehouse. I place exterior, waterproof floor lamps illuminating upwards, lighting the canvas and providing ambient light.

My son and my daughter play in the treehouse for years. They hide and seek, fight imaginary wars, have a thousand picnics, sleep a hundred nights in sleeping bags with their friends. I spend more time commuting to work than living with my family, and those workdays provide a comfortable living for them. I am not at home enough, but the treehouse becomes my presence while I am away at work. It gives them adventure, invention, creativity. They imagine, they playact. On those summer nights when I have an opportunity to spend time on the deck, I hear them laugh and talk in their hideaway with their friends, the warm light casting the shadows of their movement against the canvas above them. Then I hear them squeal when I switch off the power to the treehouse lights. Sometimes, that is how they know I am home.

When the children are older, I add a tire tied to a gym rope and secure it to the largest branch of one of the swamp maples. I cut out a hinged opening of the sidewall of the treehouse, so they can swing off and land on the lawn below. They play for hours. The backyard is a true playground, a workshop for child play, and they busy themselves well into the late summer nights conjuring up scenarios, enacting situations, planning strategies.

The treehouse is their sanctuary. It watches over them, allows them to explore, but in a way that protects them. If they fall from the upper level, they land on soft ground. I make sure the ground near the

structure is free from rocks, branches, sharp edges. I install a barrier fence around the perimeter of the treehouse. I insulate the power source from their touch. I pad the interior walls, the floor. The treehouse is the gathering place for the children of the area, the starting point for expeditions conducted through murky woodlands into the next clearing of the neighboring houses. At times there are as many as ten of them climbing, playing, peering out like sea pirates. I never worry about the treehouse's durability. It remains, rigid and strong.

Years later, my son begins to mow that lawn. He is careful, methodical. He attempts designs, spends hours cutting linear arrangements into the landscape. He spends less time in the treehouse and more on the riding mower and homework. My daughter and her friends take charge of the treehouse. Worms and cricket trays are replaced by tea service, paint brushes and illustration boards. Goldfish cracker lunches sustain their energies.

Both love to catch a baseball. I throw carefully and evenly. One to my son then one to my daughter. I am always aware of fairness, of equal treatment. My son could throw faster, but my daughter could catch with her right hand. Then it is time for my daughter to mow the lawn. She drives the mower fast, taking curves that tilt the machine like a muscle car.

Years pass and the treehouse loses its occupants, but we keep it there, just in case. Just in case we want to go back to our innocence.

Growing green with moss at its concrete base, its once bright canvas triangles threadbare and yellowed, the treehouse stands, still rigid and strong, survivor of rain and snow and wind and cold. It is now worn, abandoned except for the cat, who finds it a perfect perch from which to survey squirrel, opossum, and raccoon. The occasional visitation by a wandering deer forages the outcroppings from the large rocks at the base of the treehouse now firmly embedded in the ground.

I suspect a change, like one feels from the first chill in the wind of a fall afternoon. I sense a loss of virtue, righteousness, *simpatico* with the world. Inside, the fireplace is comforting, an oasis of contentment, a primal affirmation of good and right. I want my son and my daughter to be here always in this moment of living; secure and safe by this

primitive comfort by fire. I wonder how many times this will happen. I wonder how long this anomaly will last.

The treehouse is now worn, green with moss and abandoned.

My son goes off to college. His bedroom is empty of its occupant and filled with the things of his life as I knew it. But they are of a baby, and a child, not of a young man. My daughter is growing too, and she adds to the things of her life. The family unit is still there, strong as ever, just with a longer tether.

We still return to moments of connection. When I inspect the freshness of the fruit bowl, I discover an overripe orange or apple. My daughter wants me to pitch the fruit to her, so she could swing at it and watch it disintegrate upon impact. We giggle at the sight of the spoiled fruit exploding into the air. I remember that sense of abandon, of perfect freedom, living and loving unabashedly and passionately, savoring the joy of my own children. It reminds me of when I would turn out the lights in the treehouse and generate screams and squeals of surprise, only to hear laughter when I turned the lights back on. I thought of how much control I once had in and of their world, their well-being.

And every day, I feel less able, less capable, like the aging treehouse, slowly witnessing its own demise, but still visible, still rigid and strong.

My son and daughter are now on their own. The tether is now in a text or in a weekend visit. But there is no one left in that home made by the heart, by the tenacity to create something from scratch, to build from sticks and hardware carried in an old Jeep.

The treehouse sidewalls are beginning to warp. Some eyelets on the canvas triangles have ripped away from the corners, making the canvas flap in the wind with more ferocity, as if they are releasing their restriction and are violently pulling repeatedly to free themselves from the ties. The cement is revealing cracks from shrinkage. The posts could use a creosote application.

My children are adults, and the little affections of childhood, the hot cocoa at the Corner Pub that embraced us with a secure and warming

confirmation of things being right with the world are no longer attainable. This is not because they have changed.

It is because I haven't, and I don't want to.

It is because my stake, my security, my comfort has been being a father. I am a father in advice, in direction, in decision, in dependability. I pitch the ball when needed. I lock the door at night. I change the tires that are worn. I take out the trash, screw the bolt that is loose, check your room at night, one last time. I pick my children up when they are tanked-up at a secret party in a parentless household that resembles a small mansion, or stranded because of two flat tires, or unconscious because of a seizure, grateful that the confidence they have in our relationship does not make them fear calling me when they find themselves in a dangerous predicament. I stand, rigid and strong, when they need compassion as well as reprimand.

We sell the house. The new owner has grandchildren. Her husband will refurbish the warped walls of the treehouse, replace the swing rope and the tire, clean up the moss and mold, replace the canvas sailcloth. He comments that it is overbuilt, but that is probably why it lasted all these years. I am pleased it has a new life.

My son announces that he has met the love of his life and will marry soon. I meet her. She is warm, engaging, attractive, intelligent. There is nothing I can find or see or feel about her that does not make me think she is the perfect match for him. And him for her. I think of what I need to do, how I can continue this new take of father to this new person. I wonder how my relationship changes with my son. I prepare a speech, one that will not be embarrassing to him or his new wife and their friends. I begin to write.

I say that the significance of their decision is not that they have shown, in every moment together, how perfectly suited they are for each other. How they complement each other's needs and desires and hopes. How seamless they are as one vibrant entity without losing their individuality. I mention that their togetherness aspires to serve things they have yet to imagine. Their love is bigger than the two of them and that love, unspoiled by requirement, unedited by condition, impervious

to doubt, is what binds them. Their love is perfect, because it is by choice, rigid and strong.

I say the most telling significance of their commitment today is not in them but from them. It lies in how many of us are here today, fully knowledgeable of the joy of their proclamation to live as one, for life. The value lies in how many people they have affected by their actions, how overwhelmingly proud and happy they have made two sets of parents, how they have joined two families who likely would have never met and now who hold each other's friendships with affection, basking in the celebration of a match so rigid and strong. I feel I have made a good fatherly impression without making a fool of myself. I hope I am right.

I believe that somewhere in the process of physics and the hope of spirituality, a flying plane is still a miracle. Yet, when I ask my son why the tips of wings are turned up, he will provide an hour-long dissertation on aviation-design methodology. I am interested and floored by his response and his knowledge. Somewhere in the middle of my creative spirituality and his practical physics lies the genes we share as father and son.

I tell him of the moments I wished we could have been together more often, and when I did have moments, the worry that I was not spending it wisely enough with him. But somehow, the generosity, the sweetness, the goodness in him assuaged my fears. I tell him he was always reassuring, never unreasonable and always appreciative.

I look at the man he has become. I tell him while I happily wander in my soup of unfettered inspiration, he speaks a language of creativity that soars high above any random or exploratory artistic "statement." I reassure him his creativity serves others. His reaction makes me confident he has character, integrity.

My daughter laments about a rejected job opportunity. I reassure her it is their loss, not hers. A pizza at Pepe's, the place I introduced her to twenty-nine years ago, soothes her frustration and elicits a dismissal with laughter and good memories. She mentions the time when she brought the pizza up to the treehouse and forgot the last uneaten slice overnight. I remember the clean up the next day. Her resilience is rigid, and strong.

There is not enough I can do to hold on to the fatherhood in me. It is my center, my hunter/breadwinner/midcentury/mania I hold to be an integral part of my being.

I pass by the house where we once lived. The treehouse is gone, replaced by a Playskool Play System with three swings, a trapeze bar combo, and wavy slide advertised “to provide kids with hours of outdoor play.” It is constructed with a heavy-duty steel alloy, but one would not know this from looking at it because it is covered in primary color vinyl plastics that promises low-maintenance and is crack-, chip-, fade-, rot-, and warp-resistant. All the hard edges are rounded to minimize injury and the corners are covered with plastic caps, while the chains have rubber grips to prevent pinching.

It is a safe space, without adventure. It is fatherless.

The giant swamp maple that stood in front, staining the roof shingles, and threatening to land a massive branch onto the master bedroom with every major nor’easter, is no longer there. Underneath that tree, on a wood bench placed on the front porch, I remember helping my son spend hours installing and fiddling with a sound system in his car, an old M3 with a hundred thousand miles on it. I remember playing basketball with my daughter before she went off to college. I remember scraped knees, jammed fingers, bruised cheeks. I remember lessons learned from adventure.

The bench, a memory of those moments, is still there, rigid and strong.

Three Steaks and You're Out |

Schuyler Bishop

On their way to Peter Luger Steak House, with its juicy tenderloins and creamed spinach so rich it can stop your heart, Eyal and Kobe, handsome young men still on Tel Aviv time, take in the lights of lower Manhattan. They're with Eyal's gray-haired friend Harry on a half-filled J train, inching across the Williamsburg Bridge. Staid Harry, who's 57, feigns interest in the magnificent view, but he's thinking about Andrew, the mad passion of his life. Though Andrew moved out six months before, until a few weeks ago, when he started having a threesome with two architects, he was in constant contact with Harry, and there's a chance Andrew might also be at the restaurant, with his mother and stepfather.

The train stops. Harry clears his head and looks past Eyal at Kobe, who's blond, solid and handsome, a career officer in the Israeli army. "I was sorry to hear about your mother."

"Thank you." Kobe nods slowly into a darkening grimace. For more than a year he took care of his dying mother, who, since they were boys was very much a mother to Eyal as well. The New York trip is Eyal's attempt to give Kobe a break. Harry and Eyal have been friends since they met in Amsterdam ten years before, when Eyal was 21, and though Eyal constantly tries to get Harry to join him in Barcelona, Berlin or Cape Town, they see each other only when Eyal comes to New York, three or four times a year. As always, Eyal's expecting to pay for tonight, but Harry stuffed a wad of cash in his Levi's, knowing Peter Luger doesn't accept cards, the only currency Eyal carries. Wearing jeans makes Harry feel he's betraying his WASP upbringing, but he dressed down knowing Eyal and Kobe would be in those fashionably shredded jeans, which they are.

Changing to what he hopes is a lighter subject, Eyal says, "So, Harry. You still see Andrew?"

Harry's shoulders slump. He shakes his head. For Kobe's benefit, Harry leans over Eyal, "Two weeks ago Andrew came and took everything he'd left behind. He won't even reply to my emails."

Eyal rolls his eyes. He's determined to make this trip fun.

"I'm sorry to hear," says Kobe.

"I tell you, Harry," says Eyal, "you just got to forget him. Andrew's doing what twenty-one-year-olds do."

"I'm trying, Eyal. But I can't stop thinking about him." Eyal, resigned, sits back so Kobe can hear. "I go to movies, I wish he was there. I read books, all the time I stop, think, *Oh, Andrew would love this*. I read his horoscopes. All day he's in my mind. And then at night, it's, *What's he doing?* And I try to figure it out."

"Harry, he's gone."

Kobe shakes his head at Eyal's insensitivity. "Eyal says he's never seen anyone so in love as you two."

Wistfully, Harry says, "I've never been so in love. Or so loved. Like I'd be at my computer, and he'd come over and put his hand inside my shirt, just to touch me. All the time. We couldn't keep away from each other. Walking down the street we'd hold hands, not to show off. We couldn't help it. And it wasn't a Daddy thing either. It was the most equal relationship I've ever had."

Kobe leans in and says, "You were married for ten years, yes?" Harry nods. "And then there was Kevin, whom I met. You were with Kevin for many years."

"Seventeen," says Harry.

"For how long were you with Andrew?"

"Nearly a year. Two weeks after we met we were living together. He's the young man I've wanted since I was fourteen."

"I know it's tough, Harry, but you must forget him."

“I’m trying, Eyal. I just booked passage on the Queen Mary 2. New York to Southampton. A gay transatlantic crossing.”

Eyal snickers, “Sex all day it sounds to me.”

Kobe shakes his head, the antidote to Eyal. “I’m sure it will be very elegant.”

Eyal accedes. “That’s good, Harry. The kind of thing you should do.”

Kobe smiles. “And maybe you’ll meet someone.”

“I’m hoping. I’ve got to do something. You never met Andrew, did you, Kobe?”

“No, I’m sorry I didn’t.”

“He has the most expressive face I’ve ever seen. He’s handsome, but in an odd way. Like a young Jimmy Stewart. Incredibly bright.”

“And so thin,” says Eyal. “I love those thin boys.”

But Andrew’s not just another thin boy; Harry wants to do justice to Andrew’s story, but it’s too complicated to tell on the subway. Inspired by *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* and a year and a half as a total pothead, Andrew dropped out of high school, sure he could get a better education for himself. He volunteered to work on a gubernatorial campaign and so impressed everyone that after only two 60-hour weeks he was made a paid staff worker. Andrew humped, the candidate surprisingly won, and Andrew was rewarded with a desk, a shared office and a responsible job in the Maine statehouse. At the age of 16. But after a year of working in Augusta, he realized three things: politics wasn’t for him; he had a passion for David Hockney; and a high school dropout wasn’t going anywhere. Andrew started saving his money and, in addition to his statehouse job, worked weekends as a busboy in a restaurant in Portland *and* got his high school GED. At 20, with no parental support, he set off for New York City to take summer classes and, he hoped, enroll as a full-time student at NYU. That autumn he and Harry met. Lived blissfully together for a year, until Andrew was accepted at NYU and wanted to live on his own.

“And you met on CraigsList?” asks Kobe, his voice rising to a high-pitched *list*.

“We did. We met for sex, but it was love at first sight.”

“You believe in love at first sight?”

“I do. And it’s not like it happens every week. Just five times in my whole life, including Andrew.”

“I fall in love at first sight, too,” says Eyal. “Nearly every night.” Eyal’s dark hair is gelled and fashionably cut. He’s not classically handsome, but he has some sort of lupine sex thing going on that makes him incredibly attractive; on the street, young men and women constantly stop him to talk, touch and, they hope, have sex with him. “Well,” he says, wanting to put the subject to rest, “at least you can say you had him.”

“Doesn’t help.” Harry connects eyes with Kobe. “For Eyal, the answer to everything is sex.”

“Sex and more sex,” says Kobe. “But it doesn’t help me the way it helps him.”

Eyal says, “You could have had the steward.”

“I wanted to sleep. So I wouldn’t be jet-lagged.”

“The way to get over jet-lag is sex. But don’t worry: once you have the steak at Peter Luger you’ll want sex.”

“Eyal is crazy,” says Kobe. “What are you talking about?”

“You never noticed, Kobe?” Eyal puts a hand on Harry’s leg, looks him in the eyes. “Harry, you know that, don’t you? You eat steak, you want sex; you want sex, you want sex.”

Harry and Kobe laugh, say at the same time, “But you always want sex.” Laugh again. And Kobe says, “How can you tell, Eyal?” The old woman across from them has given up all pretence of discretion and is leaning toward them with her ear cocked. Nearby conversations have stopped as the passengers listen intently.

“No, really,” says a humble Eyal, looking now at the floor. “Eating steak makes me want more sex.”

“I didn’t know that was possible,” says Harry. “But this is our stop.”

“Marcy, yes,” says Kobe. They step onto the elevated platform. The night’s warm, not a breath of the vaunted March winds. The only exit they see is a single, cramped, revolving grinder gate. Kobe and Eyal stand with a dozen other people. Harry sneaks through but then waits on the dark landing while the Israelis politely wait their proper turn and come through after everyone else. As Kobe exits the turnstile, Harry says, “I figured Andrew left me because I was too old. His new lovers—”

Kobe is incredulous. “Lovers, plural?” his voice rising to the final *L*.

“One’s fifty-five, the other’s fifty-eight.”

“Wait, wait, wait. Andrew is having a threesome?”

“A threesome.” Harry loves how precisely the Israelis speak English. But he can’t help himself: “And who knows, you might get to meet Andrew.”

Kobe’s voice rises to a squeak: “Andrew’s going to join us at Peter Luger?”

Harry shakes no. “He might be there with his mother and his stepfather.”

Eyal’s eyes bulge. “No, really? I hope not.”

“Wait,” says Kobe. “I think I lost part of this story. Andrew has two lovers?”

“Yes. He hooked up with these two architects online.”

Eyal and Kobe lapse into their guttural Hebrew, which they emphatically speak until they reach the sidewalk, when Kobe switches in mid-sentence to English, says, “So now Andrew has two lovers?”

“Very well-known architects. A-list gays. They have the best apartment, well, loft, I’ve ever seen.”

Kobe's voice rises: "You've been there?"

"Years ago. A fundraiser. The whole top floor of this beautiful building. One of them had a thing for me."

"I don't care about these architects," says Eyal. "You said Andrew's mother might be at Peter Luger?"

Harry smirks, nods. "Last month Andrew told me his mother and stepfather were coming to New York this weekend. His stepfather was dying to go to Peter Luger's. I told him he'd better make reservations fast." Harry's shoulders slump again. "That's when we were still talking. I thought we were going to work it out, until he met Mark and Matthew."

Kobe's voice rises to squeak: "And his mother knows they have threesomes?"

"No, no, God no. They don't even know he's gay. His mother and stepfather are some sort of fanatical Catholics. They do missionary work in China, India, Africa. . . . Andrew wanted us to meet. Thought he could say I was one of his professors."

"That must hurt you," says Kobe.

"It does."

They walk on, cross desolate streets, avoid puddles, Harry deep in his hurt. Kobe says, "It's very bleak this part of the city. Are we going in the proper direction?"

"There it is, right up there," says Harry, pointing to the lighted doorway half a dark block away. He knows no steak can fill the emptiness rising up from his gut. Two Lincoln Town Cars pull up in front of Peter Luger's. The four back doors pop open at the same moment, and there's Andrew, stepping out the curbside door of the first car, into the light, animatedly laughing as he stands to his full height.

"Oh, shit," says Harry

“Isn’t that Andrew?” Eyal asks quietly.

Kobe catches his breath. “That’s Andrew?”

Harry nods, says, “That’s Andrew.”

Tall, thin Andrew, dressed in a jacket and tie, offers his hand and graciously helps his mother out of the car. Andrew’s stepfather steps out of the street-side door, slams it. But then he waves to the man who got out of the car behind theirs. Harry is perplexed. Then, squinting, adjusting his glasses, he realizes the two old men in the car behind Andrew’s are not just any old men. “Oh my God,” he says. “It’s Mark and Matthew.”

Kobe says a little too loud, “His lovers?”

Harry is panicking. His heart races, his breath shortens. “I don’t know if I can do this.”

Turning Harry by the arm, Eyal says, “Come on. Let’s go back to the subway.” Harry lets Eyal turn him, but then swivels back, wanting to see.

“Eyal,” says Kobe, pleading. “We have reservations.”

“We can’t go in there, Kobe.”

A flurry of jabbing Hebrew interspersed with “Peter Luger” and “subway” and “Harry” and “Andrew” and “reservations” quietly fly between the two old friends, then Kobe switches to English and says, “Let me just go cancel, so if I want to come back some time I can.”

“You sure?” Eyal still holds Harry’s arm. “We can go someplace else.”

“I can cancel the reservations,” says Kobe.

“No,” says Harry. “Fifteen times Eyal’s told me how excited you are to eat here. I can do this. Just give me a minute.”

Andrew’s mother and stepfather enter the restaurant and the two old men crowd around Andrew. One of them says something, and Andrew’s chirping laughter pierces the night—and Harry’s gut. Then one of them grabs Andrew’s butt and ticklish Andrew squeals and

jumps, as he did so often when Harry grabbed him. Coyly, Andrew admonishes, “Mark. Stop that.” And they go through the front door.

Harry breathes deep, closes his eyes, imagines a river, uses every relaxation technique he knows to calm down. And it works. As they enter Peter Luger, Eyal says, “Harry. Don’t look for them. Just let’s enjoy our steaks.”

“Yes, I’m famished,” says Kobe.

“I’ll be okay,” says Harry.

“This is very nice,” says Kobe. He turns to fully take in the long wooden bar on the left, which was original to the steakhouse. Harry likes the bar, but, as always, he’s surprised at how cheesy the rest of the place seems. The tables are right, and some of the walls seem authentic, but the acoustic-panelled ceiling ruins it. And the chandeliers look more Home Depot than converted gas. If only someone would spend a few bucks. But the steaks, well, they’re worth the trip.

Kobe gives their name, and Harry takes a not-so-discreet gape into the room on the right to see if he can see Andrew, but there are so many tables and he’s so anxious he can’t really focus and the diners are just lumpy blurs. *Forget Andrew*, he says to himself. *Just relax*. He takes a deep breath, thinks, *I’ll come back later and go to the bathroom*. He puts a hand on Eyal’s back, trying desperately to come back to the moment. Eyal turns and smiles, says, “We’re going to have fun.”

They’re led to the back, not to the main part on the left, where they seat the celebrities, but straight ahead to the nook by the kitchen. Harry goes to sit so he’s facing the room, but Eyal stops him, says, “No, Harry, you sit over here with me.”

As he circles the table, Harry looks again for Andrew, but there’s too much activity, too many people. He sits facing the kitchen, and Eyal puts an arm around him, the kind of thing Eyal does all the time and which always surprises Harry. “Better we face away from the people, so we don’t look.”

“You’re right. But don’t you want to see the people.”

“I want to sit over here with you.”

The ancient white-jacketed waiter who approaches their table is polite, if brusque. “Good evening, gentlemen. Do you know what you want?”

“Thank you,” says Kobe. “Three Beefeater martinis. Straight up. And menus.”

“You need menus?”

“Yes, we’d like to see menus.”

The waiter nods. Departs.

Kobe says, “Did he think we wouldn’t want menus? People don’t look at menus here?”

“Just this place,” says Harry. “They expect you to know what you want.”

“I like looking at menus,” says Kobe. He gingerly picks up his thick wood-handled steak knife. “If the steak here you can cut like butter, why do we need a knife like this?”

The waiter returns, hands each a menu. Departs. Kobe thanks him too late and, after opening and reading his, says, “What kind of menu is this: steak for 2, steak for 3, steak for 4?”

Eyal sees Harry’s shoulders slump. “Harry, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Better I sit facing this way.”

Wanting to divert Harry’s attention, and knowing how he can always get Harry going, Eyal, who loves and knows more about American politics than most Americans, says, “Can you believe what’s going on here in America now?”

“I thought it couldn’t get any worse. Money, money, money.”

“American democracy,” says Eyal. “How do they get away with it?”

“Well, that’s what deTocqueville said would be the downfall of America.”

“Who is this de Tocqueville?”

“A Frenchman who toured America in the 1830s and in one trip figured out everything about us and our politics.”

“I like French boys,” says Eyal. Kobe couldn’t care less about French boys, de Tocqueville or democracy in America. He keeps reading the menu, turning it to make sure that’s all there is. Shakes his head, interjects tidbits into their continuing political conversation: “I heard the tomatoes and onions are not worth the money.”

Harry nods in agreement. “They’re always incredibly disappointing.” Kobe slathers an onion roll with butter, salts it and scarfs it down. “Oh, delicious!”

As their martinis arrive, Harry and Eyal are on to Europe. No, they’re not quite ready to order. They lift their stem glasses. “Cheers.” The martini is perfect, cool, biting with just the hint of olive.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” says the gruff old waiter. “You look at your menus, decide what you want, then tell me.”

Harry swigs his martini, sighs with satisfaction, says, “Steak for three, right?”

Kobe says, “Unless you want the filet.”

“No, you don’t want the filet here,” says Harry. “The porterhouse. That’s what they’re known for,” though he doesn’t want to say that the recent reviews have not been good. The waiter returns, they order steak and more martinis. They go on about this and that, but all Harry’s really thinking about is Andrew. How he wishes Andrew and his mother were across from him. Wishes Andrew was grabbing his knee under the table, as he always did.

Pleasantly buzzed, Harry turns to say something to Eyal and sees Andrew returning to his table, obviously from the bathroom. Their eyes meet for a moment, and Andrew rears in panic, retreats quickly to his table. Eyal puts a gentle hand on Harry’s arm, turns him back. “So, now you’ve seen him and he’s seen you. As I was saying . . .”

Their second martinis arrive. Harry takes a slug and excuses himself to go to the bathroom. Just by the *maitre d's* station, he turns, tries to focus on Andrew's table. The *maitre d'* gives him a look. He thinks I'm a stalker. His shoulders shiver, he turns quickly to the bathroom door. *I am a stalker.*

While peeing into the urinal, he says quietly, "What am I doing?" Then he washes his hands and after taking in his sagging features, says to his mirror image, "I'm pathetic." He rinses his face with cold water and, *sotto voce*, sings, "I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair."

Returning to his table, he sees Andrew's back, nestled between Matthew and Mark, across from Evelyn. Tom, her Asian husband, who takes off from his emergency room doctor job to spread the Word to the world, sits to her left, on the wide aisle, across from Mark.

The steak arrives, already sliced, and the white-jacket waiter places the platter on an inverted saucer so the juice pools to one side. He spoons creamed spinach onto their plates, then disappears, and Harry picks through the bloody meat, looking for a medium slice. The steak is so tender Kobe cuts it with his fork, just to say he could, and so bloody it disgusts Harry. Harry digs into the spinach, and thinking of Popeye's "I'm strong to the finach," he shovels creamed spinach into his mouth. It's so good he forgets Andrew even exists, savors every bite.

But then the room quiets and Harry hears Mark's squeaky voice say, "You were on the Queen Mary? We're going on the Queen Mary." And Harry knows immediately that they're going on the same cruise he's going on. His blood boils. He picks up his steak knife but his hands shake so badly he can't even cut through his bloody steak. He tries to collect himself, ignore what he heard, but instead focuses on hearing through the cacophony of conversations what they're saying at Andrew's table. He picks up his martini glass, downs what's left just as the white-jacket waiter brings three more.

Eyal asks if Harry wants to leave.

"No, no, I'm fine."

"You're not fine at all."

Too loud, Harry responds, “Okay, I’m a mess!” He pushes out his chair. Eyal grabs his arm, and into his lap Harry says, “Fucking Mark. He’s just so fucking perfect. I fucking hate him.” He twists to see behind him.

“Harry, don’t,” says Eyal, calmly. “Just ignore them, okay? Stay with us.”

Harry scootches his chair back under the table, acknowledges with rapid nods and a lifted hand that he knows Eyal’s right. Quietly, he says, “But did you hear what he said? They’re going on the fucking Queen Mary too.”

Kobe’s voice rises to the question mark, “The three of them?”

“I don’t fucking know.” Ruffled, Kobe rears back.

Eyal says, “Harry. We’re on your side.”

“I’m sorry. Sorry, Kobe. I just . . .” Harry picks up his martini. “To better times,” he says and gulps down half his cocktail. He puts his glass on the table, pushes out his chair. Eyal takes his arm.

“Harry. There are times to let go and times to hold back, and this is one of those times to hold back.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t.” Harry is a man possessed—pumped up with gin. He pulls his arm out of Eyal’s grip.

Kobe says, “Eyal, stop him.” Lapses into Hebrew.

Harry stands. Turns. He sees Andrew’s holding a martini aloft. His head is bouncing, happy. Andrew turns to Mark, smiles broadly.

Eyal leans across the table. “Kobe, maybe he’ll get it out of him.”

“He’s dangerous.”

“What can he do? What can I do?”

After hesitating a moment, Harry strides across the room to Andrew’s table, stops beside Mark. Smiles at Evelyn, who nervously smiles back.

Takes another step, so he's able to see everyone. Looks down at an aghast Andrew. Mark says dismissively, "Yes? May we help you?" But then recognizes him. "Harry?"

Harry glares at Mark. Andrew blurts out, "Mark knows everyone," then he squeezes Mark's thigh so that Mark turns, sees how ashen he is. Harry sees Evelyn's thin face twist into the very same perplexed look Andrew makes. Harry says, "Oh my God, he does have your expressions."

Evelyn smiles.

"You're Evelyn, right? Andrew's mother?"

Evelyn, totally caught off guard that someone could know her, not from her past but because she's Andrew's mother, brightens. "Yes, and you're . . . Harry?"

Momentarily disarmed, Harry says, "Yes, I'm Harry." Andrew stands, says, "Harry, can we talk?" He excuses himself as he pushes behind Mark. Harry continues to take in Evelyn, whose smile is exactly Andrew's. The last martini kicks in. Evelyn's face blurs. He turns too fast to look at Andrew, has to steady himself on Mark's shoulder. Mark glares up at him.

Evelyn says, "Is Harry another one of your professors?"

Andrew smiles, nods to his mother. But Harry now sees only Mark, and keeping his face from blurring takes all Harry's concentration.

Eyal is now on Harry's right. "Come on, Harry."

But Harry's not budging. To Mark, he says, "The Queen Mary? I'm on that crossing, too. The gay one, right?"

Haughtily, Mark says, "What are you talking about?"

"I heard you from across the room. Are the three of you going?" he asks, pointing.

"I'm Tom," says Tom. "Andrew's step-father."

Harry turns slowly, offers his hand.

Eyal whispers into Harry's ear, "Harry, come on, let's go back to our table."

Harry doesn't move, knows if he does the room will start spinning.

Eyal says a polite, "Hey, Andrew."

"Eyal," says Andrew, nodding, then grimacing with his whole face.

As if nothing is amiss, Eyal asks the table, "Are you having a nice evening?"

Haughty Mark says, "And who are you?"

Eyal introduces himself, disarms Mark. Shakes with Evelyn and Tom. Kobe joins them, flanking Eyal, but before he can introduce himself, their white-jacket waiter butts in, says, "Are you changing tables? There's no changing tables."

"No," says Eyal. "Can't you see, we're just saying hello. And in a minute we'll go back to our table. Now if you'll excuse us."

As the waiter departs, Kobe, who's quite taken by Matthew, smiles lasciviously and says across the table to Matthew, "That waiter is very rude."

Matthew coyly smiles back, says, "He is rude." Then, tearing himself from Kobe's gaze, he says cheerily, "I don't know what's going on, but it's sure nothing I expected."

"Nor I," says Kobe.

He introduces himself quickly to the others, then says, "And you must be Matthew."

"Time to go, Harry," says Eyal.

Evelyn says, "But how is it you all know Andrew? Are you his professors too?"

Harry snickers, says sarcastically, "Professors?"

Kobe fills the void, politely says, “Eyal and I are from Israel.” Thrilled to have something to talk about, Evelyn says, “Oh, we’ve been to Israel. The Holy Land.”

“Ya Jerusalem,” says Eyal, who, also taken with Matthew, focuses on his prey. “We’re from Tel Aviv. We hate Jerusalem.”

“No, we don’t hate it,” says Kobe. “We’re rivals. Like New York and Boston.”

Eyal leans over Mark and shakes with Matthew, saying, “You’re very strong. Do you work out?”

Matthew politely rises out of his chair, to show his physique. “Yes, every day.”

Evelyn and Tom sit quietly trying to figure what is going on, while Mark fumes, knowing exactly what is going on. He grimaces fiercely at Matthew but is ignored.

Kobe says to Matthew, “We’re staying at the Sheraton Towers.”

“We’re at the Sheraton, too,” says Tom.

Always the diplomat, Kobe says, “It’s a lovely hotel. We got a very good rate.”

Tom laughs. “We didn’t get a very good rate.” Laughs again, but only Evelyn cares about his joke.

“I work out at the gym too,” says Mark.

“That’s good,” says Eyal. “But you, Matthew, what do you do at the gym? Machines? Heavyweights?”

“Machines, mainly.”

Kobe says, “I work out too.”

“Yes, I can see,” says Matthew.

Mark is miffed that he’s left out. “We work out together.”

Eyal asks Matthew, “Do you always work out together?”

“As a threesome?” asks Kobe, his voice rising to the question.

“No, I like to work out with others,” says Matthew. “Mark likes to think we’re a threesome, but—”

“Matthew!” says Mark. “Are you forgetting?”

“I often go on my own,” says Matthew.

Andrew, flummoxed, says out of the side of his mouth, “Matthew, what are you doing?”

“Yes, Matthew,” says Mark, “what are you doing?”

“Actually, I believe I’m going to the Sheraton.”

Andrew, regaining his composure, says, “Mom, Tom, do you mind if we go out by the bar for a few moments to talk?”

“Yes, come on, Harry,” says Eyal, “let’s go out to the bar.”

All Mark’s attention is on Matthew. Through gritted teeth he says, “You’re not going to the Sheraton.”

“I didn’t want to come here tonight, but you insisted. So I’m here.”

Mark says, “Would you please sit down and shut up.”

“You can tell Andrew what to do, Mark, but not me.”

“Wait a second,” says Evelyn. “You’re not Andrew’s professors?”

“I am,” says Mark, unconvincingly.

“But if you’re not Andrew’s professors . . . ?”

“Honey,” says Tom, the situation finally dawning on him. “I don’t think we want to....”

A humbled Harry takes in the table, then turns to Andrew, by his side, who now seems more sad than anything. Sheepishly, Andrew says to Harry, “The Queen Mary? I was going to tell you—”

“Don’t,” says Harry, raising his hands to stop Andrew before he does any more damage. “I shouldn’t have come over.”

A calmness washes over Harry. The storm has passed. And Harry finally realizes Andrew is gone. And that Andrew’s life is not the ideal he thought it was. And that all those declarations, that he’d never been in love like he had with Harry, that they very well might get back together, that he just needed more time, were just Andrew’s way of trying to ease Harry’s pain and his own guilt for leaving.

But other forces have been unleashed. Kobe’s burgeoning sex drive has taken over, and, as Andrew slithers behind Mark to get back to his seat and Mark tries to figure how to gain back control, Kobe says to Matthew, his voice, like his sex drive, deep, steady, powerful, “You know the Sheraton Towers?”

“I do.”

“Room 1508.”

“I’ll be there,” says Matthew. “Steak always makes me . . .”

“What?” says Eyal. “Sex, right? Harry, what did I tell you? Kobe? You didn’t believe me, did you? Steak makes you want sex.”

Tom laughs nervously, says, “Quite a gay group we’ve got here.”

And that’s when Evelyn vomits steak, spinach, Diet Coke, steak sauce and onion roll all over Mark, Matthew and her son.

FORGIVE me, Ladies, in advance for the sins your Author commit
because the pleas I make should be for your able assistance
but I find instead in my circumstance
these excuses on my lips self-aware of how I will violate
the graces you each represent thru no fault of my own
not really, rather thru
my Time, my UnTaught UnLearning
my Hollowed-out Husk . . .

OH CALLIOPE, yes
I pretend, have pretense
to the EPIC scale
but I know, yes I know
how sadly I will fail

OH ERATO, yes
I speak of LOVE
and profane lust
not well, I admit
but still, I must

OH MELPOMENE, yes
I may mock TRAGEDY
with a Hollywood ending
or not, depending

so I am sorry, and I am not, if you see how I mean
if you find me flip or insincere
I protest, not in anger, nor in fear
but in honest disappointment
that my intent remains unclear . . .

OH EUTERPE, yes
I SING but I lack
the Mopheads' charm
when I sing out of tune
it causes alarm

OH POLYHYMNIA, yes
I diss
scorn trad
less
than
the SACRED
itional truth
from meanness
from ruthlessness

OH TERPSICHORE, no
there's no place for DANCE
in a poem
but in an Opus-of-the-Mind
the suggestion by chance

OH THALIA, yes
I tell JOKES
stolen from
vaudevillians
and other old folks

OH CLIO, yes
I retell HISTORY
In my own peroration
no longer trusting
the normal narration

OH LIRANIA, no
I will not read HEAVEN
nor claim
that the clockwork stars
work everything out even

"Preambolo", from il trama riguardante di Samson & Delilah by d'Ov

Outside My Box | Kerry Hugins



Watercolor on paper

7.5" x 5.5"

2018

kerryhugins.com

Seashell Translations | Kerry Hugins



Watercolor on paper

7.5" x 5.5"

2018

kerryhugins.com

Poppie | Kerry Hugins



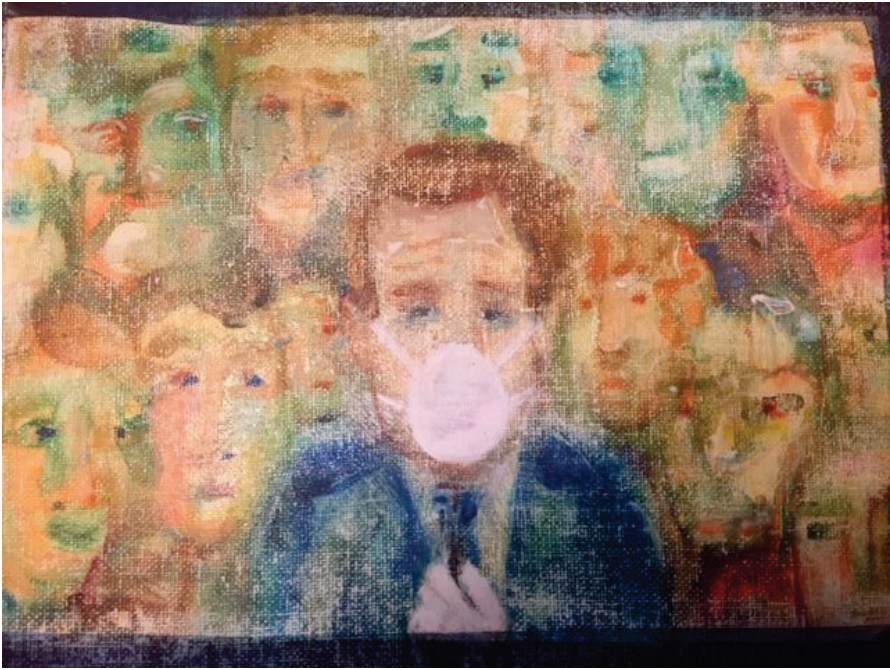
Watercolor on paper and illustration brush

8.5 x 7 inches

2020

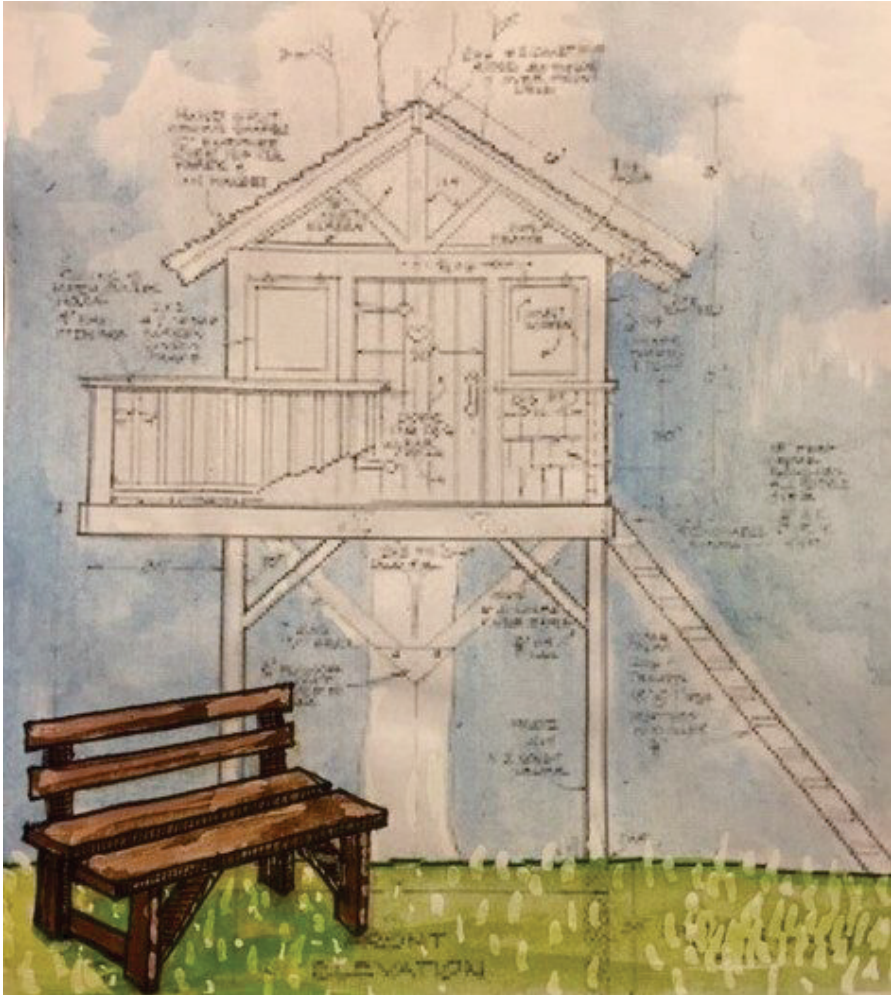
kerryhugins.com

Please Kick Me | John Weik



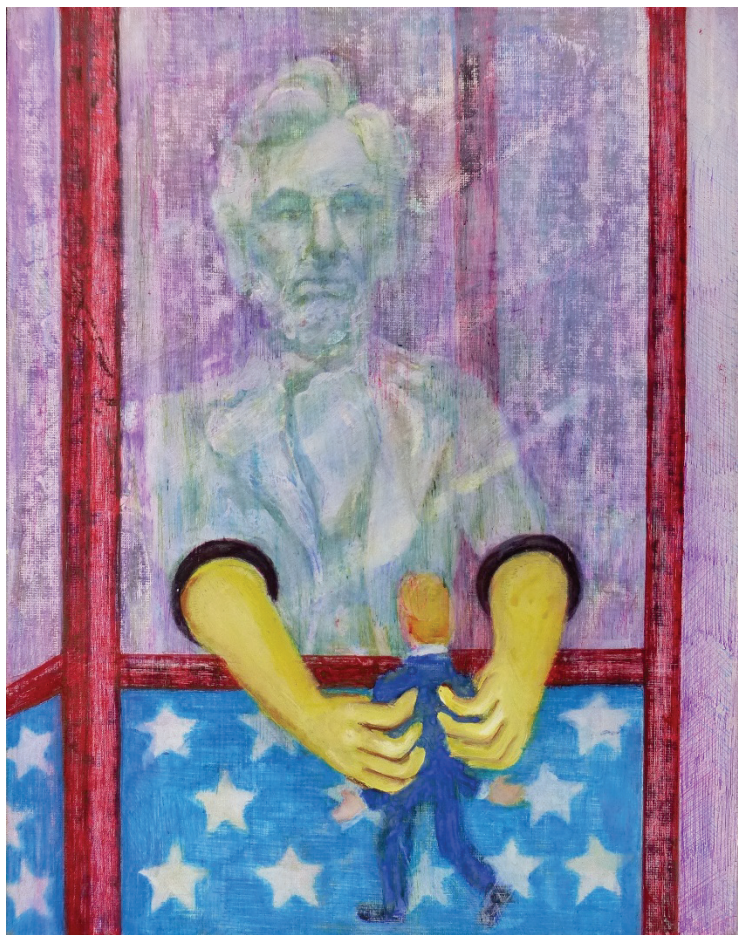
Detail from original water paint and ink on canvas board
11 x 14 inches
partysloth.org

Rigid and Strong | John Weik



Collage: ink and water paint on paper
8 x 11 inches
2020
partysloth.org

Reprimand | John Weik



Ink and water paint on canvas board
11 x 14 inches
partysloth.org

Eliza's Austin | Eliza Gandy



Permanent marker on canvas panel

8 x 10 inches

2020

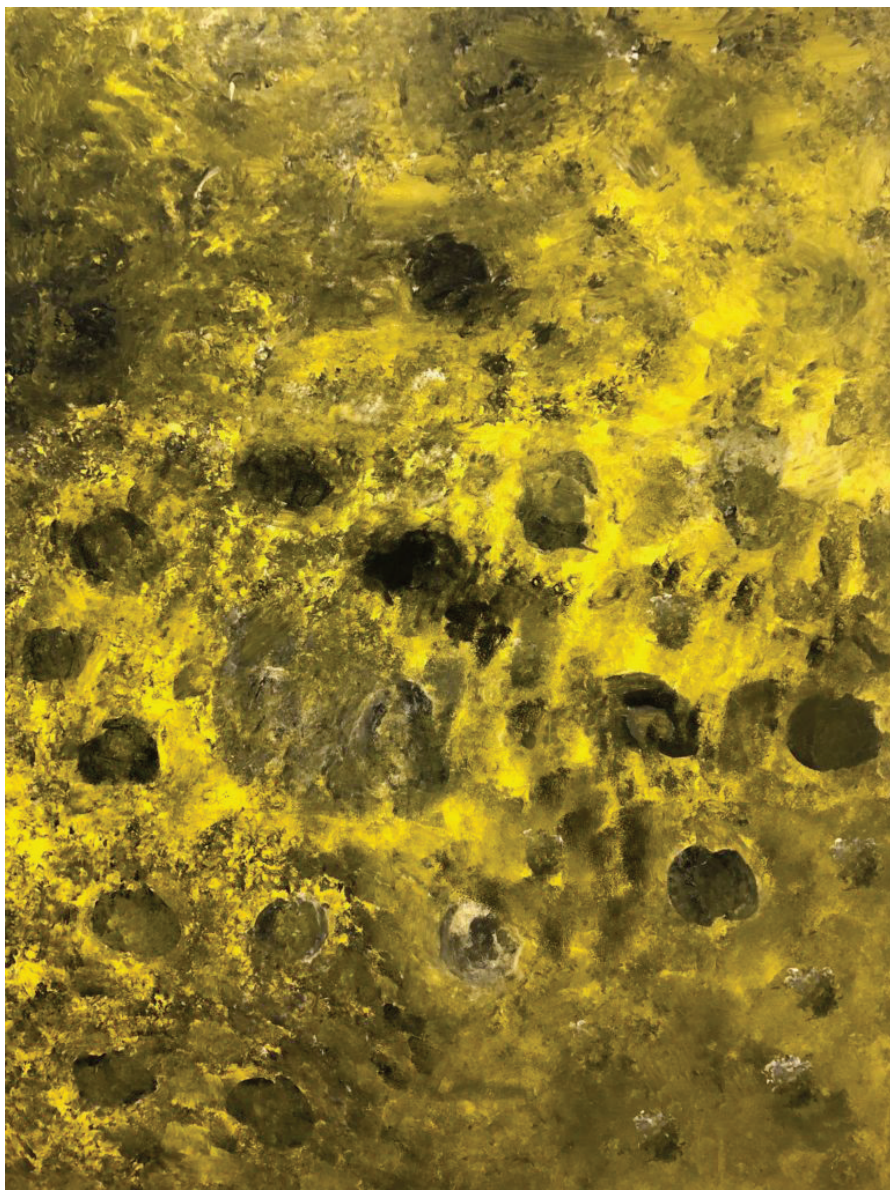
Jump on the Water | Emanuela Franco



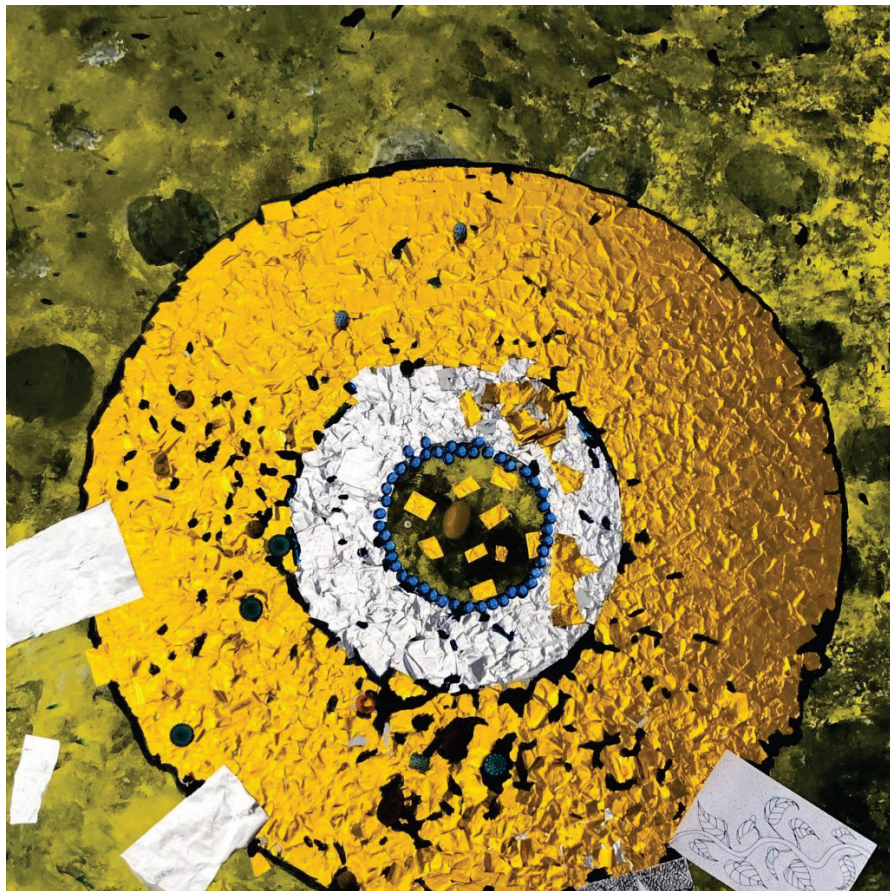
Digital black and white photograph
2587 x 1733 pixels
2007

The photojournalism project “Let’s Play” (“Vamos Brincar”) aims to record images of children playing in the streets of Brazil. “Let’s Play” reviews the games currently forgotten by most children who live in large cities. Playing “paste-stick” (pega-pega), “hide-hide” (esconde-esconde), “seven sins” (sete pecados), among other games, are part of the tradition of some communities and societies of inland places. Rescuing the games of the past is fundamental in that society where new technologies invade everything. One of the focuses of the project is the social isolation of children living in large skyscrapers, locked up as a result of the expansion of urban violence.

Jaguar | Christine Sloan Stoddard



As the artist-in-residence of Heartshare Human Services of New York, I design many collaborative projects to complete alongside adults with disabilities. This is in addition to creating my own work and overseeing workshop participants' individual art projects.



Sometimes I use my own pieces to inspire the collaborative works. Such was the case with the small jaguar fur painting featured here. I asked a group of five or six individuals to interpret my small acrylic painting to abstract what they saw in their collaborative piece. They worked on a 36"-by-48" canvas. I guided them in the process using acrylic, sponges and paintbrushes.



Once the painting was completed, we put it on display for a couple months before I brought it to another Heartshare group to further develop. We completed the final iteration of the painting with origami paper, beads and excerpts from one of my comics.

Let's Live Here | Molly Knobloch



Acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas

2587 x 1733 pixels

2007

mollyknoblochart.com

Candy Dreams | Molly Knobloch



Acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas

40 x 30 inches

2019

mollyknoblochart.com

Winter Swimming | Molly Knobloch



Acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas

40 x 30 inches

2020

mollyknoblochart.com

"Your people have
fallen into
history," an
Iranian friend
whose family fled
the Islamic
Republic tells
Lizzie. "The rest
of us are already
here."

2019 Birthday Lecture: The Countercultural Vision of History | Peter Berard, Ph.D.

Ishmael Reed is back in the news these days. The writer, now eighty-one years old, got national attention for his latest play, *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda*. Most of the headlines of pieces on the play are some variation of “Ishmael Reed Does Not Like Hamilton,” and indeed he does not. He sees the hit musical as whitewashing the Hamilton family’s involvement with slavery and the generally elitist politics of its subjects. Reed’s play is about the ghosts of the family’s slaves, as well as displaced Native Americans and indentured servants, coming to haunt Lin-Manuel Miranda, who whimpers piteously that he was basing it all off Ron Chernow. In interviews, Reed claims that Chernow, not Miranda, is the real target of the play. *The Haunting* sounds basically on the historiographical money, though perhaps a little dry.

The news pieces on Reed’s blast at Hamilton struck a chord with online people who associate the musical with gormless liberalism — some of you probably shared articles on it somewhere I could see them. *Vice* ran a video piece that followed Reed as he saw the play for the first time (he had previously only read the script), and he presents a likably irascible figure. Beyond that, though, Reed is in the position many of us know well, shooting rubber-bands at a cultural juggernaut. Thus far, Lin-Manuel Miranda and his people have not deigned to notice the play about his haunting, and *Hamilton* continues to be a big smash success.

Had Miranda wanted to take the offensive against Reed — and I’m not saying he should have, either morally or strategically — the materials are there. Ishmael Reed has had a long and let’s just say colorful career.

In the sixties and seventies, he was a major literary star: one of his poems was the last in a volume of the *Norton Anthology of English Poetry*, literally the showstopper of the canon. He's been feted by critics across the spectrum from Amiri Baraka to Harold Bloom, the latter of whom included Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* in his list of five-hundred canonical works in the western canon. It looked, for a while, like Ishmael Reed might be the future of American literature.

Then, the seventies happened. Reed was always pugnacious and individualistic, a hard combo in the cliquey world of literature at any time, but harder still in the heightened ideological atmosphere of the 1970s. He wasn't a movement guy – Amiri Baraka might have praised him, but Reed had little but scorn for black nationalists, either in terms of their literature or their politics, and he received at least one public death threat for writings satirizing militancy. He had his own ideas.

Things really started to sour after he got into an acrimonious public feud with Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*. A recurring pattern in Reed's public beefs is that he starts out with a reasonable criticism. In this case, Reed began publicly wondering why it was black men were so often depicted as incestuous sexual monsters in the works of supposedly progressive writers. He gets in trouble with his conclusions: black women writers were in league with white men to bring down black men, all part of some literary-sexual conspiracy. Feminism, to Reed, was the political expression of a lynch mob mentality directed at all men but at black men in particular. He says stuff like that in his essays — still does, sometimes, though he tones down the conspiratorial aspects — and has his characters say this in *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, where I first encountered this tendency in a chapter-length rant by the main character. It was a weird thing to stumble upon, to say the least.

Other writers reacted to Reed accordingly, drawing a kind of *cordon sanitaire* around him. This in turn led Reed to becoming increasingly bitter and small, and it showed in his books. Where once he wrote sprawling works packed with symbolism and crackling with strange energies, his books from the 1980s onward lose a lot of their creativity. They engage with a world derived from bad op-ed writing rather than one created from myth and poetry, and they always involve a Reed-

substitute character giving the comeuppance to some deserving representative of the establishment, often enough including feminists. I'm not going to do Lin-Manuel Miranda's publicity hacks' jobs for them, but there's definitely enough pull-quotes about Reed's feelings on feminists, women, and gays to go around.

If not to pillory Reed — if not to pull the old switcheroo, making you see the harsh truth behind a figure you might have briefly liked, clicking on some of those anti-*Hamilton* pieces — why else am I bringing him up? Well, there's a few reasons. For one, I don't think it's that simple of a story. Reed's a complicated figure. It would be a lot simpler if he had never created anything worth our time, but that's simply not the case. His work from the 1960s and early 1970s is first rate, innovative, performing a high-wire act of drawing both from the highest and lowest ends of culture. Even in his lesser later works, you still see flashes of what made him great in between the silliness and superciliousness. In short, he's not an ordinary troll, or anyway that's not all he is. He's also someone who partook in the construction of a particular vision of America's past, present, and future, and I think the liabilities in that vision help explain his troll turns.

Most of the ideas of the American past that we now receive come to us from a breaking point: the breaking of the American establishment consensus idea of what American history was (and hence what American society is). Expressed by the historians of the mid-20th century, this held that American history was characterized by a consensus on the worthiness of liberalism, democracy, free (but sometimes regulated) markets, orderly progress, etc. When conflicts arose, like the US Civil War, they were over defining these concepts. In this, they argued, America was — is — exceptional.

That's a ruthless simplification but I have a lot to get to. The point is, starting in the 1960s, there arose challenges to this consensus school, and different conceptions of the American past gobbled like so many hungry, hungry hippos over the minds of the American people. Even conceptions of the American past that partook of many of the ideas of

the Consensus school were incapable of putting it back together just as it had been. Liberal believers in progress had to make previously marginalized voices part of the story (this is more or less the stream Hamilton comes from); conservative believers in American exceptionalism had to explain away the parts of American history that seemed a lot like the grubby histories of every other country in the world, and of course there were other, rival conceptions that undercut all of these assumptions.

It's not just historians who create our concepts of the past. It wasn't in the days of the consensus and it isn't in our day or any time in between. In a sense, everyone who thinks or talks about the past, no matter how vague a notion they have of it, contributes to the creation of shared views of the past. This is true of actors with no intention of making a statement about the past- people looking to write a novel, say, or produce a TV show, or get elected to office, or make their kids grateful for some treat, etc. Conceptions of the past created largely by non-historians are important, but much vaguer than those professionally crafted . . . so you'll just have to bear with me.

One of the actors on the spot for the collapse of the consensus narrative of American historiography was the counterculture. Here, I want to define my terms, mostly negatively. When I talk about the counterculture I am not talking about the New Left, as defined by groups like Students for a Democratic Society, the Black Panthers, the anti-Vietnam War protests, and so on. I'm referring instead to those who put emphasis on "dropping out" of a mainstream society they defined as being stricken by a variety of largely psychological or spiritual ailments- boredom, hypocrisy, malaise, etc. Rather than tackle these problems or source them to a political or social structure that created them, the counterculture sought to escape them. They did this physically by establishing communes and spiritually by various "mind expansion" techniques- drugs, eastern spirituality, rock music, so on and so on.

Of course, the New Left was on site to help redefine American history, too, and was in many respects better equipped to do so. And they did- a lot of contemporary American historians from that generation were involved in the New Left in some way, and they pioneered a

historiography that stressed conflict, discontinuity, and non-exceptionalism in the American past. But that's not what I'm talking about. I want to talk about the countercultural conception of the American past.

In keeping with the differences between the counterculture and the New Left more generally, there was some overlap between their historical understandings but many important differences, most of them involving emphasis on the political. If the New Left's vision of American history has helped shape academic ideas of the American past, this is because it had a thesis about the sorts of things historians study, expressed the way they express things- articles, pamphlets, books, conference arguments. The countercultural idea of the American past was expressed indirectly, by inference, mostly (but not exclusively) in works of art- novels, poetry, film, etc. The counterculture's idea of history is affective and reticular. Affective in the sense of privileging structures of feelings and expression over structures of politics, economics, etc. Reticular in the sense of being a reticule, or, in plain English, a "grab bag"- instead of neatly laid out narratives, it has a basic shape and concepts bump up against each other and form connections within the basic shape. This makes it harder to pin down, but by no means makes it less important.

Let's get into specifics. Probably the easiest way to illustrate what I'm talking about is to talk about one of the ur-images of American history: the frontier. To the consensus historians, the frontier was one of the things that made America exceptional, that guaranteed that old aristocratic hierarchies from Europe couldn't reproduce themselves, that guaranteed democracy- this is the Turner thesis, named after Frederick Jackson Turner, one of the great granddaddies of the American historical profession, who first advanced the idea in the 1890s. To the New Left, the frontier was sometimes a promise — consider how many of them came to political awareness under the influence of John Kennedy, who called for a "New Frontier" — but mainly a site of conflict, brutal conflict, between Native Americans and whites, between the US and other countries, between social classes, so on and so on.

The frontier is also a key concept for the countercultural understanding

of the American past. The consensus school enshrined the frontier for what it created- modern American society. The counterculture held up the frontier as being what modern American society lacked- what it lost, in fact. You can argue, in many respects, that the lost frontier — the ejection from the garden, the creation of mainstream society with all of its repressiveness — is the reticule, the grab bag in which the parts of the counterculture concept of American history coexist outside of much in the way of linear order or structural hierarchy.

Once you know to look for it, you see it all over, from the counterculture's fetishization of Native Americans to the writings of the Diggers and others to the emphasis on small-scale technologies, from the acid blotter to the personal computer, as tools of liberation one can take with them out to a frontier- as opposed to the big technologies, factories and room-sized computers and the like, favored by mainstream society at the time. They don't call it "the Electronic Frontier Foundation" idly. Escape and transformation are key counterculture themes- for the American branch of it, anyway, it's almost inevitable that they'd reach for the frontier as a key metaphor, as a space to escape to and in which to transform.

This trope produces some very strange visions of what went on in the American past. In many ways, it's one of the more natural things you can imagine- a group of people projecting themselves into the past, locating an honorable lineage for themselves. This takes some strange shapes in the case of the countercultural past. A good resource for this is a book called "Gone to Croatan," an edited volume put out by the anarchist press Autonomedia in the early 1990s. The essays are all about pre-20th century "dropout" cultures- various communalists, runaway slave communities, whites who ran off to join the Native Americans, etc. Taken together the essays in the volume produce a number of impressions: first, the sheer fecklessness of comparing the impulse to "drop out" of stultifying midcentury conformism with running away from one's masters or facing genocidal violence; but second, the sort of affective, reticular approach to history I'm talking about. What binds the subjects of *Gone to Croatan* together is less any structural relationship or shared frame of reference but more the sort of mood or attitude that they conjure up in the reader, or, anyway, the intended anarchist reader of the early 1990s.

A lot of *Gone with the Wind* is taken up by an earlier effort that shows a strange intersection between academic history and countercultural historical vision. This is the strange story of the Ishmaels- not to be confused with the Ishamel, Ishmael Reed, we started with and to whom we will return. The Ishmaels were a poor family in and around Indianapolis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Numerous and impoverished, they were a target for the active eugenics movement in the State of Indiana, and made the subject of a once-famous ethnographical study that labeled them “the Tribe of Ishmael.” Oscar McCullough, the sociologist who “discovered” the Ishmaels, was something of an amateur orientalist on top of everything else and threw in various references to exoticize and other-ise this family, which soon suffered under Indiana’s eugenic sterilization regime.

Fast forward to the 1970s, and the Ishmaels are discovered by yet another supposed do-gooder, Hugo Leaming. Leaming was a grad student at the University of Illinois. He found McCullough’s research, took some giant leaps of logic on his own, and concluded that the Ishmaels were in fact a tribe- a part of an underground of tri-racial — that is, part white, part black, part Native American — society of secret Muslims that existed on the frontier before the forces of the Man — people like McCullough — shut them out. He further speculated that the Ishmaels and others from this posited Islamic subculture helped found groups like the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple, which were gaining substantial attention at the time.

A good book on this is over in the “Ds” on my bookshelves, “*Inventing America’s Worst Family*” by Nathaniel Deutsch. It showed that both McCullough and Leaming were wrong, and there was little to separate the Ishmaels — a common enough name in Wales — from other poor white families who found their way to Indianapolis and other cities around that time. In fact, he tracked down the Ishmael family’s own genealogy websites, and found bemusement and consternation at the range of mixed messages their family history had been made to tenuously support.

Lost tribes surviving — thriving, even — on the margins of society, staying under the radar of officialdom, living a truer and more authentic life than those accepting the rules of mainstream society, rebelling by their very existence- you can see how that would appeal. More than that, the countercultural vision of the American past was participatory. You could participate in finding these lost groups and reviving them, like Leaming and other participants in Croatan. You could emulate them in your own life. If the book was published in the 90s, it has the stamp of the 70s and 80s on it as well, the decades when participatory history, with its reenacting and craze for genealogy, first got underway.

This is where history gets conflated with art, and this is where we return to literature and to the work of Ishmael Reed. Reed's called his approach to literature "neo-hoodooism," in reference to the version of voodoo originated in New Orleans in the nineteenth century. Like the Afro-Caribbean religions, Reed's vision is syncretic, black themes changed by the experience of the New World and intermixing with other traditions. His novels (especially his earlier, better ones) are less driven by plot or character in the traditional western literary sense and are more like "conjurings" in this hoodoo sense, sacred dramas that instantiate a vision of the world and a prophecy of the future.

This merges most clearly with the historical vision of the counterculture in his 1969 novel *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*. In it, a society of children living in the wilderness and dressing as Native Americans are destroyed by the forces of land speculation, who create a town inhabited by figures representing the other evils of mainstream society- racism, organized religion, and so on. The only survivor is the Loop Garou Kid, a black cowboy and conjurer who joins other outsider-types in raining surreal destruction upon the town created in this act of slaughter. It's at once an allegory for the destruction of a frontier seen as a space of freedom from mainstream society and a prophecy of that society's destruction and the frontier's rebirth. Reed's historical vision is on display in other works, most notably *Mumbo Jumbo*, about a sort of jazz-brain-virus that threatens to loosen up society in the 1920s, and *Flight to Canada*, a similarly surreal novel about the underground railroad, but I won't go too deeply into them. What all of them have in common is the vision of both a prior

existence and a rebirth of a spiritually authentic, liberated, non-Judeo-Christian polyculture in America. The very form of his novels — surreal, discursive, self-referential, partaking more of spoken language than canonical literary form — merges with its content and themes in this case. Even if you don't believe a word of it, historically or aesthetically, his early novels are significant achievements.

At much the same time Reed was accomplishing these things, he was squabbling with the black freedom movement, praising capitalism and dictators like Papa Doc, and eventually coming to his big blow-up with feminism. The connective thread of his more recent forays into the public are defending any black men who find themselves in controversy — including Barack Obama along with Mike Tyson, Clarence Thomas, and OJ Simpson — from foes he inevitably compares to Nazis, be they feminists or actual white supremacists. Reed isn't the only example of a right-wing strain in the counterculture. There's the history of libertarianism, which we don't need to rehearse here. There's also a weird strain of Confederate apologia running through the countercultural idea of history, from Howard Zinn's equivocating about who was right in the Civil War to the image of the Confederate as the great symbolic rebel against mainstream society in hippie writer Richard Brautigan's *The Confederate General from Big Sur*. If it turns out the losers of the American past were all heroic underdogs, and the Confederates lost... most Confederate nostalgia can be traced to resistance to the black freedom struggle but it's been at least abetted by the romanticization of rebellion qua rebellion that the counterculture helped promote.

What to make of all this? The space of freedom imagined in the countercultural vision of the past is not a space of responsibility, and what all of the structural critiques we see in the aftermath of the 1960s have in common is a call to take responsibility for imbalance of power and the iniquities thereby created. Even using the phrase "space of responsibility" brings Reed's literary villains, like Drag Gibson, the land speculator in *Yellow Back*, or the Knights Templar from *Mumbo Jumbo*, to mind. The countercultural vision is a picture of freedom as escape- not just from specific oppressions, mainly not even that, but from the very existence of the sorts of structure that could be used to

any purpose, oppressive, liberatory, or otherwise. In short, it's taking for the hills, fleeing for Croatoan, making like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* — or Siddhartha, for that matter — and leaving it all behind, even if “it all” includes a family and responsibility. Wherever responsibility rubbed up against this particular form of freedom in Reed's work, responsibility lost out- and those who would be on that losing side often viciously satirized.

Along with everything else, Reed was one of the early backers of multiculturalism, calling for ethnic studies departments in universities, publishing authors from all sorts of backgrounds (including some of the first collections of Asian-American literature in the US), suggesting a bewildering array of ethnic literature from obscure slave narratives to assorted white-ethnic works as replacements for the conventional canon of American literature.

Taken together, I think Reed and the countercultural vision of the American past represents an early draft on the concept of multiculturalism. It partook both of the wide visionary nature and the fecklessness of movement culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Participants, from Ishmael Reed to cranky Facebook-boomers, not only see an attempt to correct its fecklessness as an imposition, but seem to interpret it as a threat to the whole project. Responsibility is just bringing back the structures that they sought to escape in the first place. The point of the polyculture, in this early draft of multiculturalism, is that it's free and fun (well, for somebody, anyway), not necessarily that it's just. I'm not certain anyone involved would see the distinction. As with so many baby boomer projects, we are getting stuck with the bill for fixing the situation.

I came to this subject because of my interest in how non-historians create involved visions of the past. This can tell you a lot not just how people see history but how they go about constructing their worlds more generally, what make up their patterns of thought. There must have been a feeling of exhilaration, the sense of rediscovering a better, freer history, which can point to a better future... the rebels of the sixties sought to awaken society from the somnolence of the Cold War consumer society, but many of them sought to escape into another dream. These were dreamers who resented being woken up.

My Knees, Anthony Bourdain and Depression | Rich Furman, Ph.D.

Anthony Bourdain hung himself.

As I dragged my family around the country from one academic job to another, *No Reservations*, Bourdain's culinary travel-and-adventure series was a constant — a comforting event once a week in our hectic lives. I developed a weekly ritual of experimenting with popcorn toppings inspired by each country Bourdain featured. My creations were a bit unorthodox: extra-thick fermented Japanese tamari with organic sesame oil, Poblano peppers from Central Mexico infused in artisanal avocado oil and extra-aged parmesan cheese mixed with Scottish yeast, normally reserved for distilling single-malt scotch. As the start of the show approached, and the last moments of the introduction played, I cranked the volume so loud that my dogs ran from the room, and the thin century-old windowpanes of our North Tacoma bungalow rattled. Seconds before the show was to start, above the music and Bourdain's voice-over introduction, I called to my family using Bourdain's very words, which signaled the start of our special time together. I accentuated each syllable so even a straggler would know that it was time to quickly join together. It was as close to a family prayer as I would ever recite, almost like a Jewish *nigun*, a ritualized chant that resonates deep within your bones.

NOOOOOOOO RESERVATIONS.

No Reservations brought Bourdain considerable notoriety, and his wonderfully funky series ran for nine seasons. He left the show at a time of personal crisis precipitated by his divorce and joined CNN for a new globetrotting culinary adventure, *Parts Unknown*. CNN brought him a far larger audience, considerable celebrity and wealth. He did not always wear his newfound status and its perks and responsibilities well. An introvert with outstanding extrovert skills, Bourdain seemed to thrive in his new role but was frequently worn-out.

Shortly following his death, several essays attributed Bourdain's downfall to drugs or alcohol, but this does not appear to be the case. It is true that he had a significant history of substance abuse. Bourdain had long struggled with cocaine and heroin addictions but finally quit both. For many years, he drank a great deal, seemingly alcoholically or addictively, but, by all reports, he had learned to drink moderately by the time of his death.

I never met Bourdain. My opinion comes from reading his books and essays and watching the many interviews of him and those who knew him. I believe that drugs and alcohol were probably not Bourdain's most significant problems. In his first book, *Kitchen Confidential*, he more than alluded to battles with hopelessness, despair and a struggle to find hope and meaning. He hinted at his struggles during various episodes of *Parts Unknown*. His adventures were always tempered with — and usually made richer, more profound and, frequently, more human — by his acute sensitivity to the pain, struggles, despair and tragedy of others' lives. *Parts Unknown* was as much a story of human struggle — his struggle — as it was a food-and-travel show.

Over the span of many years, my family watched Bourdain with laughter and tears, joy and heartache, longing and a humble reverence for the human condition. My wife and I relished and resonated with his talent for portraying the bittersweet nature of life, of existence itself. We certainly had our share of loss. Each of my wife's parents died tragically. My oldest daughter struggled with substance abuse and behavior that had become increasingly out of control: cloaked as a science experiment, she grew psilocybin mushrooms in our attic and was lucky to survive multiple car crashes driving with druggo friends. My wife and our two daughters frequently developed strange, difficult-to-diagnose medical conditions — they were masters at confounding the medical community with disorders that defied clear diagnostic criteria that often appeared to be far worse than they were. Finally, the blow that shattered so much of the world we had constructed: my wife became disabled and wheelchair-bound from a paradoxical neurological response to pain medication following surgeries and a life-threatening infection. During those three years, *No Reservations* became a needed escape from a life of chronic pain and disability and the witnessing of a life of chronic pain and disability.

I have always loved to travel. When I was seventeen I walked across the U.S.-Mexico border at Chula Vista, California — thank you fake ID and borders far more open, friendly, and less-contested than they are today — and hitchhiked from Tijuana to Mexicali, where I hopped aboard a six-dollar second-class train that sliced through the northern Mexican deserts and high plains for twenty-six hours until I arrived in Mexico City.

I longed to understand that sprawling, pastel-and-soot ancient megalopolis the Aztecs once called home. So, instead of riding the subway, I traced its path stop-by-stop above ground, crisscrossing the largest city in the world on foot for over eight hours. On my second night, I drank beer and ate pancakes at midnight with college students from UNAM, the largest university in the world, and the nexus of decades of Modernist art and poetry and protest in that vibrant and turbulent capital. They brought me to house parties and raves. We danced all night until nearly noon when we would drink a hot spiced corn drink, *atole*, before passing out from exhaustion in the flat of a gay artist couple in the *La Condesa* neighborhood.

Against recommendations, I hiked the shanty-covered hills, ate street tacos with locals who called my green eyes *ojos del diablo* — devils' eyes — but made my way back to safety. Outside of the capital, I explored the colonial town of Guanajuato and slept in a dingy three-dollar-a-night room beside the bus station for a few days. When I was almost out of money, I tried to book a ticket on another twenty-four-hour second-class bus, but it was oversold. Luckily, the conductor allowed me conveyance on the roof with a few others who were either too late or too poor to buy a ticket yet absolutely needed to travel north.

On that roof, I soaked up views of the yellow-and-brown desert that collected red hues just like my sunburn-blistered face. Despite the throb at the base of my spine from being jostled up and down onto the metal roof and not having nearly enough food or water, I discovered that no matter how miserable I might have been at any particular moment, I possessed a love for travel, a need for travel. This need would become one of the central themes of my life.

I can sum up this joy clearly — and in the Bourdainian voice I have attempted (inadequately, I am sure) to infuse into this essay — by saying: *It was good, it was all very good, and I was happy.*

For over a year I had minimized how bad my knees really were. It was not intentional. I was not conscious of attempting to be macho, tough, or even brave. It seemed to me that disability had crept up on me. I was, perhaps, out of touch with how wrecked my knees were and how this impacted the rest of my body. It is only through retrospection that I can see that the internalization of stoicism, self-reliance, autonomy and invincibility — core elements of what has been termed toxic masculinity — each contributed to me underestimating the severity of my condition. It was not that I resisted seeing a doctor: it simply had not entered my mind until I could barely walk. My obliviousness, I should add, is rendered fairly ironic by my having spent the last twenty years studying, writing and teaching about how various aspects of masculinity contribute to men's poor physical and mental health. I pride myself, typically, on being rather self-aware. Clearly, my personal capacity for self-reflection has serious limitations.

It was during a trip to Cuba that I was forced to come to grips with how disabled I really had become. I had walked a few blocks up the hill from my apartment to a large tourist hotel for breakfast and quality internet — a rarity in Havana. The walk there was difficult but manageable. The walk back, however, was a different story — my knees were so inflamed and brittle I felt like my torso was becoming kindling and splinters — the three blocks took over an hour to walk, if my slow rocking from side-to-side in fracturing agony could actually count as walking. For a couple of days after, I only left my room to eat and to buy more ice to try to soothe my inflamed knees, which now throbbed even when I was not walking. I was in one of the places on the planet that I most wanted to explore, and I was unable to even walk. I began to feel depressed. It was becoming clear that whatever was happening to my body, I would not be able to ice, stretch, or anti-inflammatory my way to health. A part of me intuited that I would need new knees, and sooner rather than later.

Lying in my room, I considered a life of disability. I had so avoided acknowledging that I had a significant problem that I did not even know if they even give new knees to otherwise healthy fifty-one-year-old men. If they did not, would I have to adjust to a life of chronic pain and disability? Would I wind up in a wheelchair? Would I have to tolerate pain this intense on a daily basis? Was my life as I had known it over? A few days later, my condition improved enough to allow me to walk a few blocks, but I could not shake an accelerating, deep sense of hopelessness and despair during my final week in Havana.

When I returned, I made an appointment to see an orthopedist. I had x-rays that confirmed what my pain had already assured me: I did not possess nearly enough cartilage to prevent my femur and tibia from grinding into and destroying each other.

My arthritis disabled me within the span of a year, and while my surgeries themselves went well, the second total knee replacement was not without, what was euphemistically referred to as “*post-surgical complications*” — immobility, stiffness, muscles that often refused to function and when they did were so tight that they felt as if they were going to snap. I feared the worst, that arthritis had won and my body was ruined. There were moments when watching Bourdain travel the world gave me some sort of strange, irrational hope that I would return to my pre-arthritic state of several years ago — I would be able to travel again, too, just like him. Bourdain’s irreverent, evocative, snarky yet still deeply hopeful-for-humanity-style somehow helped me feel connected to the places and people that he encountered. I was, it felt, part of his world. Yet all the while another part of me knew that if my recovery did not progress, *Parts Unknown* would be the closest I would ever get to traveling to Burma or Bali, at least outside of a wheelchair.

I binge watched *Parts Unknown* while I recovered from back-to-back total knee replacements. My emotions were all over the place as I watched Bourdain's adventures: I feared that my knees would never heal enough to allow me to ever travel again, to hike another set of hills, to have my perspective transformed, once again, by travel. Nearly every new project I had ever developed, whether research or writing or teaching, had come to me while traveling. For a while, I didn't even know if I would be able to walk again without intense pain, no less travel. Yet travel had been such an essential part of my life, personally and professionally for over thirty years. Life without travel would be devastating.

Over the last few weeks, my range of motion in my right knee has improved enough to give me some hope, some confidence that I will return to something close to "normal." Yesterday, I bought plane tickets to travel with my lover to Guatemala. When I was twenty-one years old, I volunteered in Guatemala for several months to help children and adults with physical and psychiatric disabilities. I really did not do much more than sing songs to and feed the children, play soccer with a few of the teens and cards with a man who had lost his legs. I was not much use to them, but through singing and laughing and playing with them, I decided that when I returned home, I would finish my undergraduate degree and would apply for graduate school in social work.

Years later, I had written a memoir about my ten-month travels through Central America. Most of the manuscript chronicles my time in Antigua. So, booking the flights and making hotel reservations in Antigua yesterday was an affirmation, a hope, part recognition of my improving health and part trust that I would continue to improve. I hoped to return to a semblance of the life that arthritis had taken from me. I had lost the sense of myself as a fit and strong man, having a body that listened to my brain and followed my will. I had lost a great deal of my desire to connect with the world outside my home.

From reading the Twitter hashtag #RIPBourdain, it seems thousands of people wanted to be Anthony Bourdain, or at least wanted his seemingly idyllic life: traveling anywhere in the world he wished to go; eating exotic meals with movie producers and artists, punk rock icons and billionaires, writers and presidents (he drank beer with Obama in Vietnam!). Bourdain had achieved fame and wealth from doing what he loved, what millions of us love.

When Bourdain explored his addiction in his book of essays, *Medium Raw*, he admitted that his compulsions functioned to fill empty and injured places within himself. He wrote of his self-loathing, his assessment of his mediocrity as a chef, his belief that he did not deserve his success and he often intimated that his highly social career was exceedingly painful given his introverted personality. He described a trip to the Caribbean in which he drove around the island drunk while frequently considering driving off a cliff in order to end his sadness and pain. He felt despair over perceived failures, which included two divorces for which he usually blamed himself.

While it is impossible to really diagnose someone with a clinical disorder without formally assessing them, I strongly believe that Anthony Bourdain was depressed. Clinically depressed. Even some clinicians — most are not trained to assess and treat men — might not have considered Bourdain depressed had they spoken with him: he was too angry, bitter and snarky. Yet, increases in and the inability to control anger are often signs of depression in men. Those who don't understand these gender differences in the expression of mental illness often view anger simply as a character defect, or often as part and parcel of addiction. I believe this lack of understanding is what led to talk show hosts and others believing that Bourdain died as a result of addiction. Yet, he was depressed. The anger of Bourdain — tears of a clown.

The orthopedic physician assistant looked at my x-rays on the computer screen for less than a minute before he began asking me questions about my pain, mobility and current activities. To help him understand, I told him about my trip to Cuba. After I finished, he sighed, gave me a quizzical smile, and gently tapped me on my left knee, and then the right, and asked: "You traveled on those things?"

You traveled on those things.

It is what I remember most clearly about my orthopedic evaluation. Those words, and that my osteoarthritis was so advanced that total knee replacement — on both knee — was really my only meaningful treatment option.

After an appointment with the orthopedic surgeon, my surgery was set for late November. I was grateful for such a quick surgical date. Given that I was teaching online in January, I would not have to take leave from my faculty position to have my simultaneous, bilateral knee replacements. However, two weeks out from surgery, I was informed that my surgeon had developed some health concerns of his own and would not be able to perform my surgery. For the next four or five days, I found myself lost in the bureaucratic hell-maze that is Kaiser HMO, trying to find some way to have my surgery so I would not have to take a medical leave.

After a great deal of advocacy—read, I threatened hospital administrators with handcuffing myself to the front door of Kaiser Permanente Tacoma while calling the local television station and informing them about the nature of my protest—I had a January surgery date, and while I would have to take paid medical leave, I knew I was privileged to have a job that afforded me this option.

During the pre-operative exam on the morning of my first surgery, the surgeon noticed a small scratch just below my right knee and informed me that he would not be willing to operate on that leg—as small as the scratch was, its position represented too great a risk for infection. I was gobsmacked and was instantaneously overcome with despair. I wave of horror came over me, fearing that I would have to wait until summer for my second surgery due to my teaching schedule and how much leave I am allowed each academic year. The surgeon assured me that he would be able to operate on my right knee in six weeks, which would hopefully allow plenty of time for me to recover from the first surgery and still have enough time after the second surgery in order to be ready for the spring quarter.

I had been so beaten down by the pain of my arthritis, the disappointment and stress of losing my first surgical date, along with my fear of dying on the operating table that I panicked, and nearly canceled the operation. Somehow, I was able to pull myself together, perhaps with help from the first phase of anesthesia which had already been administered prior to his finding my scratch. I consented to surgery, they gave me the rest of my anesthesia, and I fell asleep. I had my first total knee replacement.

When I woke up in the operating room, the surgeon informed me that the surgery was “textbook.” I had felt no pain whatsoever, which was sort of shocking. The anesthesiologist told me that I was one of the lucky ones for whom nerve blocks work extremely well. Along with the narcotic pain killers I was given, I really was only conscious of a little discomfort. The nerve block, in fact, worked so well that I felt very little pain even five days after surgery, and so I stopped using the opiates I was prescribed – I hated the way they made me feel. After a day and a half off of the medication, I thought I was free and clear from pain.

However, in the middle of the night, I was awoken by pain. Not just pain, but an agony the likes of which I have never felt before. Within seconds, my whole body was overcome by a depth of physical anguish that literally took my breath away—I wanted to scream, but nothing came out. I lied there alone trying to figure out how to call for help. It should have been obvious that I just needed to holler for my girlfriend who was sleeping upstairs or that I could throw something across the room to make a large bang, but the pain was so acute that I literally felt unable to act. I was reduced to having to experience a throb and burn that pulsed between each layer of my flesh. I experienced this pain as, how can I say, sinister, an evil of sorts that did not seem real, this horrible movement of fiery sensation that pulsed from skin to fatty tissue, through my ligaments and tendons, and finally to my recently sawed bones. I was shocked, in awe even, that my body could produce an experience so intense. It did not seem plausible that such a feeling was congruent with living. I quickly became certain that I was going to die. It was then that I screamed.

The dogs ran down the stairs with Sandy remarkably close behind them. As soon as I saw her, I choked out the words “pain medicine.” She quickly disappeared into the kitchen and returned with the oxycodone I had stopped taking two days before. While the pain decreased a bit after an hour or so, it took two days on opiates for the pain to mostly abate. Over the next couple of days, all I did was lie by in my chair trying simultaneously to understand and forgot that initial, unmedicated pain, and how it traveled between various layers of my body. I had experienced firsthand, I told myself, something someone should never have to feel.

After my brush with unmedicated pain, my recovery went exceptionally smoothly. My physical therapy progressed quickly; by the end of the second week, the range of motion in my left knee was so good that I began peddling on the exercycle. I progressed from a walker to a cane to walking without assisted devices a week after that. Everything was going as well as could be expected, with the exception of some pretty serious insomnia, a common side effect from major surgery and opiate use.

Despite getting better, the insomnia began to impact my thinking and emotions. I started having a hard time remaining optimistic. A week after starting the pain medication I stopped feeling pleasure, hope or joy. My mood began to suffer greatly four weeks out from my surgery, and I found myself, for the first time in my life, having thoughts that were not about ending my life, but about wishing I were no longer around. These increasingly persistent and hard to suppress thoughts scared me, but I felt too prideful to share my nearly automatic, not-consciously-entertained ruminations. I knew I should have. In the knee replacement class that was part of my pre-operative preparations, I learned how common depression was following total knee replacement surgery. My significant other—my designated knee replacement-recovery coach, Sandy—and I developed a plan that included me sharing any depressogenic thinking with her. I believed, however, that I would be able to handle my increasingly dire mood myself. I did not follow the plan. I was weeks away from my second total knee replacement, and I was in trouble.

The week prior to my second surgery I become increasingly fearful and anxious, and, perhaps for the first time in my life, truly clinically depressed. I have had extended bouts of loss and grief before. My divorce two and a half years before, for example, marked the start of a very intense, loss-filled several months. This, however, was different. I slipped into a darkness and hopelessness that felt bottomless. I had no joy or meaning and saw little reason why my feelings would change. This dysphoria was trigger by my growing fear about my upcoming second surgery. I started to believe that I would prefer to remain chronically disabled and in constant pain rather than going through with a second recovery. While the pain that I experienced from my arthritis was debilitating, it was a wade-pool ripple compared to the tropical tsunami of pain that I experienced the night my nerve-block wore off. While the pain was only at its most intense for an hour or so, I was truly traumatized by the experience. Suddenly, all my options seemed equally horrible. I started to believe that it would be much better off if I were dead.

The fog of depression seems to have blocked a good deal of my memory about the days leading up to my second surgery. I know that I stuck close to my dogs, wrote a morbid, informal will, and clung to the little hope that I had. I am not sure exactly how I dragged myself to the second surgery, but I did. The fact that my physical therapy was also going well certainly helped. Everyone was telling me that I would soon be walking again, that I would soon be traveling.

The first thing I remember after my second surgery is still being on in the operating room and my doctor telling me that everything went “like clockwork.” I felt relieved and fell back asleep. However, as soon as I woke up in the recovery room, I felt a tightness and constriction around my surgical leg that I did not experience after my first surgery — something felt wrong. I flagged down a nurse, and in my groggy state, told her that something with my leg was wrong, that it felt like my leg “could not breath.” She told me it was fine and walked away without so much as looking at it. Another nurse walked by, and the same thing happened again. It took me raising my voice and becoming angry with a third nurse before I was taken seriously: the cellophane wrap that was wrapped around my leg after surgery was far too tight.

This was not the only early mishap. A few hours later in my room, the drain that was placed in my wound to clear out blood and fluid popped out. A nurse tried to put it back in but was not successful in spite of stabbing my leg multiple times with the sharp end of the drain. He called another nurse who also struggled to put in the drain. After ten minutes of cursing and pushing on my knee, a physician assistant fit a new drain into my leg and cleaned up the small puncture marks caused by the slightly panicked nurses.

Perhaps precipitated by these two misfortunes or just bad luck, my leg was far more swollen compared to my first surgery. Nothing about my recovery from my second surgery went smoothly. The day after my first operation, I was able to achieve a ninety-degree range of motion, but I came nowhere close with my right leg even after a week. It felt stiff and tight, and no matter what we tried in physical therapy, not much was changing. I could barely bend myself into the car to get there. My therapist began to look concerned during our sessions.

For two weeks, I barely moved from the couch, believing I had made a horrible mistake by having the second surgery. I missed my natural, original, presurgical knees—those diseased, brittle, rapidly disintegrating hinges. I feared that I allowed myself to become a willing pawn in the for-profit machine of corporate medicine. I started to see myself as a dupe, a fool that let a butcher mutilate my body for the good of corporate profits. As my insomnia returned and my paranoia increased, I started to wonder if my lover had colluded with my surgeon to disable me so she could take my house and dogs away from me. This level of paranoia shook me. Part of me knew it was not true, but I had lost control of my own mind.

Fortunately, I started to recognize the irrationality of my thinking and began to taper off oxycodone in spite of how disconsolate I was feeling. After several days off the opiates, nearly three weeks after my second surgery, I began to feel less paranoid, but I was still in a battle for my life. I had a plan in place for how I would want my possessions to be distributed. I started to plan for a trust to pay for my youngest daughter's college, and I would leave Sandy enough money to get her through her master's program. I wanted her to take care of the dogs, in what once was my house, what I had referred to as my forever home.

I do not want to make it seem as if I had an active plan to kill myself. I did not. Nor was I preoccupied with my death during the majority of this time. That I even entertained thoughts of my own non-existence, that they automatically demanded the attention of my consciousness when they never had before, that I had begun to make plans for what I wished would transpire after my demise, terrified me. It showed I was close to — perhaps as close as anyone can be — to the edge. It gave me personal insight into how various physical and emotional pains can interact with depressive states to distort one's thinking. I have been a mental health professional for nearly half of my life but never had I truly understood the nature of depression, not in this visceral, lived, deadly way.

Whether I met the diagnostic criteria for any of the major depressive disorders is not the point of this essay. What is, however, is that no one is immune from depression, a disease that can diminish our desire to live. I was lucky that for whatever reason, I have a history of cognitive/emotional resilience that somehow allowed me to quickly move beyond my depression.

It is not easy to explore the needs and vulnerabilities of men at this moment in history, and for good reason. The national #MeToo movement has brought to light how men abuse the power they hold over women in order to sexually abuse them and then get away with it. Brett Kavanaugh, accused of sexually assaulting several women, was quickly confirmed to the Supreme Court despite the protests of millions of women and men alike. Women who have been victimized are claiming their space as survivors and advocates for social justice, calling out men for their sexism, misogyny, and abuse. Every day women are subjected to a President who was caught on tape admitting to sexually assaulting women. And of course, sexual assaults are not limited to politics or Hollywood — 1-in-6 women will be raped in their lifetime and over 300,000 women are raped each year.

In this context, why should we concern ourselves with men, even those who are depressed? How can we have public discussions about the pain of men at a time when we, as a nation, are pausing to care for the needs of women? How do we create this space without making women feel invalidated, unsupported, and uncared for?

I really don't know the answers to these questions, and I have been working with, teaching about, and writing about men and masculinity for twenty-five years. What I do know is this: men become depressed, and not attending to the needs of depressed men is killing many, fathers, sons, brothers, friends, lovers, partners. More than six million adult men, or seven percent, suffer from depression. While depression is more prevalent in women than men, men are far less likely to seek treatment for their depression and other mental health disorders. Men are not socialized to attune to their feelings, and many men fail to recognize or admit to sadness, melancholia, and loss. As such, men often do not recognize, or admit to themselves, that they are depressed. That depression looks different in many men than in women only complicates matters. Many helping professionals don't understand how to assess depression in men and fewer specialize in treating men. While women are more likely than men to attempt suicide, men are far more likely to successfully kill themselves.

Bourdain's second book, *Medium Raw*, was published eight years ago, when he was fifty-three-years old, the age I am now. In many of these essays, he adopts his angry-at-the-world persona, a persona filled with a palpable, judgmental righteous indignation. Yet his harshness is not only reserved for others. He is also self-critical, self-effacing and less-than-empathetic toward himself. He never seemed to feel fully worthy of his success. He continued to view himself as a low-wage-earning chef who lacked the creativity, talent and social skills to become truly great. He seemed to believe that, at least in part, he lucked into his success and fame. He often experienced himself as a fraud and suffered from what is sometimes glibly and too easily referred to as "imposter syndrome," the dread that who you are does not really match your achievements and, someday, this will be discovered, leading you to lose all that you have. For Bourdain, this seemed to be a real and pervasive fear.

Some of his essays are less bitter and angry and are in fact circumspect, reflective and wise. At times, he is gentle and vulnerable. In the best of his work, he turns his considerable power of analysis onto himself. We read a Bourdain that continues to struggle with self-acceptance, yet who is far less judgmental and more tender with others. We rediscover the Bourdain that we fell in love with, the one most frequently encountered during his summative reflections at the end of each *Parts Unknown* episode, in which he honors and thanks the people who touched him.

In 2011, I published the book, *Social Work Practice with Men at Risk*, with Colombia University Press. After the book began to receive some attention, some colleagues and a book reviewer or two challenged the notion of men being at-risk.

Are men, in particular white men, not the cause of many of the social problems that we face? How could they, as a group, be at risk? Men commit the vast majority of violence against women, against children, and against each other. Men are responsible for most sexual violence, domestic violence, homicide, robbery and even war. Men still earn far more than women for performing the same jobs and have access to positions of power and leadership that are far harder for women to obtain. Most men continue to be privileged in subtle and invisible ways, including the ability to walk through life without constantly worrying they are going to be victimized or harmed.

These truths show that the onus to change falls upon men. Men that care about women must work to dismantle patriarchy and transform the oppressive institutions that leave women far more at risk than men for many psychosocial challenges. Men must take ownership of the deleterious effects of most forms of masculinity and work to transform the ways that masculinity is performed. We must hold each other accountable for violence and other transgressions against women.

Men must change, but, or perhaps and, men also deserve care and support. As a social worker, my code of ethics requires that I value the dignity and worth of all people — all who suffer from emotional and mental distress deserve help. Many men are in pain. Even if they do not understand their experiences as such, they are suffering, and they deserve help.

Bourdain was a man at risk. I am not sure anyone would argue with this diagnosis now, but what if, weeks before he killed himself, I had explored the psychosocial risks of men and masculinity on social media or in an op-ed piece and used Bourdain as a potential example? Perhaps I am wrong, but I think there is a significant likelihood that I would have been lambasted. Bourdain was white. Bourdain was wealthy and possessed a dream-of-a-career. He dined with marvelous, fascinating people in three-star Michelin restaurants with tasting menus and immaculately selected wine pairings, was gifted his own private shelf (filled, of course) in a billionaire's wine cellar in Shanghai, met his heroes and anyone else he wished to know. He was able to engineer nearly any experience or adventure he could conjure. His life was charmed. I believe that if Bourdain himself went onto social media and wrote about feeling down, he might have been scorned. He might have been called out for his wealth and power and privilege, been chastised for concerns that were "first-world problems." Perhaps he would have been told to suck it up. A few might have simply responded with one of the flippant, dismissives of the day: *Womp womp*. Who knows, I might have even forgotten my own depression and the years I provided therapy to men in pain and joined the cacophonous dogpile.

Having white, male privilege certainly inoculates against some of the risk factors associated with negative mental health outcomes — poor health, poverty, and a lack of access to, and inability to afford, quality care. However, anyone can become depressed. Privilege does not prevent depression from changing how we feel about ourselves, our lives, and our futures. Nor does it prevent someone from slipping into the darkness of depression, that downward opaque spiral that leads some to consider killing themselves. Leads some to kill themselves.

Anthony Bourdain was probably depressed, and, like many depressed men, he probably believed he could handle it by himself. He probably thought he could grin and bear the agony of depression. I also thought I could handle the despair I experienced before and after my second total knee replacement. Frankly, I caught a break. I somehow pulled out of it. I don't even know how. I am still healing from my surgeries eight months later, but I am okay. I am no longer depressed. Lucky, lucky me.

Bourdain probably thought he would be okay as well. And he was.

Until he wasn't.

Solidarity | Kimberly Tolson

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color."

Colin Kaepernick

Former NFL player and U.S. military veteran Nate Boyer told Colin Kaepernick that kneeling as a protest would show more respect to former and current military members than sitting on the bench.

Martin Luther King, Jr., black American, delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed labor discrimination. Malcolm X, black American, was assassinated on February 21, 1965, receiving a total of 21 gunshot wounds. In 1965, the federal government enacted The Voting Rights Act, legislation that outlawed racial discrimination at the voting booths. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., black American, was assassinated. Just seven days later, President Lyndon B. Johnson, white American, signed into law The Civil Rights Act of 1968, which protects those against intimidation and violence based in racial discrimination. On December 4, 1969, Fred Hampton, black American, was assassinated at point-blank range by two Chicago police officers. That same year, my white parents graduated from high school, got married at twenty, and enrolled at a small, Baptist college in the South, most likely unaware of the racial tensions that many in their own state of Arkansas endured. Or if not unaware, my white parents were largely unaffected by the tide of racial discrimination. My father was drafted in 1972, so instead of becoming a foot soldier, he enlisted in the Air Force as an officer and devoted twenty years to the United States military. At my white grandfather's funeral, he scoffed at the folded flag my white mother clutched. He told me he refused a military funeral. They can go to hell, he said under his breath. I'm done.

On September 1, 2016, Colin Kaepernick, black American, kneeled during the National Anthem in a preseason game for the San Francisco 49ers. His teammate Eric Reid, black American, kneeled beside him. That same day, in a different football game, Seattle Seahawks' Jeremy

Lane, black American, sat on the bench during the National Anthem. Days later, Megan Rapinoe, gay American, kneeled at a National Women's Soccer League match during the National Anthem. Eight days after Colin Kaepernick first kneeled, Denver Broncos' Brandon Marshall, black American, kneeled during the National Anthem. On September 11, 2016, four Miami Dolphins players kneeled during the National Anthem: Arian Foster, black American; Michael Thomas, black American; Kenny Stills, black American; Jelani Jenkins, black American. The same night, the entire Seattle Seahawks team linked arms as did the Kansas City Chiefs team. Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid kneeled during the National Anthem on September 11, and two of their teammates, Eli Harold, black American, and Antoine Bethea, black American, held their fists in the air. Two players from the opposing team, the Rams, held their fists in the air: Robert Quinn, black American, and Kenny Britt, black American. Colin Kaepernick, black American, kneeled during the National Anthem for every 49ers game in the 2016 season.

Colin Kaepernick, black American, lost his job because he kneeled during the playing of the National Anthem. Opting out of his contract in early 2017 as opposed to being cut by his team, he was blackballed by the NFL. Later in the year, he filed a grievance against the NFL, accusing owners of colluding to keep him out of the NFL. In 2019, the NFL paid Colin Kaepernick an undisclosed amount in exchange for his silence. On the three-year anniversary of his kneeling, he tweeted in support of those who refuse to be silent in the face of systemic racism. Eric Reid, black American, nearly lost the chance to play football again because he kneeled during the National Anthem. He was passed over for months during the 2017 free agent season but was finally drafted by the Carolina Panthers for a one-year contract; in Reid's first game with the Panthers, he kneeled during the National Anthem. Brandon Marshall, black American, lost contracts with CenturyLink and a Colorado credit union, both companies citing his kneeling as the reason. In solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, Rihanna, black American, turned down an invitation to perform at the 2020 Super Bowl Halftime Show saying, "I just couldn't be a sellout." U.S. Soccer admonished Megan Rapinoe's kneeling, as did the public. American Soccer Now held an online poll that asked if Megan Rapinoe, gay American, should

even be allowed to play soccer for the United States due to her kneeling during the National Anthem. Months after she kneeled, U.S. Soccer passed a policy that required all players stand during the National Anthem. My white parents' new home flies the American flag, a red, white and blue reminder of what country they proudly live in and fight for: America. For the past thirty years, my white father has taken advantage of everything retired military life has to offer: free healthcare, more affordable food, at-cost travel, and nationwide discounts. He's become more of a patriot after his service than during active duty. And now he flies the American flag in his dead-end cul-de-sac.

In fall of 2016, 63 percent of white Americans disapproved of kneeling and 74 percent of black Americans approved of kneeling. The poll also revealed that the older the American, the less likely they were to approve of kneeling. Seventy-seven (77%) of NFL viewers are white Americans. Every single NFL team owner is a white American. Another set of polls revealed that 72 percent of Americans disagreed with Kaepernick's kneeling, calling his actions "unpatriotic," and 61 percent of Americans didn't support his reasons for kneeling. About the Americans kneeling during the National Anthem, the President of the United States said, "Maybe you shouldn't be in the country." The President described the players' actions as "disgraceful." He called them "sons of bitches." In 2018, two years after the kneeling, 53 percent of Americans still thought it was never appropriate to kneel during the National Anthem. A vast majority of those who disagreed were old, white Republican Americans. My parents are old, white, Republican Americans. Now many Americans just hope they can make it through the holidays without ever talking about politics. Many Americans think that talking about political issues increases the hate and the prejudice. More Americans would rather talk about religion with a stranger than politics.

Hundreds of black men are shot and killed by police each year. Many police officers don't lose their job or receive criminal punishment. Colin Kaepernick, black American, kneeled because he was fed up with the unchallenged police brutality, as were many Americans. From Oscar Grant to I can't breathe, he'd had enough.

Eric Garner, 43 years old, father of six, suffocated by the New York police on July 17, 2014. Michael Brown Jr., 18 years old, fired at 14

times by a Ferguson, Missouri police officer who killed him on August 9, 2014. Laquan McDonald, 17 years old, shot and killed while walking away from a Chicago police officer on October 20, 2014. Tamir Rice, 12 years old, shot and killed by Cleveland police on November 22, 2014. Walter Scott, 50 years old, former Coast Guard, shot five times while fleeing a North Charleston police officer on April 4, 2015. Freddie Gray, 25 years old, arrested and unnecessarily assaulted by Baltimore police officers which resulted in his death on April 12, 2015. Philando Castile, 32 years old, shot seven times by Minnesota police officer while sitting in his car on July 6, 2016. Alton Sterling, 37 years old, shot dead while held to the ground by Baton Rouge police officers on July 5, 2016. Dennis Plowden, 25 years old, shot and killed by Philadelphia police on December 27, 2017. Stephon Clark, 22 years old, shot at 20 times and killed in his grandmother's backyard by a Sacramento police officer on March 18, 2018. Rashad Cunningham, 25 years old, fatally shot by Indiana police just 10 seconds after being approached on August 17, 2019.

In 2015, black men were nearly 2.5 times more likely to be shot by police officers than were white men. By 2016, that statistic rose to 4 times. Young black men were 9 times more likely to be shot than either of my white, middle of America parents. Now they are killing black women. 28-year-old Atatiana Jefferson, black American, was shot in her home while playing video games with her nephew.

All I heard from my white parents about it all was that Colin Kaepernick needed to show some respect and stand for the National Anthem. True patriots stand for the flag and our country. It's just what you do, they lectured me, my white mom absentmindedly placing her hand over her heart. My white dad told me that the young black man who was shot at fleeing a stolen car deserved it. He said that only guilty people flee the cops and that the police had every right to stop his car in the first place. I told him that there's never a reason to shoot at someone who is running away. That cops can't just stop random black people because they look suspicious. I thought that's racist, but I didn't say it. I wanted to say it, I tried to, but I couldn't. I also failed to say I love you, Dad. We don't talk about things because we prefer to cling to the bad feelings, the need to be right, like the fact that I haven't visited

my parents for Christmas in fifteen years because the first year I invited my future husband to celebrate with us together, they separated us, forcing us to stay in different rooms. But I don't want to lose you, I think. More and more Americans cancel their holiday plans to avoid being around those who support the opposing side. I don't want to be that statistic.

I sit across the table from my mom and dad, both old, Republican Americans, both retirees living in Kansas. A news scroll on the restaurant television reports that a white cop entered a black man's apartment, thinking it was hers, and fatally shot Botham Jean, a 26-year old black American. Castle doctrine be damned, I think. My dad refuses to chime in. My mom says that there is never an acceptable reason to kneel or protest during the National Anthem. She refuses to listen to my side. Nothing I say will ever convince her otherwise. It's personal, she says.

Children | John Bonanni

My daughter has my hurt in her.

She lives with it better than I have. I hid it, softened it, made it acceptable, and then called my compromise a success. An achievement of normal. She faces it, endures it, mocks it by parody, dismissal, lightness. No big deal. It is what it is, she says.

But deep inside her, damaged hopes and dashed dreams hang within her like a buoy floating, reminding her of another shot. Every rise of a wave of maybes met with the pull that ties her down to no, not this time, maybe not ever. Anchored to the wasteland of bottom feeders.

Just waiting for it to be all over. So she can have another shot. Maybe this is where she belongs, she says, she hopes, but not with too much expectation. But with relentless persistence.

Her power is like iron, resistant and impenetrable. They have no idea what they pass up.

She is an oncoming train, with no intention of stopping. A lioness, standing you down, a protector, a sentry.

Her love is righteousness, her integrity is commitment, pulling at the buoy with every rise, until she is free.

My son is everything I had hoped to be.

My son is the charm, the right stuff. The achiever, the master builder, the perfect calculator. Everything right, all is proper.

He fears nothing, except a blank page.

He plans, he pleases, he avoids confrontation. He reduces risk. He makes it nice. Always nice. He has permanence, structure, character, intelligence.

He provides assurance where there is concern, trust where there is doubt, solution where there is difficulty.

He loves within a framework, his passions contingent upon outcomes.

Until he flies. Then, he soars. There he is alone, forever invincible.
Endlessly creative.

He will not take you there, but he will return. His integrity demands it
of him.

Team of Mules | Gregory Stephens

My granddad's father John Speed Stephens Jr. was the son of an Irish immigrant, and as a fourteen-year-old, he became the pioneer who planted the Stephens in Indian territory, pre-Oklahoma. This is his story, passed on by my father, born in Palmer, Oklahoma. Many of the details were told to him by his Uncle Dennis, who lived to 101 years in Sulphur, Oklahoma.

Back in Pineville Missouri, the Irish wife of that Irish immigrant, John Speed Stephens Sr., up and died. When John Speed Sr. married an American woman, his son could not abide her. His old man told the boy that he either had to accept his new mother-in-law, or he could set off for the territory. In the latter case, he would be allowed to hitch up the mules to the wagon and leave. It was a gentleman's agreement. So John Speed Jr., at age fourteen, drove two mules and a wagon down through De Queen Arkansas and down into Indian Territory.

John Speed Jr. worked the railroad between Texas and Indian territory. His wife Marietta Leemaster was a maid for the engineer's wife. John Speed came to be in charge of more than thirty men, their mules and equipment. He was a successful businessman, but there is a tragedy at the heart of his story: he lost his oldest son Lawrence during a typhoid epidemic in Alvin, Texas. He had taken the family there to bale coastal hay and ship it back to farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma. When Lawrence suddenly passed, he gave up his business, moving the family back to Oklahoma, where they settled on Cochran Creek in Murray County.

There John Speed ran a grocery store. My dad "Bo" used to sit in there and watch the runnings. His father Floyd sat Bo and his sister Dorothy on a box in this country store and forbade them to speak. The store smelt of sorghum, the sweet sticky livestock feed in burlap sacks, on which the kids rested their feet below their wooden box.

Forbidden to ask questions, the brother and sister, ages three and four, sat and watched, there in the semi-darkness, all day long. Dorothy was eleven months older than Bo, and they were like twins. They could

hear the clanging of their father Floyd's blacksmith shop just down the street. Floyd's wife must have been sick that day, so he brought the kids into town. At lunch, he passed by in his leather apron to bring them part of his sandwich.

John Speed never spoke to the children nor gave them a bite to eat, not even a nibble of his candy, all day. Brother Bo and sister Dorothy were both fascinated and terrified. John Speed kept a six-shooter in the store, just in case. That was his "insurance," the country folk said. Everyone knew he had it, and no one dared cross him.

When he was not dealing with customers, John Speed talked to his right-hand man, "Uncle" Tom Barker, a former schoolteacher who had volunteered to serve as a witness when John Speed Stephens came down from Indian territory into Texas to marry his fiancée, Marietta Leemaster. Tom followed the younger man back north across the Red River, and the two men were never separated until death. Tom would read the newspapers to John Speed, who kept a chaw in his cheek and spat into a dented tin cup.

There had to have been a sense of diminished expectations of returning to life in a tiny town in Oklahoma, after the death of Lawrence. The loss of his son, and a bigger business, must have haunted him. But if John Speed carried a certain sense of tragedy and regret to his grave, he was well-liked and respected. A man who could supervise 30 men and their mules, then run a community grocery store, had to have people skills. Dad describes him as uneducated, but intelligent. John Speed was a straight-talker: a man who got to the point, whose word was law. He ruled his stretch of Cochran Creek.

One of John Speed's sayings from railroad days was "a mule can only do what a mule can do. And that's enough." He would not abide his men mistreating their mules. He understood that people and creatures operate within natural limits, and we should not expect them to jump their traces. John Speed seems to have had some incipient conception of animal rights—gleaned from experience, not books, for this pioneer was illiterate.

Reflecting on the generations of Stephens men leads me to understand how some familial scripts repeat themselves. Stephens men have a history of setting off on their own. My son Samuel reacted to my

second marriage like John Speed Jr. reacted to his father's remarriage. Both young men went away: John Speed at age 14, Samuel at 12. In this cycle, I am a version of John Speed Sr., leaving behind the ancestral homeland, and losing my son in the process.

Dad says he is more like his mother's family, the Robbs. So Samuel, whose personality is more like his mom than his dad, followed a script that is similar to my father's. As a youth, Samuel was coached to see his father's house as a prison. Following a family script, he turned his back on the father and walked away. But then he found a new faith (Islam). This may seem off-script in his father's family. However, now this faith has led him homeward, towards his father's house in Missouri, near where the family saga began.

In the present, father and son, rooted in a family of meat-eaters who slaughtered their own beef, and killed chickens with their bare hands, are committed vegetarians. We compare notes about proscriptions against mistreating animals in the Bible and in the Qu'ran and understand that we are walking in the footsteps of John Speed Stephens.

Nature
is utterly ruthless
with lifeforms
that don't love
themselves.

John Whitbourn,

"An Interview with
Peter Berard,"

San Antonio Review,
Summer 2020

Interview with John Whitbourn |

Peter Berard, Ph.D.

John Whitbourn cuts a unique figure in the world of speculative fiction. Entering the scene with *A Dangerous Energy*, which won the Gollancz Prize for Fantasy Fiction in 1992, he's the author of numerous novels and short stories. He is perhaps best known for his fiction set in a fantasy version of Earth where the Reformation failed, the Catholic Church (bolstered by a monopoly over magic) reigns supreme, and England is still ruled by the Stuarts. Some of his fiction has been called "the first Jacobite propaganda in centuries," and a current of fascination with what our world and typical "Whig history" deems backwards and retrograde. Catholic though his sensibility may be, dark humor, ribaldry and a keen appreciation for man's smallness in the world runs through his fiction.

In this interview, we find Whitbourn in a "valedictory mood," and he expands upon his outlook, methods, and future works.

Peter Berard: One of your few interviews is entitled "Confessions of a Counter-Reformation Green Anarcho-Jacobite." This isn't findable online, and you've implied you were glad about that. Do you eschew the label(s) it put on you? I admit I've referred to it a few times when describing your work to friends.

John Whitbourn: No, I don't repudiate that title, chosen to headline a long-ago interview with a mainstream monthly 'glossy' UK SF magazine; albeit I suspect applied a trifle 'tongue in cheek.' Nor would I be ashamed of any of the component terms if someone insisted on labelling me so. Though I think it's often detrimental, especially in the present climate, to label people. It leads to them being put in a box, placed on the appropriate cultural supermarket shelf, and then purchased or spurned according to ingrained habit. Whereby we stand in danger of missing out on a million miles of fun and enlightenment.

Accordingly, I have a longstanding practice of sampling books and journals and interviews where all the signs are that I wouldn't agree with a word within. You get to kiss a lot of frogs that way, but a surprising proportion turn into Princess Leia (*Star Wars* 'slave costume' and all...). A consequence of which is that, for instance, I can speak pretty fluent Marxism; say up to USSR era post-grad level and can be in rare-content discussing Gramsci and 'false consciousness' in an English pub with bearded leftists. And I suspect they'd never guess the 'Counter-Reformation' etc. epithet might be applied to me.

Whereas if you only read what you know to be a literary 'amen-corner' for your own views, then there's the intellectual and spiritual danger that, in the immortal words of Louis Jordan (1947): *'Jack, you're dead'*.

So, yep, I'll own that title you quote. As a composite tally of individual flags I would rally to if spotted in the fog of battle. Or glimpsed through some of the windows through which I look out to view the world-weather. But, however and nevertheless, I am not a didactic writer. I think didacticism (posh talk for preaching) is to storytelling and good books what razor blades are to little children. i.e., to spell it out, not a happy mix. To put it mildly.

Granted, there's Charles Dickens and, arguably, George Orwell, who harnessed their genius to good causes dear to their heart, and who still achieved literary greatness. However, I'm not in their league—and nor is almost anyone else.

In short, I'd say the story is the thing. If you have a stance or belief, then by all means let it play a role in your writing (how to stop it doing so?), but never via occupying centre-stage and spouting soliloquies. If you have a cause to espouse, then get a lectern or a website.

In sum, the 'Counter-Reformation Green Anarcho-Jacobite' components all apply, but they don't cohere to any specific ideology. In particular, the Jacobite portion is firmly bolted to the 'Anarcho,' because I don't think that restoration of the rightful dynasty to the British throne can any longer justify hurting, let alone killing, anyone—though the appeal of 'Lost Causes' remains. Such descriptives (and loads of other stuff, including neutrality and no-strong-view-on-the-subject) are only there as, at most, the theatrical backdrop to the play in progress, not, G-d forbid, as a bellowing ham actor trying to blow-dry the audience's hair. I've read books that were like that—say Robert Heinlein's later works—and loathed them. If I want to hear a sermon, I'll go to church.

PB: What does your writing process look like? Are you an outliner, or do you just go ahead and write the thing? Have you got any advice for beginning writers of weird and/or counterfactual and/or counter-reformation fiction out there?

JW: I plan. But always and only in moderation, as the ancient Delphic oracle wisely advised. Usually under the headings of 'plot', 'setting' and 'characters'. Probably not more than a side of A4 for each. Anything more vampires out all the fun of creativity for me. Speaking personally, excessively detailed planning runs the danger of my mutinous mind ticking off the project as 'done'. Thus, making any further writing sessions a conscript chore requiring dragging yourself back to. I don't think I'm alone in this. I've known several prospective writers who write wonderful—exciting even—novel plans: 50, 60, maybe more pages long, and studded with nigh complete scenes; but thereafter the life and joy seems to ebb out of the project and they prove to be stillborn: uncreated worlds. Which I see as a shame and warning—and the 'awful' variety of both.

So, to illustrate, I have in my archive a page torn from a spiral-bound notebook. One side contains the notes and doodles (green ink for some forgotten reason...) from a University lecture attended in 19**. On the reverse, written during that very same lecture (yes, I know: for shame, slacker student!), is jotted the whole plot and purpose of my first novel *A Dangerous Energy*, which launched my publication career and won a BBC literary prize. Including a healthy sum of ££££s. Which I'd like to say was squandered on wine, women and song, but instead went into the financial blackhole that is a young family. My point is that, re-reading that novel 'plan,' it comprises maybe twenty sentences. All but one of which formed the basis of individual chapters in the published book. I seemed to have been in the happy position of taking dictation from... somewhere—albeit not the lecturer speaking at the time (RIP Prof. Slade). In fact, almost nothing scribbled down in that plan that day was much altered or rejected. It formed the skeleton and spirit which supported and animated the eventual book. So, that's my ideal scenario I suppose, although it's not always been so 'easy' since. But I was young and green (old meaning) then...

The peril is that, for me and I suspect many others, planning is the pleasurable part of writing: the period of pure, bubbling creativity, of 'world-building', and people-birthing—what Tolkien called '*sub-creation*.' After which comes the day-after-day hard work of actual creation: getting words on pages and making those words do what you want them to do. Which some days comes like sunshine from heaven, but more often is like herding cats...

The other thing I do, when the book is well underway and near what I term the 'point of no return' in terms of knowing it will, Deo volente, be completed, is to ask myself the following question. *'If you were teleported onto a rooftop, armed with a megaphone, and tasked in this, your last ten seconds of life, to summarize to the whole human race gathered expectantly below, 'What is your book trying to say?'—then what would you tell them?*

Assuming a good answer comes to you, I find that that focuses the authorial mind wonderfully. At best, it can cram a shapeless tale into a corset, or laser-etch events into clarity, or get characters to get to the damn point. It may even shock the author, revealing what their book was actually about, contrary to what they thought. In which case, true creativity has taken place, unsuspected and under their nose.

Then you have to revise it. My least favourite bit. The fun declines exponentially till you get to the nadir of grammatical conundrums and the esoteric labyrinth of printer's notations. But no one held a gun to your head and made you write the thing. It's all your own fault and *'ain't no one to blame but you, boy. Stop your ungrateful whining.'*

Enjoyment can be re-injected by merely respectful, not slavish, adherence to your prior planning. In particular, your characters should be sufficiently alive as to be capable of swerving off course so as to surprise you. Synergies snap into life, connections are made, motivations become obvious, and—if you're really blessed—'secret harmonies' start to be heard, linking plot and characters and setting AND authorial purpose. Such that, on a good day, the writing process is pure pleasure.

And when it's not, write anyway and revise what you've done later. Preferably tomorrow. That also is important. Keep going.

I'd also add that, unless you're a hack or mere mercenary, you must write to please yourself. If your readership happens to possess the guts and moral integrity to unreservedly dig what you write, then let bliss abound. But if not, at least you've written something that's the best you could do, and that no one else at all, all the way from Creation from Doomsday, could have written the way you've written it! Which is no small achievement when you stop to think. The great Cavafy wrote a poem ("The First Step") making that very point.

So, that's the way I do it. I've heard of other ways. Such as those (apparently only a few) who sit before a blank page and then straightaway bobsleigh off on a 100% unplanned wild ride the ending of which they know not. If so, I envy Yahweh's apparent smiling upon them. Or there's those who plan down to the last full stop and bracket. What do I (a mere English hillbilly) know? Let a thousand blossoms bloom. There's no right way to write—only right and righter ones. As in all things in Life success is the arbiter. Success = quality or sales? Discuss.

As to other advice, there's the boring bog-standard stuff about reading widely, of being influenced by favourite writers but never ever pastiching them, and, of course, never giving up in the face of outrageous discouragement via rejection letters from publishers and other sinners. Plus I'll add my personal call to jihad of always giving your sub-creation depth and detail (lightly conveyed)—make it your favourite daydream playground and invent stuff that might never make it into the completed book but that can still linger there, like the places and people over the horizon that you know full well are there, even if you can't presently see them. In short make a real world—because if you can't be bothered to believe in it, why should anyone else?

Also, I got given an infallible cure (well, it works for me...) for 'Writer's Block'—although have you considered how you never hear of 'Nurse's Block' or 'Shop Assistant's Block'? It comes courtesy of Joe Haldeman of *The Forever War* fame, who I've had the pleasure of meeting. He recommends that if inspiration is proving elusive you set yourself—make yourself—compile lists. It doesn't matter of what: American presidents in chronological order, Capital cities of Africa, animals with tails: whatever. Within minutes you'll be so bored your brain will be desperate to cooperate with creativity again. Whereupon you start writing and keep going. If it proves to be not so hot when you reread later, then that's not the end of the world. At least it's something and can always be revised. Better that than a blank page and discouragement.

Always keep in mind that not one in a million of us can be so blessed as, say, Hank Williams, *'the Hillbilly Shakespeare'* (1923-1953) who said of his songs *'I pick up the pen and God moves it.'*, or Mozart who seems to have just taken down dictation from... ?, composing scores with scarce an amendment. Those people are the awesome mountaintops we can squint at from below and aspire to equal in altitude one day, if even only for the span of one fortunate sentence.

And don't forget to enjoy your writing life and the gift of sub-creation. You are already blessed with the ambition and ability to head in that direction, so be grateful and revel in your gift. As we learn in childhood, people who don't say thank you for gifts end up not getting any more...

My final word would be, whatever you do, don't listen to those servants of Satan who advise you to study successful (= sales only) authors and copy them. That way you end up dragging yourself to the PC to grind out your daily 2000 word quota of *The Death Lizards of Khabzi; Vol. 7 of the Chronicles of Count Madoc, the Intergalactic Celt* (a spoof book reviewed as '700 pages of total bollocks' by the great Phil Rickman, perceptive critic and creator of the 'Merrily Watkins' series—see below). And you will have betrayed your gift. Concluding in deathbed regrets, even if dying amidst riches, plus hard questions to answer in the Judgement to come.

PB: Who do you consider your literary influences to be? Is there anyone other than yourself you'd recommend reading to get where you're coming from, fiction-wise?

JW: In terms of writing style, I aspire to the seemingly effortless 'crystal clear' English prose of English SF great, Sam Youd, aka John Christopher (1922-2012) of *The Tripods* and *Sword of the Spirits* trilogies fame. And, of course, George Orwell. In practice I despair of reaching their standard beyond the odd consecutive phrase or two from time to time. And even then, only if I really work at it. Yet we all live in hope.

In terms of labour-of-love world-building, I stand in 'we-are-not-worthy' awe of your fellow countryman, Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman ('Phil') Barker (1929-2012) for his creation of 'Tekumel' and the Role Playing Game *Empire of the Petal Throne* and novels set therein. He and it have been a major influence and are the 'Exhibit 1' I usually produce to vindicate my views on depth in world building.

In terms of sheer storytelling ability, the master I revere is Yiddish, Nobel Prize winning, author Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-1991). Although I could never carry off his deceptively simple *'There once was a man who lived in Warsaw, and this man had three sons...'* style. It belongs to him alone—and the untold tribal campfire bards who preceded him, plus of course, the 'author' of the Old Testament, the identify of whom, I'll grant you, is not universally acknowledged...

So, as you may gather, I like clear, ‘clean’, simple (which it ‘ain’t...), ‘muscular’ prose, thus incorporating within my pantheon of esteem such far-from-SF figures as Russian Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Englishman Phil Rickman. No women there, I notice, before any freelance commissar does. Don’t know why. Don’t care. Though possibly due to the baleful influence of Jane Austen, whose sheer.... *existential pointlessness* was (is still?) culturally imposed on generations of English schoolboys. Thereby successfully inoculating them against literature for life. Fortunately, I stumbled upon an antidote (SF and Fantasy) in time to avoid that fate. Just. My life would have been very different otherwise. I know for a fact that many of my school contemporaries subsequently only ever read car manuals and sports reports. Which is their loss (and what a loss), but not necessarily 100% their own fault.

Conversely, I abhor convoluted, ‘precious’, indulgent, prose, where you need to check that you’ve got sandwiches-and-a-flask with you before embarking on some of the longer sentences. And then have to re-read them to get the sense—if any. Poor old Anglicised American Henry James (1843-1916) is often quoted as one of the worst exemplars of same, and H G Wells wounded his nominal friend by describing him and his writing style as like ‘*a magnificent but pitiful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea in a corner.*’ Ouch. James should have punched Wells in public.

In connection with which I have one tip – or more accurately a dreadful warning – for would-be writers. Trust your reader. That is vital. By showing up and opening your book they’ve demonstrated that they’re at least notionally on your side (unless they’re a reviewer...). They will therefore meet you at least halfway in cooperating with what you write. Alas, there is a tidal pull that afflicts authors, especially as they get older and/or more established, of not trusting their readership and so seeking to exclude all possible erroneous interpretations of their words. Whereby in time their material starts to sound like a house-sale contract or something drawn up by desiccated corporate lawyers. So, if you feel like writing: *‘She put the kettle on—by which I mean connected it to the power supply with the intention of brewing a hot beverage: not placed it on her head like a hat’*. Or *‘He slipped on his dressing gown—that is to say he donned it over his body as a further piece of apparel, not stumbled across it as it lay on the floor,’* then that urge must resisted *‘with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your might.’* Otherwise, artistically speaking, Louis Jordan’s dread words apply again: *‘Jack, you’re dead’*.

PB: There's a lot that's worthwhile in your writing (I enjoy the humour, among other things) but when I try to explain it to people, I mostly talk about the worlds, specifically the world that features in *‘A Dangerous Energy’* and its sequels. What historical inspirations went into it?

JW: I agree (except re that *‘a lot...’* bit!)—it’s the ‘world’ that’s the thing. As with ourselves in our own little lifetimes, so should it be with the people and places in our books. The world was there before us and will be still after we’ve *‘strutted and fretted our hour upon the stage’*, to paraphrase the Bard. In keeping with that palpable reality (unless you’re a solipsist...) I believe that an author should strive to ‘sub-create’ such that the same sense of belief is conveyed to the reader. Or, making the mirror-image case, I can’t abide (plus think it slighting to your book and readership alike) stock-fantasy frontage-only film-set style worlds: sham places and people, only as deep as they need to be to support the passing scene and their fleeting role in the tale. Which then are packed away as the focus passes on.

Sadly, fantastic literature now swarms with such, worlds created like they were assembled from a publisher's pro-forma: 'Name of Goodie Nation', 'Name of Troubled Heroine', 'Name of Magical Item plot arbiter (NB—for copyright reasons can't be a ring)', 'Name of Evil Lord' and etc.

Against which tendency, the late Diana Wynn-Jones's deeply subversive spoof travel guide *'Tough Guide to Fantasy Land'* (1996—available for mere hamburger-sum pennies via Amazon) should have acted as a nuke-strength cleansing disinfectant. Certainly, no one who's read it is likely to tolerate shoddy pot-boiler fantasy ever again. Which righteous work alone should have earned even avowed atheist Jones entry to Paradise. If there's any justice.

PB: From where I sit, the world of *A Dangerous Energy* has some stuff going for it – environmentally more sound, settler colonialism seemingly checked early – but is otherwise quite dark: limited in terms of what people can do with their lives, technologically backwards, stifled, given to Crusades. There's a "warts and all" approach you don't get with other writers whose worldbuilding has a strong worldview behind it (thinking here mainly of libertarian writers). Do you see the world of *ADE* as an improvement on our world, and if so, in what ways?

JW: The world or alt-history I depict in *A Dangerous Energy* and *To Build Jerusalem* and *The Two Confessions* (in a nutshell, the 'Reformation' failed, or, as I'd say, the combined coup d'état and treason were foiled) is meant to be a real place where humans live out their lives and times and being, both before and after and beyond the spotlight of the plot falling upon them and meeting the main characters. I think of them as active agents with lives to live unconnected with my story aims, and quite often make references accordingly. I may have absorbed that style from my youthful reading of the estimable Andre Norton, who I now realise often slipped in 'colour' that turned out to have no connection with the unfolding tale (such as, from memory, some planet being a centre of *'Type 2F spaceship battlecruiser manufacture'*) but cumulatively combined to make me believe I truly was, for the duration of my read, 'elsewhere.'

However, referring back to my distaste for didacticism, I am not a proponent of the *A Dangerous Energy* world, nor an advocate it being 'better'. I do see positive elements within it, such as the apparent better general mental health compared to 'our' present anomic pandemic. Although their physical health care lags centuries behind that of the contemporary West. Equalling average life spans of far shorter duration. However, our descendants may likewise pity us for our own 'mere' seventy years or so span. All is relative.

Conversely, 'ADE-world' doesn't share our privilege of almost unfettered knowledge seeking and curiosity-settling via the 'galactic encyclopaedia' we have access to through our mobile phones and PCs. I recently stayed a week beside the ruins of a Cistercian Abbey in England that was once accounted a major centre of learning for possessing a library of two hundred books! Whereas intellectuals stuck in 'my' history or real-life scholars like St. Bede, the 'Father of English History' (672-735 A.D.), would be thrilled by arrival on loan of just one new book from some other monastery or university. Yet if there was a reference therein that intrigued them there was no possibility of 'Googling' it like I do a dozen times a day, minimum. Tough—they'd have to write a letter to some other scholar. Maybe abroad. And maybe it'd get delivered, and maybe that person might know the answer. And maybe they'd reply and maybe their reply would arrive safely. In due course...

I wouldn't like that, not now I've experienced modernity. But what my alt-history people do have as a collective possession is a shared Creator-focused narrative of Life and the Universe, firmly set within a redemption history, such that everyone doesn't have to work out their own purpose from scratch (assuming they can be bothered or ever could), and so can just get on with their given years, with a reason for having families and doing good (or ill), etc. Assuming that they inwardly accept it, as I suspect the vast unthinking majority would, and as such insights as we get from historical records confirm they did. On a Bell Curve ranging from passive acceptance to full-on commitment. At least openly.

Whereas now the fraying—to near nothingness in advanced places—of societal cohesion or narrative, or cultural heritage to hand on (*'All we can hope to leave them now is money'*—Philip Larkin, *'Homage to a Government'*) is really starting to show. Equaling that *'Alienation'* which Marxism makes so much of, but I think fundamentally misunderstands.

Wherefore, each successive generation in the West (and everywhere else for all I know) seems to be suffering from mild to severe 'futureshock' at the howling gale of ceaseless change and the pointlessness-pandemic, amounting in many cases to nervous breakdowns not susceptible to any individual, person-by-person, cure. Either by pharmaceuticals or counselling. Mark Fisher (aka 'K-punk', 1968-2017) wrote perceptively on the subject.

PB: You have attacked the Whig version of history – everything being a logical and upward progression up from feudalism to modern industrial society – both by implication in your fiction and more explicitly in interviews. What would you say your view of history is?

JW: It's easy to attack the Whig view of History—defined as *'we are the summit and purpose of History and evolution'*—even without the kick in the crutch given it by WWI, let alone the Holocaust, which ought to have been its coup de grâce. And the reason that it's easy is that the basic charge of being 'arrogance-on-stilts' is broadly true.

Yet it's understandable how it came about. All hegemonies and cultures need to love themselves and have a foundation myth and justification narrative, however risible it might read to subsequent appraisals. If they don't, they fail and die, just like individual human beings and families that don't essentially like themselves do (as with Western modernity). Nature is utterly ruthless with lifeforms that don't love themselves.

So, for instance, the titanic wealth-and-land expropriation and ditching of societal cohesion that was the Reformation excused its actions as 'reform', and a few prominent figureheads (of varying sincerity) pinned a religious fig leaf over its more obvious motives and all the gory bits. In this fallen world that's what classes and regimes up-to-no-good are pretty much obligated to do. Which doesn't mean we can't meanwhile mock and undermine them...

Accordingly, I'd venture to say—armed by the work of revisionist (but centuries-too-late) scholars like J. J. Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy—that the Reformation in England at least, was a forcible civilisational conversion to de-facto materialism and selfish me-alone proto-capitalism, incited, in the immortal words of John Stuart, 3rd Marquess of Bute in 1868:

'by a lustful and tyrannical king and... a pack of greedy, time serving and unpatriotic nobles...' equalling '...a great national crime.'

English Radical politician and author, William Cobbett (1763-1835), put it more bluntly and far ruder than that, in words you can look up, but I will spare the more sensitive reader.

Which, via state violence and coercion, and then the slow grind of legally imposed social conformity, forced a more malleable and ultimately patina-thin and discredited shadow of Christianity on the nation, against the will of vast majority who clung to the faith of their ancestors until their cultural memories died with them and a new Protestant and 'Anti-Papist' nation was born.

But what do I know? I wasn't there.

That said, I still perceive there's a line to be drawn, albeit a crooked one, from the Reformation through the 'Enlightenment' and the more nihilistic excesses of the Industrial Revolution', and thinking of Mankind as perfectible and 'the measure of all things', which leads you ultimately to eugenics and the Holocaust and the Gulag.

Likewise, the Whig History appropriated term 'progressive' seems to me to be most likely only progressing towards servitude to a cradle-to-grave, thought-dictating, 'Total State'. Combined with a trajectory towards a Culture whose culture is consumerism, oblivion-drinking and conquest-fucking. The next or overlapping logical step to which is broad-but-unknowing adoption of the Islamic heresy expressed by Hassan i Sabbah, 'The Old Man of the Mountains', founder of the Assassins (1034?-1124 AD): *'Nothing is true, and everything is permissible.'*

Which is no mission statement for a life, let alone a civilisation. Superficially it sounds sort of ‘stark’ and ‘manly’ in the face of an existence we didn’t ask for and are unlikely to ever understand. In practise it would lead to the kind and meek and poor and weak going under, ground underfoot in perpetuity. A sort of forever Nietzschean Fascism. I wouldn’t want to hang around in a world where that view was the default.

Seeking to be positive, instead of Marx’s, I think mistaken, class and class struggle explanation of History’s motor, I would substitute ‘Security’ as the engine of whatever might be called ‘progress’. As in safety from a life shortened or suborned by arbitrary violence, whether by the next-door tribe or your own tribe or a boss or just plain bad guy. For instance, most people in the developed world at least, no longer need fear Viking raids or their equivalent. So, all being equal, you’re more inclined to nurture ambitions beyond keeping breathing, to build nice homes and to have families. Speaking of which, in most places your Family are not legally allowed to kill you anymore. That measure of Human progress has visibly improved through time. So, taken together there has been an related decline in the need for 24/7 protection from a harsh world as provided (at a price in taxes and obedience!) by kings and feudal barons and then capitalist barons and then your Dad and your five fierce brothers, and so on and so forth. Or, to look at it in terms of accommodation, we see the transition from fortified villages, through sheltering beside castles, to our present undefended, demilitarised, suburban dormitories. Said safety from violence in turn permits (and eventually offers as-of-right) a wider and wider dissemination of power over your own life within society. Such that you end up with even the ‘little people’ having votes. Even though they’re not armed! And lone women being able live independently, even alone and unwed if that’s what they want.

So ‘Security’ would be my substitute for Marx’s societal impetus and I really ought to coin a name for the theory before I die. Alas, Whitbournianism doesn’t have the same snappy (and slightly sinister) ring to it as *Marxism*.

As to what I personally think, well, on a melancholy day it's pretty much Hassan i Sabbah's conclusion (see above), or the quote I can't presently trace (Voltaire or Balzac, or maybe my favourite poet, 'Anon') to the effect that Life is nothing but shipwreck and always will be...

Otherwhen, I hope that humanity is on an almost imperceptibly subtle but ultimately upward slope in the general direction of a better fed and sheltered/easier/safer and longer span of years in this '*million-petalled flower of being here.*' (Philip Larkin again). Yet none of those estimable improvements will help in making any sense of being here for seventy or so years. Humans are not 'eat-sleep-shag-die' animals. Or needn't be.

Also, if pressed, I'd confess I concur with the Sufis (and Job 32:8, and English explorer Sir Richard Burton, 1821-1890) that 'the spirit and life of Man is nothing but the breath of G-d'. And likewise, Sa'd Al-Din Mahmud Shabistari's words in '*The Secret Rose Garden*', c.1300 A.D.:

*I' and 'you' are but the lattices,
in the niches of a lamp,
through which the One Light shines.*

And so on. It's both a comfort and lip-stiffener to contemplate.

I hope I've never, ever, used any of my characters as a ventriloquist's dummy to voice my own views (as I've said, disrespectful to both them and the reader), but as '*summas*' go I nevertheless find myself in broad agreement with the chilly and homicidal Stoic, Admiral Slovo, central figure in my '*Popes & Phantoms*' (1993), when he said—responding to a request for deathbed summary of his philosophy:

'It's simply put' answered Slovo... 'I believed life was a vale of tears and hard on failure. I hoped that what the Church taught was true, but I feared that nothing was true and everything was permissible.'

That phrase again!

Taken with all I've said above, I've maybe just set myself up for a battering by twitterstorm, and/or 'five-to-fifteen' years in a re-education camp, but I discover than my inner indifference knows no bounds. I'm Facebook and Twitter-mob proofed. No one, not even the Government, can sack me, and I've finally secured what official American genius, Hank Williams, called '*rocking chair money*'. That is to say a modest sufficiency directly comparable to the '*rocking chair by the fire*' sole ambition of 'Old Moses' in John Ford's masterwork, '*The Searchers*'. So, I can say what I think. Though I'd be in trouble—to put it mildly—if I was starting out in publishing again. Modern professional Publishing is not staffed with '*No problem: you've got your view, and I've got my mine*' live-and-let-live people. Many are about as liberal as Lavrenti Beria. In fact, I'm sure I would never have been published. Those are the times we live in.

Although nowadays there's 'Self Publication'! No longer such a derogatory term and the last resort of the desperate. In a revolutionary process in a revolutionary era whose end we cannot even dimly glimpse (but comparable in import to the invention of the printing press I think), the Internet is coming to the aid of Freedom (and anarchy and creative destruction, and nihilism too!). The literary gatekeepers are being outflanked prior to being deposed, and like any other ruling class convinced that their thoughts are synonymous with right and virtue, they're not happy about it. Very far from...

I could check my 'Sympathy Meter' reading for them if you like, but I fear the arrow may be at 'ZERO'. Perhaps its batteries have run out...

PB: In the world of *ADE*, the Catholic Church appears as the one bulwark against a multiverse of beings inimical to human existence - demons, even bigger demons like the one in '*To Build Jerusalem*', elder gods, elves, etc. How much do you think this reflects our actual existential situation versus how much of it is good for stories?

JW: To be only partly flippant, about 50-50.

I do believe there are powers out there. In such a richly stocked universe it would be odd if there were not. I have heard first-hand testimony regarding signs of them from people that I trust. Which is as close as I care to come. They are probably in relation to us as we are to the bugs we unknowingly kill in abundance every time we walk or drive. And they are not necessarily committed to our happiness and well-being in the first place. Therefore, it is neither safe nor wise to consort with them, via a Ouija board or anything else. Just as it wouldn't be wise for me to spit in Mike Tyson's beer, or for Iceland to invade America.

A lot logically follows from that perception and you've hit upon it in one of your reviews:

In Whitbourn's world, those people [The Church] have the direct line to the one bare trickle of cosmic hope, so I guess it makes sense they call the shots.'

Interestingly, in SF and Fantasy terms that stance makes you see things very differently indeed from secular modernity. For instance, one of my favourite films is *'The Mothman Prophecies'* (2002), starring Richard Gere (+ great soundtrack too – recommended for chilling the spine...), but a practicing Muslim friend of mine couldn't understand all the fuss. *'So someone's being afflicted by a jinn,'* was his comment. *'Big deal. That's what jinns do, jinns are mischievous. Why doesn't this fool pray to the Creator of all jinns for aid?'*

Likewise, Blatty's *'The Exorcist'* (book and film—and shun the sequels I implore you!) only really sounds out its proper responses if placed in the locating cosmology. Otherwise it's just 'gross-out' horror and an entertainment. Add in the requisite buttresses and extensions of its 'universe' and then you're viewing a very different, taller and more imposing edifice...

As the other part of the 50-50, how happy a happenstance it is when your perception of reality is also a genuine launchpad for storytelling...

PB: The Gideonites (militant underground Protestants) in *'To Build Jerusalem'* practice "democratic centralism," which, having Trotskyite friends, I found tickling. Have you got experience with such an organizing model?

JW: See above re my eclectic reading tastes, including Marxism and other ideologies. Also, via the random contingencies of upbringing and career, I can simulate Marx-speak at least as good as any tenured Sociology professor. Plus, Marxian ideology does genuinely interest me, and my library of same is extensive and far from dusty. Which makes me a very atypical Englishman. However, I'd take to the hills with a rifle rather than live under it.

PB: I haven't had the chance to read it yet, but I'm intrigued by your recent books centered around the adventures of King Farouk of Egypt. What inspired you to write about him?

JW: For those not in the know, we speak of His Majesty King Farouk bin Ahmed Fuad bin Ismail bin Ibrahim bin Muhammad Ali bin Ibrahim Agha, by the grace of God Farouk I, King of Egypt and Sudan, Sovereign of Nubia, of Kordofan, and of Darfur. Caliph of the Faithful and sole official Rolls Royce Ltd. agent for the Principality and Sovereign State of Monaco. 1920-1965. Whose disgracefully amusing (and amusingly disgraceful) antics I describe in *'The Book of Farouk'* – Vol. 1 *'Nothing is True...'* and Vol. 2—(you guessed it...) *'Everything is Permissible'*. 2018 and 2019 respectively.

The short answer is that I like History and I like Farouk, and I like having fun with History—and Farouk liked having fun too. In my youth, he was the absolute archetype king of the playboys and the indefensible international jet-set. And an actual (albeit deposed) King to boot!

Longer answer: I'm attracted by opposites. Like most thinking people are, I suspect, even if secretly and guiltily. It's basically the question of 'what if I'd lived my life completely differently?' Or in this case, you might call it jealousy... For, as the contemporary Egyptian saying said:

'If there were seven deadly sins, King Farouk would find an eighth.'

So, I found myself daydreaming, what would it have been like to have lived blithely unconcerned by ethics, morals, chivalry, keeping in shape, keeping promises, honour, courage/cowardice and other people's opinion of you? Let alone consistently respectful behaviour towards the fairer sex? In short, all the things that frankly I've found to be a real drag when applied in my own life.

Therefore, I wrote Farouk's 'autobiography' to find out. And added lots of fantasy and supernatural elements and Islamic theology because..., well, because I just damn well wanted to. King Farouk-style,

Though please don't run away with the idea that Farouk was a bad man. He wasn't. I don't think anyone could have ruled Egypt at that time, not without resorting to mass massacres. Whereas Farouk killed very few people, far fewer than he could have (many of them asking-for-it), and probably fewer than he should have. As I say in the *Book of Farouk*, it's arguable that Egypt of the time was unrulable. Foaming-at-the-mouth vested interests competed to writhe their way to the top of the crab-barrel and then, perched in undignified fashion there, make their stay permanent by crushing all those below. Meanwhile, an invincible British presence (iron fist barely concealed in a golfing glove) with lofty Imperial strategic aims conversed only with a barely-Egyptian-by-blood deplorable ruling class. Beneath that binary oppression surged the 99% of the un-consulted and increasingly insulted, stirred into frenzy by thwarted nationalist *amour-propre* and religion gone rancid.

So, what mortal monarch could have ridden such a bucking bronco of a nation? Alexander the Great, maybe. Genghis Khan perchance. But then the resultant mountains of skulls would have needed a Sherpa to climb them and put a flag on top—and the history books would have tut-tutted even more than they did at poor Farouk's best efforts.

No, at worst, all Farouk's sins were those of naughtiness. And mischief too—such as pickpocketing (he stole Churchill's heirloom watch!). Rather than the colder sins, like cruelty. Consequently, he was deposed and went into exile and polished his professional naughtiness as a playboy with purloined resources (allegedly a Monte Carlo hotel bathtub filled to the brim with gold bars), before successfully gorging himself to death in 1965, aged 45. And then *'Moved into G-d's mercy'* as his grave in Cairo notes. Not a bad way of traversing the rocky road of Life I suppose.

It may be that I will owe Farouk an apology should we chance to meet in the Life-to-come. If so, I am confident it will be freely forthcoming. Meanwhile, G-d knows the truth of it. Which suffices.

I also feel the same about the similar but way more sinister figure of Parvus (1867-1924), aka Alexander Lvovich Parvus, aka Israel Lazarevich Gelfand aka... no one's really sure what his real name was! A bear-sized Russian revolutionary who looked like a stereotypical capitalist from a Bolshevik agit-prop poster. Who liked fun and kleptomania and the ladies (an affair with Rosa Luxembourg perhaps!) as much as Farouk did, but who was otherwise far darker. As in arms dealing and making shady millions wherever he so much as paused for breath. As important a figure as Lenin in the 1917 events (and more so in the 1905 ones) but subsequently airbrushed out of History by a jealous Vladimir Ilyich. He rounded off his life by hosting orgies on his private island near Berlin. Which was absolutely appalling behaviour, I agree.

I shouldn't but do rather envy Parvus his evident freedom to be a rich and ruthless monster. But I shan't now be writing a book about him (see below re why not).

PB: I read in a previous interview that some of your worlds started out as role playing game [RPG] settings. Do you still game, and if so, what have you been playing lately?

JW: As a youth and young man, I used to be heavily into wargames and then role-playing games. Indeed, I credit the former with kick-starting my up-till-then lacklustre academic abilities. Suddenly there was this absorbing new hobby which involved *'Early Sassanid Clibanarii'* and *'Patrician Roman Legio Lanciarii'* etc., and which provided a good reason to discover just what those things were, and the context they came from too. And one thing led to... a hundred thousand others and I absorbed history and politics like a sponge along the way. So, I'd earnestly recommend those hobbies to any educators dealing with 'learning averse' pupils, and especially boys turned off books by the likes of Jane Austen. I still retain an interest in the subject and can enjoy reading a set of wargame rules or 'Army Lists' or an RPG as much as I would an ordinary book.

Then, way back in the late seventies, I actually wrote a RPG called *'Continuum'* for gaming with my set of wargaming friends, and the setting was the same 'alt-history' in which my first book *'A Dangerous Energy'* was subsequently placed. Or rather I should say that years of playing *'Continuum'* (before the standard factors of work, wives and children kicked in...) created such a wealth of world-detail that the idea of setting a book therein seemed just a logical extension. Which eventually led to three books in the loosely linked series I belatedly dubbed *'The Pevensy Trilogy'*—derived from a historic English seaside village peripherally involved in all three books.

Hence the rich level of detail (or *'filigree'* as you say in a review) you kindly perceive in my books, as well as the thought-out background I always look for in any Fantasy or SF project.

Looking back, I can't say that *'Continuum'* was massively original, save maybe in its 'gunpowder' and actual-England setting, plus all the borrowings and extrapolations from English folklore. Otherwise it was a joint hotchpotch and homage to early 'Dungeons & Dragons' (I ordered the original 'White Box Set' all the way from America!) and *'Empire of the Petal Throne'* by M A R Barker (see above). Even so, it was a lot of fun and a productive factory of happy memories along the way. I'm still in touch with the players and we occasionally chat about their alternative lives therein—and what a swine of an umpire I was...

Funnily enough, I can remember the exact spot where the initial idea for the whole alt-history and RPG and books came to me—a mental bolt-from-the-blue but fully formed image of a sorcerer sitting in a pub [= bar in American], but not the standard Merlin style medieval wizard, nor generic D&D ‘tavern’, but a sort of mutant Victorian version of both. It arrived whilst I was walking to the next-door town one day in 1977—the first day of a fortuitous (as it transpired) period of unemployment, giving me the time to start recording all the ideas and mechanisms that came bubbling up and demanded to be written down.

I still pass that very point almost daily but the well of inspiration is drier than it was then. Although I will admit to the spookiness of the fact that a mere thirty-six years later the idea of calling my King Farouk novel *The Book of Farouk* came to me when I was thinking of anything-but at that self-same spot! Obviously, the *genius loci* there, or the imagination landmine buried beneath that particular bit of pavement, hasn’t entirely gone away...

PB: Have you read any good books lately?

JW: Yep. Anything by Phil Rickman of England, and ditto James Stoddard from your country. But especially the former's ‘Merrily Watkins’ series (about a ‘lady-clergyman’ exorcist) and the latter's *High House*’ series.

Phil can evoke subtle supernatural events and—just as importantly—their philosophical/theological implications, like no one else I know; and is also a wizard of characterisation, a better-than-Baron-Frankenstein creator of flesh and blood. For instance, his heroine, Merrily Watkins, has become to me a living, breathing, person, with the all the unpredictable individuality that appends to living breathing personages. Conviction thus develops, via mere marks upon paper, that a possible encounter with Merrily merely requires visiting the real-life UK Cathedral city of Hereford where the books are set.

Whereas, to be succinct where an essay could well be justified, James Stoddard has written a series that will one day I trust will be acclaimed as an all-time Fantasy genre classic (and maybe bust out of the genre ghetto too). A sort of Narnia-meets-Gormenghast – but better!

Treat yourselves!

PB: What's your next project?

JW: *The Age of the Triffids*': fulfilment of my life-long ambition of writing a sequel to John Wyndham's masterpiece (but abruptly ended) *The Day of the Triffids*'. As already published early this year. Plug: see <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/171274982X>

For copyright reasons it's only available from Canada and New Zealand.

And then that's it. I've got me my 'rocking chair' and a supply of Saudi-sourced 'worry beads' sufficient to see me out. Plus, bookshelves heaving with Philip Larkin's poetry and commentary thereon, and a comprehensive Hank Williams (senior, junior and Hank Williams III too!) CD collection.

I intend to put them to collective good use, seeking wisdom and much needed good karma whilst (as per Chateaubriand's *Vie de Rancé*, 1844) *'waiting for the clamour to end.'*

PB: Is there anything else you want to get out there?
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JW: See above. Nope. But thank you for asking.



**IT'S A
SIN TO
LIVE SO
WELL**

Two Takes on Charles Marohn's *Strong Towns* | Russell Arben Fox, Ph.D.

Book Reviewed:

Strong Towns: A Bottom-Up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity

by Charles L. Marohn

2019

Wiley

256 pages

I. Bringing a Better Urbanism to my City

In September 2019, I took a group of students to the annual Prairie Festival at The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, as part of my effort to introduce them to some genuinely radical thinking regarding environmental sustainability, local food systems, and the cultural shifts necessary to make them happen. Afterward, as I talked to one of my students about the animated and quite funny discourse given by Wes Jackson, the founder of the Institute, I tried to communicate to them the importance of Jackson's insistence upon the "virtues of ignorance" — probably with little success. The moment the conversation was over, I wished I'd thought to make use of Charles Marohn's wonderful book *Strong Towns: A Bottom-Up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity* (Wiley, 2019). Particularly this line of Marohn's: "Once we accept that our cities are complex systems, we are forced to come to grips with the reality that we can never fully understand them. More to the point, what we often think of as simple and obvious solutions to the problems we face are simple and obvious only because of our limited understanding. The more we truly know, the less clear things become" (p. 120).

Jackson had been talking about the damage which reductive, industrial solutions to the problems of food production has done to our farms and natural ecosystems, whereas Marohn's great crusade — one that has involved building a whole movement — is to get America's urban dwellers, and in particular those responsible for shaping the spaces wherein they dwell, to recover the "spooky wisdom" of older urban ecosystems, ones which grew organically and adaptatively, rather than bankrupting themselves in pursuit of simple solutions. Both, though, are ultimately discussing the same modern predicament. We are people who too often assume that — as Marohn describes at length at the end of the first chapter of his book — if there is a crime problem, we should just hire more police; if there is a traffic problem, we should just build more lanes of road; if the Walmart is stagnating, we should subsidize building another even larger one somewhere else; etc. That is, we are frequently bothered by complexity, by the time which incrementally adapting to emergent patterns requires, and by the local, circumstantial knowledge which such adaptations require; our preference, instead, is to build everything, or solve everything, "to a finished state" (p. 19), without much concern to the costs which mount in the absence of the complex stability which once attended the problem at hand. Of course, one shouldn't deny that those finished states have often included among them transformations in food production (the Green Revolution!) and personal convenience (the suburban split-level with a backyard!) which have brought enormous positives into human life. But in pursuing those states, we invariably turn the complexity of tending to the land, or strengthening our communities, into something merely "complicated," begging for ever more technical responses which become ever more disconnected from the lives of all of us who depend upon those communities and upon that land if we are to survive and thrive.

All this may make *Strong Towns* seem like a work of cultural criticism or philosophy, but it isn't — at least not directly. In fact, *Strong Towns* is one of those rare books (Wendell Berry's classic *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* [Sierra Club, 1977] is another) whose argument itself exemplifies what it advocates for: it builds towards a challenge to the whole way we conceive of its chosen focus by beginning with the most local and particular relevant matters possible. For Berry, like it is with Jackson, the focus is the collapse of traditional farming, and the key relevant matter at hand is the actual lives of farmers. For Marohn, with a focus on the collapsing financial health of America's cities, the most immediately relevant matters are the actual roads, pipes, buildings, and infrastructure that surround all of us who live in cities, and how much it costs to maintain them. Marohn, who worked as a civil engineer for decades, has an expert, intimate knowledge of these materials and processes, in the same way Jackson and Berry know about soil. So from that starting point, Marohn's book — easily the best practical treatise on localism that I have read in a long time — lays out the history and math that he sees as supporting his thesis: that America's cities are addicted to growth, and addicted to taking on debt to finance that growth, resulting in endless Ponzi Schemes to keep cities fiscally alive on paper even as basic maintenance collapses and, too often as a result, the sense of civic connection and confidence which functioning cities help provide collapses as well. The result is a bracing, powerful book which ought to get every reader to sign up a Strong Towns member (here: www.strongtowns.org), if nothing else.

Marohn is neither a historian nor a sociologist, nor as skilled a writer as Berry; his short, smart interventions into the thorny issues of private and public investment, cumulative cash flows, value per acre, and more, are both insightful and persuasive, but they leave some connections unclear, sometimes requiring the reader to supply the narrative thrust. Still, none of his declarations — “Our cities must now intentionally sacrifice growth in order to have stability” (p. 105); “There is no reason for any North American city to build another foot of roadway, or put in another length of pipe, to serve any new property anywhere” (p. 130); “Growth is an old economy objective. For local governments seeking to create successful human habitat, the centrally orienting objective needs to shift to wealth creation” (p. 176) — exist in a vacuum; all are well supported and have an intuitive sense to them. Every one of us, after all, have, no matter what size or type of city we live in, seen local governments hand out tax-breaks, desperately seek state and federal loans, float irresponsible bonds, impose ever-more creative financing schemes, all in the name of building another strip-mall, another restaurant, another office park, with the hope (sometimes fulfilled, but usually not) of landing jobs and generating sufficient additional tax revenue so as to make a few token payments and then start the process all over again. And every one of us knows how this addiction is both a product of, as well as a contributor to, the individualism, consumerism, and materialism which rarely produces anything like the traditions, institutions, and beautiful edifices that our best cities — which are, almost without exception, cities whose wealth-creating inner core had grown through a long process of adaptation, and had achieved a stability sufficient to withstand the temptations of rapid, debt-driven growth — are known for.

Some might see in Marohn's arguments a "conservative" vision for urban communities, and that wouldn't be entirely wrong. But we need to be clear on what kind of "conserving" Marohn is recommending. It is one that would follow a very different path than the market-friendly American conservatism of the past three generations. This may not be immediately obvious, especially since Marohn frequently expresses affection of market mechanisms, and accepts market realities in the way in which he tabulates costs and consequences. Yet he also refuses to allow the supposed invisible hand of the marketplace to exercise any kind of formal driving role in his proposals. Instead, he acknowledges that all markets operate in realms of prior determined parameters, amidst a set of values and incentives which reflect affirmative decisions — and it is such decisions that he calls upon America's city dwellers to make. It's not for nothing, I think, that his final chapter ends with a call for us to "work together in an intentional way" (p. 218). What form should those intentions take? Well, clearly sometimes they should take the form of limits upon our lifestyle and socio-economic choices. As he observes (with, I think, just a tiny hint of contempt), many Americans appear to — or at least are said to — "prefer [living] in a single-family homes on a large lot....[and not] within traditional neighborhoods in close proximity to other people"; they "want big box stores, strip malls, and fast food, not corner stores and mom-and-pop restaurants." He responds to this brusquely: "I can respect that some people prefer development styles that are financially ruinous to my city...[but] my local government should not feel any obligation to provide those options" (pp. 144-145).

Cities have been, likely for their entire history, places of freedom, experimentation, and choice — *Stadtluft macht frei!* and all that. Completely aside from the practical problems of making this transition (and, to be clear, such practical considerations are exactly what takes up the bulk of the book!), an urbanism which can be “stable without growth” (p. 103) would have to be city which theorizes values of freedom, experimentation, and choice quite differently than they have been over the centuries of liberal modernity. What that theory would ultimately consist of is something which many of us are searching for, with no clear solutions yet. In his own, enormously valuable way, Marohn’s whole Strong Towns project contributes to this search. In *Strong Towns* itself, you see echoes of it, though occasionally only in an unexplored and undeveloped way. For example, Marohn’s language tiptoes right up to criticizing the wealth and opportunity which industrialization brought into our lives, implying with perhaps a touch of romanticism that our urban communities may have been better places when they were poorer (pp. 60, 126-127). Similarly, the ambivalence which arguably attends Marohn’s language when he discusses white flight and women entering the workforce might raise concerns among those fearful that re-introducing limits to our urban imagination will likely result in a return to old, discriminatory patterns (pp. 93, 96, 111). But we shouldn’t read too much into these explorations—they are, after all, as the whole approach of the book makes clear, intellectual adaptations of a sense: incremental efforts to understand more about the complexity of urban life, and figure out ways to respond to the way we have both fiscally overbuilt and culturally underinvested in it.

And that is really the main virtue of Marohn's work: he is a man willing to explore. Any small, tactical action to restrict growth, build wealth, improve mass transit, halt needless construction, preserve still functional places, shrink streets, allow incremental densification, reduce regulatory burdens, promote walkability, and enable people to engage in commerce and build communities and connections in the midst of the suburban grids which plague too many of our cities is, so far as he is concerned, something that he'll likely want to see tried. And that means he'll listen to and weigh arguments without insisting on pigeonholing them in one category of answers or another. For example, he's clearly not a fan of cities' budgets being dependent upon the national government, but he also allows that some of what the national government does for cities is essential, and doesn't pretend that the national government needs to act just like a city government must (pp. 79-80, 85-86, 88-89). In short, what I think Marohn models, above all, is a *democratic urbanism*, one that turns to hard data, yes, but even more so turns to city dwellers themselves, as Berry and Jackson turned to farmers, to discover (or recover) the incremental insights that, bit by bit, makes towns strong. Does he have a democratic theory to make sense of all the ways in which cities, and the concentration of interests they represent, potentially complicate local governance? Not really. But he has shown us, through this book and in his whole campaign, just how imperative, and how practical, asking those questions, and incrementally experimenting with answers, really is.

II. But Can Middletown Cities Ever Be Strong?

At the end of chapter 5 of *Strong Towns*, "Growth or Stability" — which is, in more ways than one, the real center of the book's whole argument — Marohn makes a deeply important and culturally rich (whether he realizes it or not) set of observations. He writes (and forgive my interruptions, but it's a rich passage that deserves further elaboration):

Cities are a collection of us; they are the way we take collective action in our communities. [Here “cities” are presented as inherently democratic and civic creations, not market ones; the act of organizing spaces for commerce, art, personal expression, political action, etc., is a form of collective agency, distinct from other historical forms.] Over the past century we’ve gradually given up this responsibility, deferring the direction of our places to the priorities of others. [Note what is implied by “others”—they are not a single, collective force, but individualized others, others separated from what those in the city collectively attend to.] If the people [invoking “the people,” that essential civic construct] are to lead again, if we are to create a prosperous future for ourselves and our neighbors, local government must reassert leadership (pp. 105-106).

This is civic republicanism, participatory democracy, populist self-governance, and fiscal humility all rolled into one; it is a great expression of fundamental localist truths. Marohn may not see himself as a social theorist or historical critic, and his book isn’t without its perplexing points. But he’s produced here a great, vital work of localist theory. As my home of Wichita, Kansas, like so many other mid-sized cities, struggles its way through never-ending disputes over parking, housing, city projects, business development, and much more regarding our built environment, there’s no book that I’d rather every member of our city council to read.

I have doubts about how well the book's message will go over with all the folks in city hall, though. To be sure, there are many people in and around Wichita who have dedicated themselves to getting the city to think differently about transportation, public spaces, food access, and more, and many city workers have shown real commitment in trying to make Wichita more walkable and less auto-centric (and thus less committed to our economically unsustainable infrastructure). But the fact remains that real fiscal discipline and sustainability eludes us, and the suspicion remains that the bulk of Wichita's leadership—just like probably the bulk of civic leaders in mid-sized cities throughout America—seems to be more enamored by the promise of major projects than by anything else: specifically, as it is in Wichita's case, by the promise of “apartments, office space, retail and hotels” that will serve as “economic engines” for a growing downtown, even though the data showing any actually existing demand for such expanded opportunities is thin at best.

This sort of build-it-and-they-will-come expansion is the primary overall target of Marohn's book; he believes, in essence, that the growth machines—a classic urban argument that, somewhat frustratingly, he never directly engages with in the book—which plague so many mid-sized cities (in my judgment, the components of that argument pretty thoroughly describe the basic socio-economic and political reality of Wichita today) need to be fought, head-on, because they'll turn one's city into Detroit. How do cities that have been, for decades, overly dependent upon 1) programs that attract state and national government largess, and 2) tax revenues from debt-driven, bond-floating, never-ending development schemes, break away from those addictions? Marohn thinks the answer is obvious, if not easy: America's cities, with very few exceptions, should refuse "to build another foot of roadway, or put in another length of pipe, to serve any new property anywhere," should prioritize the "maintenance of [infrastructure solely in] high-productivity neighborhoods," should abandon zoning restrictions so as to allow local spaces "to evolve to the next level of development intensity," and in general should "sacrifice growth to build stability" (pp. 130, 154, 163, 171). While sometimes excited by the possibilities that his proposals may unleash, Marohn is mostly realistic, recognizing the resistance these recommendations will encounter. (Hence his comment that Detroit's fate should not be seen as a "strange anomaly," but rather as a warning; Detroit, he writes, is "just a couple of decades ahead of every place else"—p. 62.) In the case of my own city of Wichita, such a radical change of direction may not, I suspect, be particularly welcome.

The radicalness of some of Marohn's arguments is, in his view, necessary if we are to recognize that the cult of growth (particularly what he calls the "Infrastructure Cult") is a dying model, one which has made America's cities exceptionally fragile, constantly scrambling and striving to outbid one another for whatever expansive source of property development and job creation they can find. And perhaps it is. America's cities—again, with very few exceptions—have over the past 70 years developed a sprawling, auto-centric, mostly suburban footprint, one whose costs, in terms of environmental impact and social isolation, to say nothing of long-term financial liabilities, has been enormous. Given that Wichita is facing, in pretty much any direction one chooses to look, pretty much exactly this reality—and given that our population growth rates, employment growth rates, and income growth rates, are all hanging unsteadily around 1%-3% a year, at the very most — I'd like to believe that those who put themselves forward as leaders (or potential leaders) of our city would be responsive to a call to "opt out of these systems," and aim for building instead a city that could be "stable without growth" (p. 105). I'd love to be proven wrong—and maybe our city council will prove me such. But unfortunately, there's more going on here than just the nature of the folks in city hall—or any city hall in any mid-sized city, for that matter. I suspect that the Strong Towns message faces a distinct and especially difficult set of obstacles with what I call "*mittelpolitan*" places. Specifically, it isn't hard to suspect that Wichita—like hundreds of other mid-sized cities across the United States—is both too large and too entwined with the financial expectations and structures of contemporary urbanism to be able to break away from these financially and environmentally ruinous patterns of growth-seeking, and too small to attract the sort of intense economic investment and creative human resources to allow for real local diversification and real experimentation with alternative, slow-growth approaches, such as one can find in the neighborhoods of some of America's major urban agglomerations. These assumptions—assumptions which result in the ignoring of many (mostly conservative, mostly non-coastal) cities in the 100,000 to 500,000 population range, or thereabouts—tend, in my experience, to arise whenever people look seriously into implementing any "sustainability city" or "New Urbanist" model, and the Strong Towns project falls into that category, I think.

The upper, “not large enough”-end of these assumptions is captured in the parallel set of political presumptions which hold that only people who question some of the ways American capitalism has shaped the American landscape over the past 70 years—in other words, only people who would consider themselves “liberals” or “progressives” or some such—would ever even think about these things. One must defend the American way of life, after all—right? This is the mentality which sees New Urbanism as irredeemably “leftist”, the supposed province of liberal elites in America’s largest cities. True, the godmother of so much of this localist and urbanist thinking, Jane Jacobs, almost certainly assumed that any person who truly desired a walkable, sustainable urbanism would, of course, be attracted to the neighborhoods of America’s “great” cities, not its politically conservative also-rans. In that sense, the roots of these assumptions, at least, are understandable. Still, labeling localist and democratic pushbacks against capital-driven development as “liberal” makes no real sense whatsoever, since it is mostly “liberalism” which these localists challenge.

The lower, “too large already”-end of these assumption is not as clear, but perhaps all the more pervasive and insidious for all that. While Marohn repeatedly (and wisely) insists that he isn’t proposing any top-down set of solutions, and emphasizes the need for cities to develop their own adaptations to what he presents in his book, the fact that he so often returns to his small hometown of Brainerd, MN (population 13,465) in constructing his arguments, is revealing, and might be forgiven for wondering if the sort local leadership he calls for can only be a reality when the relevant socio-economic stakes regarding one’s city are fully within the reach of local resources. Which, of course, hardly describes any place any longer—but certainly not cities of a quarter-million people or more.

In one of the book's most insightful arguments, Marohn talks about how cities, once upon a time, before "auto-oriented development" changed everything "radically" (p. 28), grew incrementally, and resisted the temptation (or simply lacked the ability or the incentive) to jump ahead and create "finished state" developments that lacked small-scale adaptability. Those earlier cities thus had an urban footprint which was much more stable than post-WWII cities which were induced into growth by outside investment, and by the expansive dreams of the Baby Boom generation. Plausible as this history is, it connects with the "too large, too late" fear I mention above, leaving Marohn's readers with the vague, but perhaps legitimate, concern that cities, as they grow, may inevitably (unfortunately?) reach such a sufficiently "finished" state of development—whether or not any "jumping" was involved—that their continuing ability to organically adapt is lost, simply because of the material costs (all those roads and pipes mentioned before!) of what the city has naturally evolved into. Marohn's entirely justified condemnation of the warped "failure mechanisms" of "auto-oriented places" only sharpens this worry further for mid-size, auto-dependent cities in mid-America. Accept his condemnation, and it may seem reasonable to conclude that, when one's city has spread out to such a point that "it is extremely difficult to....do any of the routine things that humans do without a motor vehicle," the point of real urban re-evaluation is probably past, because the costs of safely and cleanly contracting the city's roads and infrastructure is too massive to contemplate (consider pp. 34-35, 112-113). This end of all the above assumptions perhaps says: you've grown this much, so quit imagining that you can think like a small, sustainable, strong town. No alternatives left; you've simply got to compete with the big leagues, or die trying.

I realize that all this may not be a particularly fair assessment of the possible reception of Marohn's analysis by my city council members, or those of any other similar metropolitan area. But I nonetheless fear these assumptions make it easy for many people in my city to decline to wrestle with the questions Marohn asks, leading them instead to believe that we here, in our in-betweeness, have no conceptual or civic space to think differently. The fact that mid-sized cities like my own are having stories of growth enthusiastically sold to them from all quarters all the time doesn't make things easy either.

For example, consider Mick Cornett's *The Next American City: The Big Promise of Our Midsized Metros* [Putnam, 2018]. It's not a bad book—not only because Cornett, who was the mayor of Oklahoma City for 14 years, is a decent writer with an often entertaining and thoughtful story to tell, but also because the story he tells about OKC includes more than a little which Marohn or any other critic of conventional urbanism might approve of. Cornett is absolutely correct about in how an inferiority complex about one's place can be devastating, and that the “spirit” of a city, its history and traditions and culture and identity, however constructed or reinterpreted, are essential to developing a consensus around the hard changes that effectively living together often requires (see *Next American City*, pp. 40-41, 69, 113, 84-85, 245). And the fact that Cornett is up front about the costs of those changes is admirable. Cornett's description of the MAPS projects which have transformed downtown OKC, and of the political support which had to be built up for slowly paying for those projects directly out of specific sales taxes voted into place by OKC's citizens, without bonding and without debt, is really quite superb (pp. 72-78).

It's also, however, incomplete. The fact that OKC in the 2000s and 2010s, the era of Cornett's mayorship, had oil and energy corporations making huge profits and paying huge salaries, generating a lot of excess money to be captured by civic causes, hasn't been lost on some reviewers. (This is important context for understanding Cornett's regular references to "buy[ing] the allegiance of corporate America" and getting "capitalists from outside" to invest, as well as his effusive praise for Chesapeake, Devon, and other major corporate players—pp. 49, 100, 124, 129, 196.) Moreover, Oklahoma City—and many of the other cities Cornett draws examples from, including Seattle, New Orleans, Sacramento, Albuquerque, Louisville, or Buffalo—can't really be considered "mid-sized"; his discussions of Des Moines or Chattanooga might be relevant to a city like Wichita, but most of the rest of his reflections assume a regional center large enough to confidently depend upon the commercial activity of those who live in the surrounding suburbs and outlying cities to generate more than a third of all the needed sales tax revenue (pp. 75, 79). Finally, and most frustratingly (especially here in Wichita, where the construction of a new baseball stadium—wholly financed by bonds and promised future sales tax revenue—for a new AAA-baseball team has created all sorts of controversy for our growth-obsessed mayor), Cornett blithely disregards all the widely available evidence showing that major sports development projects are usually financially losers for a city, and happily confesses to taking the side of major sports franchise owners, all because he is convinced that if you want your city to be "culturally relevant" you've got to get your city on national television. "Perception matters," he concludes, and "a nice art museum" won't do nearly as much for the health of a city as seeing one's name on ESPN (pp. 138-140).

In short, there are all sorts of ways to see the claims of Cornett as, with a few notable exceptions, particular to a city and socio-economic context that most other mittelpolitan spaces don't share, and those that are more broadly applicable are often spun in ways which only feed into exactly the patterns that Marohn (and I) think cities like Wichita must break away from. And Cornett is not alone. David Rusk, the long-time prophet of city-county consolidation, places Wichita are his top ten list of "best bets" for being able to successfully expand its tax base through unifying with Sedgwick County, thus presumably greatly expanding its spending resources and flexibility. Christiana McFarland at the National League has a similar perspective, suggesting that as businesses which, feeling crowded out of major urban agglomerations, choose to relocate to nearby to smaller cities (so long as they have "major research facilities," of course), the fiscal freedom of those cities outside those urban economic powerhouses will only expand. None of these reflections are entirely worthless insofar as reconsidering the growth paradigm goes: McFarland's observations about the potential for building sustainable rural-urban networks in regional cities far away from coastal agglomerations is an important part of the story of local resilience, and Rusk's suggestion that the racial divides in cities like Wichita are crucial obstacles to achieving real "elasticity" in development is very relevant to Marohn's larger point about allowing for urban adaptation. *Mittelpolitan* places have to learn from whatever resources or set of ideas they can find. But whether either of these perspectives hold out the promise of what Marohn likes to call, borrowing from Nassim Taleb, "antifragility"—that is, being able to get far enough away from the Ponzi financing scheme rat-race so as to allow for real experimentation and adaptation in the built environment—remains to be seen. And if they become, as I fear they easily could, complements to the aforementioned structural reasons why the leaders of a mid-size city like Wichita might simply write-off Marohn's recommendations as radical nonsense, well, then they're actually part of the problem— not, as they should be, ideas to be experimented with as incremental parts of a solution.

One of the reasons why *Strong Towns* was so persuasive to me—even where I thought Marohn’s approach to history or politics was simplistic or incomplete—is that he is so thoroughly an engineer, and that kind of practicality is an unavoidable presence in his writing. As long as I have spent trying to familiarize myself with the language of city planners and urban engineers, I’ve been haunted by the fear that my tendency to theorize, to want to develop normative accounts of phenomena that are connected by shared principles, gets in my way of really addressing the practical social and economic problems which confront actually existing mid-sized cities. Here, though, I suspect some theory—even more than the localist, populist, civic republican one that Marohn’s book weaves together—is going to be imperative. A different narrative is needed, one that presents the “leftist” cause of urban sustainability—of embracing limits, of slowing down, of investing in collective projects which are shaped at least as much by participatory democracy rather than the market—in “conservative” terms, at least in the traditionally prudent (as opposed to the contemporary American) sense. Taking seriously the distinctiveness of the hundreds of mittleopolitan spaces in America, which house millions of people, encompass hundreds of thousands of square miles of suburban housing, overbuilt roads, and costly development projects, all of it mostly far from elite nodes of learning and finance or churning mixes of immigration and experimentation, but surrounded by natural resources for food and energy production in a manner impossible for larger urban agglomerations to contemplate, and at least potentially free from some aspects of the polarizing drive for wealth present in the global cities of the world, might be the first step in such theorizing.

I want Wichita to be strong. But after more than 14 years here, I think I'm on solid ground in suspecting that the temptation of many in *mittelpolitan* places to eschew Marohn's recommended path to stability, and avoid looking the looming reality of contraction in the face, will be too great to withstand. Wichita's very in-betweenness—completely aside from the growth machine elites that have significant influence in this city's (like almost every city's) decision-making, not to mention the rural libertarian-conservatism which contributes to a prejudice against anything that smacks of “planning” or seems less than conventionally market-friendly—will probably make it easy for many of our elected leaders to assume that it's just too late, politically speaking, in Wichita's development to change direction, even if they wanted to. Pursuing growth, however unlikely, will appear to many of them as their only option, or so I suspect. In which case, in the spirit of Marohn's incrementalism, the primary task for concerned urbanists in mid-sized cities everywhere is to keep building up alternatives—fiscal, environmental, electoral, whatever—and then nudge their cities along those alternative paths whenever the opportunity presents itself. And, of course, read and share his book. After all, you never know how many minds it may change.

Warring Warbles Within |

William O. Pate II

Book Reviewed:

WARBLES

Alex Z. Salinas

2019

Hekate Publishing

85 pages

Having put aside my recent readings inquiring into the goals of white supremacists, the connections between free-market right-wingers and Bitcoin enthusiasts and the morality of markets to reread and comment upon Alex Z. Salinas' debut book of poetry, *WARBLES*, I'm struck by the way his work communicates the struggles of an authentic real-world American in a time when many prefer to abstract away to justify various forms of violence.¹ His work allows one to zoom in, as it were, on the lived experience from the often purposely nebulous, amorphous and ill-defined level of supposed theory justifying additional suffering offered by your day-to-day conservative.

¹ For my recent reading, see inadequate.net/read.html. David Golumbia's *The Politics of Bitcoin: Software as Right-Wing Extremism* sits beside me as I write this; Misty is about to begin Edward and Robert Skidelsky's *Are Markets Moral?*, which I read yesterday morning; and I thoroughly enjoyed Kevin Musgrave and Jeff Tischauser's "Radical Traditionalism, Metapolitics, and Identitarianism: The Rhetoric of Richard Spencer" in *boundary 2*, though I question their claim of using rhetorical analysis in their study.

To be clear, Alex's work isn't political. In fact, though he served as the poetry editor of *San Antonio Review*, which I edit and publish, I can't say I am aware of his true political leanings. He could be a raging Trump supporter, for all I know, to be honest.² His poetry certainly betrays no political leaning. So, my remarks should not dissuade those of the apolitical bent from enjoying his work.³

On the contrary, *WARBLES* contains poems on the topics you'd expect in a first book of poetry: family (with its history, customs and lineage), love (especially for a beloved), self (it is poetry) and the writing process. Perhaps the most surprising topic he touches on is faith ("Winds of Obsession," "Fallback," "TV Religion"). Clearly, faith isn't a unique topic for poetry, but addressed unironically and without sarcasm by a Millennial poet it can appear slightly unexpected.

I say Alex's work isn't overtly political, but, as any feminist will tell you, the personal is political.⁴ One of my inquiries recently has been on what we can base a belief in the basic equality of all. When conservatives abstract away to concepts like freedom or liberty or rights, what can we point to that truly levels the playing field? In *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton argues that it's the basic frailty of the human body and our inherent dependence on one another to survive that makes us all equal.⁵ If there's one thing we all share, it's that we truly can't do it on our own. Babies can't survive without someone to care for them. The same happens at the end of life, though we've done a great job of ignoring that reality in recent decades I think it may become more apparent again soon. In "Rolly pollies," as in other poems, Alex reminds us of our felt frailty:

² I hardly believe this to be the case.

³ I would insist conservatives could enjoy his work as well, if I believed they were capable of enjoying the poetry of words instead of profits and/or prophets. See Jose Enrique Rodo, *Ariel*, especially pg. 110 and after.

⁴ Of course, as soon as Alex shared this review on his Facebook timeline, a guy responded mansplaining that the notion was much older than feminism.

⁵ I've owned the hardcover edition of this book for more years than I can remember. I only just recently finally read it on a whim. As for an answer to the equality question, I'm looking for something that isn't completely metaphysical to justify my own belief that we are all intrinsically valuable as human beings and no one person is somehow inherently more valuable

*They say newborns need their
mother's touch, skin-to-skin contact,
to help their brains produce the right
amount of hormones.*

*Adulthood is no different.
Walk into any state prison and stare
long enough into a convict's eye—
tell me what you find missing there.*

*They say we eventually become self-sufficient—
logical, reasonable, responsible.
They say once we're no longer children,
we've grown up.*

*This is the point at which we
lose touch, probably—forget the connections
we made when we were unafraid
of using our hands.*

Alex was born, raised and lives in Texas. Some poems call out San Antonio landmarks. Though he's Hispanic, he doesn't share his family's knowledge of the Spanish language ("Connect Four," "Ju Speak Spanish?"). Moreover, outside the heated immigration context of early 21st century United States, he could easily be considered ("pass for") white ("The Great Things About Being Sometimes Hispanic"). His work documents some of the negotiations he makes with these aspects of his identity – negotiations that involve not just self-imposed questions of selfhood but those identities placed upon him by society ("Salt," "The Great Thing About Being a Hispanic Writer"). His struggles make me wonder how white supremacists justify their beliefs when their membership in an identitarian group is questioned or undermined by the existence of non-"white" genetics in their own DNA or their closest comrades turn out to be people who were

(and, thus, deserving of life, liberty and happiness) than another (who is expendable, but only after being made to suffer exploitation).

assumed to be white. And, in carving out their own ethno-states, where do people like Alex fit?

As in all books of poetry, there are pieces I would rate misses. They don't predominate or overwhelm. If anything, the poems that don't quite hit the mark remind you that Alex is only thirty and has much more to offer. Alex is a writer with a bright future whose work I look forward to continuing to read. *WARBLES* is an excellent first outing that only makes me more excited to read his first book of short fiction, which is sure to be published soon. Any book that reminds us of our shared humanity is worth reading.

Outgrowing God | Alex Z. Salinas

Book Reviewed:

An Accident of Blood

Charles W. Brice

2019

WordTech Editions

115 pages

It could be the case that Wyoming native Charles W. Brice is a water poet. That is, a poet who peers into lakes and oceans and witnesses there — in addition to schools of minnows, the memory of his father accidentally hooking the nape of his mother while fishing — the rotting brilliance of humanity in its pearlescent unglory. Throughout his collection, *An Accident of Blood*, I often asked myself: “What does Mr. Brice hear in the sound of cold waves, stillness?” Also, and more important: “Do I really want to know?”

The opening poems in *Accident* find the author grasping to understand his childhood filled with magical thinking and town gossip, as well as agitated nuns who must deal with unruly schoolboys. In “I Think Her Name Was Sadie: A Threnody,” Brice recalls a teammate on his high school basketball squad desecrating a woman’s grave.

“I’m so glad I wasn’t there / to see the six-foot seven center
/ ... hold her skull in drunken glee”.

“A Plague of Light” begins:

“Under that blinding sun / only a murder seemed right. /
Was I the stranger or was it / the sunlight in Cheyenne /
whose daggers penetrated every / corner of our house?”

A couple of stanzas down, Brice quotes his mother:

“We’re big fish in a small pond, / my mother loved to say.”

In another poem, “What I Learned from My Mother,” it is gut-wrenchingly this:

“Don’t be smart. / Don’t learn too much.”

Where Brice’s family often failed to connect with the budding deep thinker, the soon-to-be writer, he sought literature — supreme Band-Aid — to fill and close the gaps within himself.

In “The Smell of Home in Wyoming,” an eight-year-old Brice remembers straightforward advice from a friend’s dad.

“Al, Joe’s dad, taught me never to walk / behind a horse without patting its butt / to let it know I was there.”

By the end of the poem, Brice propels a simple childhood memory,

“Hay in the barn — / the smell of home in Wyoming,”

to an existential, linguistically charged stratosphere:

“And now Al gone, Joe gone — / no one left to hear this poem.”

It is this concern with language — as well as his audience, or lack thereof — that preoccupies Brice as he takes readers on the journey of the rest of his life, as a conscientious objector in a Denver hospital in the 1970s (perhaps explaining Brice’s numerous death-obsessed poems, especially evident in, “Death and the Miser”) to a wizened poet ultra-critical of the Trump administration (read: “Wiretap Tweets — The Definitions”), which he sometimes handles with satisfyingly acidic humor akin to Charles Bukowski or Billy Collins — both influences on his work.

Brice is not without offering his own advice to readers. In “Breathe,” dedicated to the late Anthony Bourdain, he writes:

“The pleasures of this world are simple / and mostly free. /
Remember them in those desperate moments. / Honor them
with your presence. / Breathe.”

Brice, who stated in a 2016 interview that he is “an atheist who is a Buddhist,” uses the geography of multiple pages in *Accident* to tackle the notion of God. In “Hitching Post,” the poet concludes with this striking stanza — one of many pitch-perfect voltas throughout his collection:

“Now Old God is post-temporal. / Everything, even this
poem, is in the past. There is no now that we can grasp: / ...
Even Old God is post-god, / absent at the moment / of his
presence.”

With provocative finishing lines like that, the bad Catholic in this reviewer can firmly proclaim that Brice, a retired psychoanalyst, is one water poet whose wide-ranging poetry is well worth swimming in.

White Kids: A Review |

Peter Berard, Ph.D.

White Kids: Growing Up With Privilege in a Racially Divided America

Margaret A. Hagerman

NYU Press, 2018

280 pages

Margaret Hagerman spent years in the wilds of privileged white America, talking with kids, going to their soccer games, etc. in order to produce *White Kids: Growing Up With Privilege in a Racially Divided America*. Working in the Midwestern burg of “Peterfield” (one suspects Minneapolis or Milwaukee), she focuses on a few dozen children between the ages of ten and thirteen; old enough to understand some of what goes on in the country, but still firming up their opinions. All of them come from upper-middle-class or cushier social backgrounds. Hagerman wants to find out how they think about race, and where their ideas come from.

We can reject, nearly out of hand, the idea that they come directly from their parents. As anyone who has spent time with children knows, the transmission of ideas doesn’t work that neatly, and Hagerman considers and dismisses the idea early in the book. Instead, we are treated to a stroll through the *gestalt* of privileged white life. Like Hagerman, we spend time with the kids, their extracurricular activities, their relationships with their parents, said parents’ relationships with their real-estate values and school choices, on and on.

Many works of social science, being less narrative than, say, works of history, wind up recapitulating, perhaps unconsciously, narrative structures with deep roots in the language. In the case of *White Kids*, we have a tale of three neighborhoods, not unlike the Three Bears of *Goldilocks* fame. There's suburban conservative "Sheridan," moderate semi-urban "Wheaton Hills," and funky gentrifying "Evergreen." All three are highly privileged spaces, and Hagerman does not spare Evergreen her criticisms. The parents there, just as parents in Sheridan, seek to reproduce their advantages for their children; they just do so through hiring private tutors and enrichment experiences for their little darlings rather than removing them from Petersfield's public schools.

That being said, a lot of the differences in terms of understanding of race between the kids on display seem to come down to the neighborhood, in the end. Sheridan kids see almost no people of color and believe that racism is a thing of the past and negative outcomes for people of color as generally those people's own fault. Wheaton Hills kids acknowledge that racism is a thing but do little about it. Evergreen kids are a little closer to grasping the concept of structural racism and occasionally do something — volunteering or protesting — to fight it. We have a preference between the three bears, and it's not in-the-middle Wheaton Hills this time. Whether the young of any of the above neighborhoods will be willing to surrender some of their privilege — the ultimate, though somewhat vague, move of white antiracism in Hagerman's book — to make a fairer America remains to be seen.

White Kids frequently refers to the dilemma of privilege: other than some oblivious Sheridanites, most of the parents and the kids understand racism is a problem and that they have privileges others, especially people of color, do not . . . but they don't see how they can ethically refuse to give their kids every advantage to succeed in life.

This dilemma is deeply structured by the United States' political economy. Or, to put it in less academic terms: losing class status sucks, hard. Given the ghoulish spectrum of bad fates that await those who slip down the socioeconomic ladder, it's not just a matter of reproducing people similar to themselves that drives white parents to cling to their privileges. It's rough out there and people will use any edge they can to hold on. Appealing to morality and racial fair play in this situation is akin to calling on the rules in a knife fight.

The worst and least understandable behavior of the relatively enlightened parents in this book — putting aside the Sheridanites and their thinly veiled racism — is the refusal to extend the idea that Black kids are as innocent and worthy of every advantage as the white kids they raise. This is the internalization of capitalism's imperative of Thatcher's dictum that “there is no such thing as society, only men, women and families.” This, more than a refusal to extend their kids' help and opportunities, is the crux of the problem. If they truly took on board the idea that all kids deserve the same chances, they wouldn't be reducing the opportunities for their kids, making them sit at home rather than do extracurriculars or some such thing. They would be looking to tear down a system that guarantees these inequities in every aspect of its construction to replace it with something better. They'd be looking to get cops out of schools and replace them with counselors. They'd be looking to decouple school funding from real-estate values. Ultimately, they'd be looking to end the system of racialized capitalism that relies on invidious racial differences to function.

Hagerman, like other liberal antiracist social scientists, insists on the structural-ness of racism, and, indeed, implicitly grades the enlightenment of her subjects (or, mostly, their parents) on how much they grasp that racism is both real and not a matter solely of individual affect. But in the end, it's individual decision-making on the part of privileged parents that she emphasizes in terms of making things better. To be fair, this is probably not the main point of the book, as a work of sociology; that would be the insights into racialized socialization she provides through keen observation of the kids and parents. But for non-sociologist readers — and it seems that *White Kids* is gaining a respectable popular audience for an academic social science text — the takeaway will be what to do with the dilemma of privilege, and here Hagerman does not provide a structural answer, but an individualistic one.



how do
we sleep
while
our beds
are
burning?

Unfathomable | Brigid Hannon

I never had an abortion but
one morning I needed Plan B.
I asked the pharmacist in hushed tones but
he stared back loudly and
looked me up and down.
I felt examine and exposed as he
slid the box across the cool counter with his cool eyes
that judged a woman he had never met.
I shook off his stare; I'd seen it before.
It was the third pharmacy I had tried.

I never had an abortion but
I started taking birth control at seventeen
when my doctor suggested it
for medical reasons.
I obliged,
secretly satisfied to be prepared,
just in case.
Still some whispered
that preparation must mean practice,
and my good little schoolgirl self would
hide my pills
at the bottom of my purse,
ashamed that I was safe.

I never had an abortion but
I have tubes they won't tie
because I haven't provided my requisite number of children
to overpopulate an already dying planet.
They call you "woman"
before they call you "human."
They make mothers from little girls,
victims,
the unprepared.
My uterus grows cobwebs,
not babies,

and that is the choice I made.

I never had an abortion but
I know someone who did,
and it was as little my business as it is yours.
I saw the duality in her eyes,
the sadness mingled with relief that
belied her traumas.
Her hand shook as she lit her cigarette.
I don't know if she regrets it.
Her choices were not mine, nor yours,
nor senators or governors or presidents or God.

I never had an abortion but
I never said I wouldn't.
Unfathomable pain leads to unfathomable choices
and I stand with sisters who
have stood alone too long,
screaming in the faces of old white men
who couldn't find a fallopian tube with a map.
Betrayed by women who
put their God before their constituents,
in total violation of a job description.
I stand with sisters who
have cried tears I cannot imagine,
deep wells of sorrow and remorse,
that have swallowed them in a shame they don't deserve.

I never had an abortion but
I was taught to be secondary.
I was taught to be compliant.
I was taught to be ashamed.

Box | Stephen Roger Powers

I feel sorry for words trapped
in the boxes of their meanings.
Abattoir sounds so nice I
confuse it with boudoir.
Why can't abattoir mean
boudoir?

I was the only one who saw my grandmother
read Barbara Cartland paperbacks. No one
believed me because she culled and plucked
chickens, rototilled and cultivated garden
beds, steam pressed sheets, sewed her own
clothes, and cracked her fingers
raising shed walls. The week after her funeral
I dragged a box from her closet.
A pink glow puffed when I pulled the flaps open.
See?

My preference is abattoir means boudoir.
I suppose a boudoir can be an abattoir.
My mother must have thought so too,
because she threw away the books.

My wife buys our black Pomeranian pink sweaters
and matching bows. They give our dog the air
of a back-cover Barbara Cartland author portrait.
People look at me funny when I walk her.
It brings back a memory though: my grandmother's lips
moved like wind-ruffled straw while she read.

Lately it is hard for me to suspend disbelief.
When I watch *The Wizard of Oz* I take
a few mental steps back
until the crew, camera, studio doors, and ceiling lights
are in the picture.

I am stepping back to watch my grandmother
reading. I am imagining what
she looked like younger. I am imagining what
she would look like older, wrapped in what
she always wanted, pink chiffon,
fringe, and ruffles, furs, pearls,
and a plumed hat bigger than all that.

A Long Way from Underground |

Stephen Roger Powers

Tropical Storm Irma uprooted the backyard
alligatorwood, which was too bad—

the tree had challenged the Cliffs of Moher
to see who could last longest.

I am sorry I never grew my arms
long enough to wrap around

its deep-ridged trunk.
The Georgia-red mud made the root base—

wider than I'm tall—
ugly as a monster's maw

drooling the rain's dregs.
I doubt the skeleton

it pulled out of the ground,
roots wrapped around the skull

and threaded through ribs,
would have remained buried.

Bones crave the air and light
of solved mysteries.

My Gallery | Sandeep Kumar Mishra

In the upper part of my body
A cognitive bell rings
From a dial-up connection of live wires
The modem is working just
To repeatedly provide the facsimile of
Barren and bald paths

Inner lumbering of daily freight
Coiling, clutching upward
There is no vivacity
The vital force has parasited
How do I inhale life?

My days and nights are bolted
Inside a brain cell
My voice has held back
It lays a plan to brawl my soul
Residing in my own skull
Dictates notes imitating my tone
I couldn't disintegrate my recall

As my sullen shadow has left me
There remains Just I, me and myself
Why is my brain a black hole?
Could it not be a universe
Out of a constellation of migraine, tablets
Syringe, backache and insomnia?

Dream has become a dead pattern
As worn out as fossilized glow
Everything has become identical
Except the weight of consequence
That has variations of endurance

As I go through perdition
My imbalance will be rectified
Hang my remaining art on the wall
As after allotted time my gallery will end

Other Little Brother | Tom C. Hunley

Boy, you can talk.

I hear you over the talking heads on TV news
who aren't saying anything new anyhow
not like you
with your fresh eleven-year-old perspective:
"The politicians don't really want to fix this.
They just want to raise money and get votes."

I hear you in the van after church: "the Bible
says that Jesus had hair like a lamb's wool,
which implies that he was black, so why
does the children's Bible portray him as white?"

I hear you
at the city council meeting
undaunted by feedback
from the mic as you say
that new apartments in the neighborhood will mean
more traffic as you ride your bike
more crime when you've already heard gunshots
from two blocks away.

I hear you
reciting your award-winning poem
"When You Are Thinking Hard"
at the Poetry Society's convention
and I hear "aww" and the applause
of grownup hands for your precocious wordplays:
"In Scrabble, you need to scramble
and when there's tragedy, you need strategy."

You can talk, and boy you'll need to
intercede someday when Mom and I are gone
and your sister prays to "our fatherly heaven"
or orders "a plain hamburger" at Chick Fil-A
or when someone needs to translate
your brother into the language spoken
by a cop or a judge or some guy at the mall
who mistakes an autistic meltdown for fighting words.

Special | Tom C. Hunley

Ever since my son's diagnosis I've dreamed
that I could spill a box of toothpicks and he would
yell out the right number, like Raymond in *Rain Man*.
Last semester, a student with Asperger's announced
to our class that yes, Frank O'Hara was right
in "The Day Lady Died," about Bastille Day 1959
taking place on a Tuesday, and when questioned,
he shrugged, said, "I have all of these calendars in my head."
I was sure that my envy of that young man's parents
could not be assuaged by any amount of money,
would not be diminished by any amount of time passing.

All I've ever heard from teachers is that my son disrupts class
by shouting "159 days left of school!" in the middle
of Reading class, that he needs an IEP, an attendant,
a sensory room, a resource room, speech therapy.
That his IQ is lower than 70. That he couldn't stay
in Montessori because he kept running out the front door
into the parking lot. That the other boys put him up
to telling the teacher that she's sexy. That he punched a wall.
That his expressive speech is in the bottom one percentile,
meaning he has trouble telling us what's on his mind.
That his receptive speech is in the bottom one percentile,
meaning he has trouble understanding what we say to him.

But last week, at an English Department party,
when the department head proposed a toast
to the composition director, my son said
"Who? That guy in back with the 38x34 Levi jeans?"
There were fifty people in the house. "How did you know?"
I asked, and he shrugged, "It's easy to read the tags."
And this week, the day after yearbooks came out,
he saw a schoolmate at Little Caesar's Pizza
and said "That boy's on page 45 of the yearbook."
As Charlie Babbitt says in *Rain Man*:
"Well, that is fuckin' poetic, don't you think?"

Dirty Looks | Tom C. Hunley

In my son's wide eyes I can see
the steeple of the church we left
after one too many dirty looks —
mosquito bites that you can't scratch
and soothe — when we couldn't shush him

and I can see him playing
all afternoon with a vacuum cleaner
and gazing out the window with wonder
at the gray power lines
while all the other kids
smeared cake on their faces
and ran through the sprinkler
at another birthday party
that he didn't get invited to

and on his breath I can smell the mustard
that smothered his french fries tonight like
the hot dogs we bought at the ball park
when the summer sun melted him down
made him sputter *I don't need this!*
You leave me alone! as the force of his foot
made the hot bleachers shake
and people booed us
—actually fucking booed us—

and we whisked him and his brothers away
without asking for a refund
though we'd only hit the bottom
of the second inning. We couldn't
face the faces full of judgment of us
and pride over their kids' home runs.
Some parents just don't know how
to discipline their kids, said some guy

to his wife. Did I flash them a smile
full of Christ-like compassion?
I didn't. I couldn't. But I also didn't
pray for God to smite them
with a hail of foul balls.
I bit my tongue and spat blood,
head down like a worn-out pitcher
about to be yanked from the mound.

A Lost Colleague | David A. Grenardo

He left one day without saying goodbye.
I cherished the moments that we shared.
He must have known my heart would wail and cry.
I wonder at the end if he was scared.

I wish I could take back that canceled lunch,
I mourn for those who missed time with him too.
Instead I told him something else came up.
He did so much good and there was so much more he planned to do.

When tragedy strikes the questions abound,
Did he know how I felt before he left?
Answers to these questions cannot be found.
Did his last thoughts involve any regrets?

His death reminds me of others who passed.
I've always tried to avoid the void and the pain.
Although it hurts and the painful memories last,
I know they reside above and love will always reign.

You Will Not | David A. Grenardo

A guidance counselor, parent, or coach,
Each utters the same remark, “You will not.”
People you believe are beyond reproach,
saying to you, you haven’t got a shot.

You will not pass the test or make the grade.
You will not perform when it truly counts.
You will not win the game when it is played.
You will not beat the pressure when it mounts.

You will not amount to anything great.
You will not reach your goals by any means.
You will not escape your pathetic fate.
You will not fulfill any of your dreams.

I try to avoid these words of defeat,
They reek of envy, deceit, and despair.
But when I use these words they can’t be beat.
You should use them too if you truly care.

You will not commit the same mistake twice
or allow bullies to prey on the weak,
You will not be silenced for any price.
A voice for the voiceless must always speak.

You will not lose faith when the road gets tough
as you prove doubters wrong by what you do.
You will not sink when the waters get rough
Because there are others counting on you.

You will not forget where you came from or
those who opened doors to show you the light.
You will not forget what you were made for,
And you will not ever give up the fight.

The Grass Is Never Greener |

John Patrick Robbins

You locked the world away, slowly allowing yourself to die.
I saw the man fade and my story continues much where yours did
decline.

The hardest moment was knowing it was farewell we always yearn for
what has already passed.

The laughs and the stories I now pass onto others.

We are but living libraries growing old with time.
Trying to recollect that which we can longer so easily recall.

Grasping onto the moments before death.
Fearing the unknown.

Flying high till we inevitably crash into the ground.

Playing roles to maintain an act while falling to pieces behind closed
doors.

Dreaming of something and not fully understanding that which
compels us to keep moving on.

We are like coins tossed into a fountain.
Wishes with good intention somehow getting lost in the dark waters
below.

Life is never planned and art is never safe.

It's last call so bring the lights up and empty the room.
As we chase dreams and one another on into the night.

Capture a glimmer of happiness, let the glow cast over us.

We are just coins cast with good intentions and even higher hopes.

Dreams remain people do not.
Enjoy them while you can.

Binding | Jennifer R. Lloyd

Watched you today
Hanging out with friends,
Talking to each in turn,
Attention paid
One story at a time.
“Oh, have you seen this one?”
You ask
To the King of Sentences
And the Critic.
“I’ve never heard of this one before,”
You say with a pat on the jacket,
A point,
And a smile.
Such easy conversations.
“That guy was crazy,”
You quip.
“But his son turned out totally
Normal.”
Pausing in phrase
To drool over a lovely,
A gift signed for you,
Thick and eloquent,
Straight-spined,
Your type,
First edition.
“Ah, man, kind of makes me want it.”
“What are the chances
I’m going to find it again?”
The lights flick off.
Time to go.
Take your catch home.
Introduce her to your library.
Murmur as you turn down the covers.

Quarantine | DS Maolalai

drinking my tea
for what comfort it brings me,
I stand by the window
watching this half-
hearted quarantine.
beneath me, the river
runs with white clouds,
its rippled alternative
of black against silver
like light in the morning
catching a badly scratched
frying pan.
there are people about
and cars wandering, though I must admit
there are fewer than usual;
a black fragment
of burned bacon, submerged
in what's left of the fat.

His Hands | Br. Tom Giardino, S.M.

I always loved his hands
Especially in the later years —
Holding and being held.

“Lefty” they called him when
young at handball and stickball in Bronx alleys;
Or when bowling as long as I
could remember.
Though short were the days
with classroom-rapped knuckles
for writing in that sinister way,
Later he made it right
Reading the world in
Newspapers, edition upon folded edition,
Drinking in sports’ stats and movie stars
With his daily milk.

I always loved his hands.
Daily they carved out a life
from beef or fish or plentiful poultry
— sometimes lean game
filled the freezer —
He was better than the best for butchers.

And in these special later years
He is not shy or ashamed.
Long we can talk,
his trade-worn fingers
intertwined with mine
as our lives have been.
He is not afraid to tell
me his feelings:
The puzzlements at the pain,
The gentle frustration
when the morning visit,
phone call
or bacon and eggs
Fade faster than the food's aroma.
Or the brief anguish
When hand-to-pocket finds
no dollars
For paying the barber
I've taken him to.

And when I ask him
if his days are
monotonous, he says:
"This is my life now —
You have to be patient.
I have no reason to complain,
I've led a full life."
And I am edified,
hoping those spiritual
genes have been
handed on....

Perhaps most of all
He has revealing hands:
They show me the parental pain
of letting go
What he most wants to
keep close.
How to keep letting go
While always receiving back
with gracious gratitude
— echoed in his lips —
Offering his hands when
needed or wanted
("a gentleman" the ladies call him).

Through it all
One Lord, one ring
We've shared, though diverse
nuptial vows.
From his hand and once-broken heart
I've worn that band these many years
in hope of his
fidelity.

I always loved his hands
Especially in the later years —
Holding and being held.

Song for Daniel |

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

Daniel, hi, how are you?
I hope you made it out
of that devil town, where
all your friends were
vampires just like you
said in your song.

Hope you meet Cobain
where you are going
so you could write a
song or two together.
Something like Walking
the Cow or Hey Joe.

And even if you have
no star in Hollywood.
I'm sure in Austin, Texas
there is a heaven and
there is a star for you,
just like you said.

“How Do You Know You Can Do Better?” | Ace Boggess

run out of breath, & silence follows
rather than the little death. stub my shins
on everything. not the bull in a china shop,
I'm a bull on the porcelain Earth.
if there's a Bandage District in your town,
my afternoons help its workers earn.
when the mail runs, seems like days
no answers come, but a few new questions
in the form of debt. *encore, encore.*
even the cops don't look for me,
they, too, have forsaken me. I used to call &
complain about the noise. they said,
turn off your ears—your final warning!
I didn't hear what they told me after that.

THE MYTH OF GYGES

The daily routine of a [well-known/insignificant] man, a servant to the king of Lydia, is broken by an unusual [order of the king/natural phenomenon]. Driven by a force he finds hard to resist, the man enters [a forbidden space in the king's palace/an enclosed space underground]. There he gazes at the naked body of [a woman/a dead man] whose [beauty/stature] surpasses [that of any other woman/that of a human body], and thereby transgresses [a sacred custom/law of nature]. Soon after, the man is seen by [one who was not supposed to see him/nobody, if he wishes]. The [failure/power] to remain invisible leads the man, with the cooperation of the queen, to murder the king and take over the kingdom. [The man reigns for the rest of his life and dies peacefully; his crime is avenged five generations later. When told, the crime and its punishment are explicitly related to the Solonian conception of happiness./ Whether or not the man is happy, and whether or not he may suffer punishment for his crime are open questions to be dealt with in the rest of the text.]

The myth of Gyges as told by Herodotus
and Plato combined by
Adi Ophir in
*Plato's Invisible Cities: Discourse and
Power in the Republic*
Routledge, 1991

Write to us!

We promise we'll write back. 😊



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San Antonio Review

ATTN: William Pate

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USA

READ | Listen | Watch

Staff recommendations in no particular order.

Reinhardt's Garden by Mark Haber, (Coffee House Press, 2019)

Space Invaders by Nona Fernandez, translated by Natasha Wimmer
(Graywolf Press, 2019)

Bitcoin: Software as Rightwing Politics by David Golumbia (University of
Minnesota Press, 2016)

Selling the Free Market: the Rhetoric of Economic Correctness by James Arnt
Aune (Guilford Publications, 2002)

Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy by S.M.
Amadae (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

Mutant Neoliberalism: Market Rule and Political Rupture edited by William
Callison and Zachary Manfredi (Fordham University Press, 2019)

Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction by Ivan Ascher (Zone
Books, 2016)

The White Boy Shuffle by Paul Beatty (Picador, 2001)

The Hamlet of Stittville by Alan Berecka (Village Book Press, 2017)

Hip Logic by Terrance Hayes (Penguin Poets, 2002)

Death to Bullshit Artists of South Texas by Fernando A. Flores (Host
Publications, 2018)

The Mandibles: A Family 2029-2047 by Lionel Shriver (Harper Perennial, 2017)

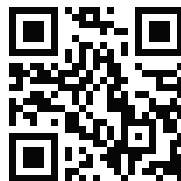
Christian Americanism and Texas Politics Since 2008 by David R. Brockman,
Ph.D. (Rice University's Baker Center for Public Policy, 2020)

<https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/3c850dob/rel-pub-americanism-030220.pdf>

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theindierockplaylist.com

20 Songs to Self-Quarantine To

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ULTIMA MULTIS April 2020 Monthly Music Mix

inadequate.net/mixes.html

Daily Worker *SHELTER IN TAPES* (the quarantined LoFi 4-track recordings)

dailyworker.bandcamp.com

Just Mercy

The Family (Jeff Sharlet)

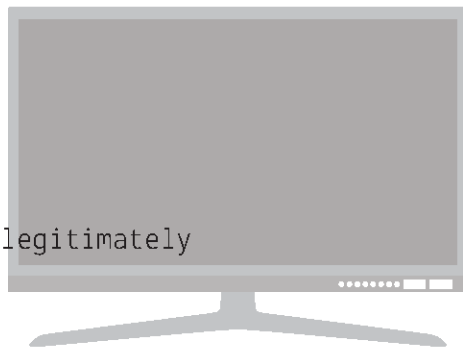
Mrs. America

The Riches

Russian Doll

The Laundromat

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Austin and other designs: 787atx.me



Quotes

Rather than simply an austerity narrative about savings, could one see in the story of student loans an effort on the part of government to create novel asset classes for investors who otherwise struggle to find a 'return'?

Andrew McGettigan, (2015).

"The Treasury View of English Higher Education:
Student Loans, Illiquid Assets and Fiscal Control,"

in Montgomerie, J. (Ed.)

Forging Economic Discovery in 21st Century Britain.

Anything we can actually *do* we can afford. Once done, it is *there*.
Nothing can take it from us.

John Maynard Keynes, (1978).

The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes

Was I really fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, the abuse and psychic destruction of our young, merely to avoid dealing with my first and greatest responsibility--to be happy? Let us seek 'joy' rather than real food and clean air and a saner future on a liveable earth! As if happiness alone can protect us from the results of profit-madness.

Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*

You, reader, are alive today, reading this, because someone once adequately policed your mouth exploring. In the face of this fact, Winnicott holds the relatively unsentimental position that we don't owe these people (often women, but by no means always) anything. But we do owe *ourselves* 'an intellectual recognition of the fact that at first we were (psychologically) absolutely dependent, and that absolutely means absolutely. Luckily we were met by ordinary devotion.

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

What exactly is lost to us when words are wasted?

Anne Carson, qtd. in Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Babies do not remember being held well — what they remember is the traumatic experience of not being held well enough.

D.W. Winnicott, qtd. in Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to re-live horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.

Robin D.G. Kelley, Freedom Dreams, qtd. in The Revolution Will Not Be Funded, 2020

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The Man Who Wrote the Perfect Novel by Shields
UT Press, 2020



Leaving the Gay Place
UT Press, 2020



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Coffeehouse Press, 2019



Individutopia by Joss Sheldon



Fear Itself: The Causes and Consequences of Fear in America by
NYU Press, 2020



When Animals Speak by Eva Meijer
NYU Press, 2020



The Revolution Will Not Be Funded by



Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures by André Brock Jr.
NYU Press, 2020



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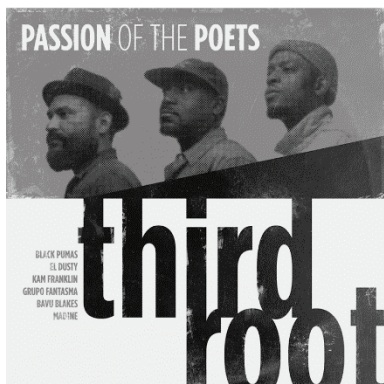
The Robbery of Nature: Capitalism and the Ecological Rift by
John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark
NYU Press/Monist Review, 2020



Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design by Bess
Williamson
NYU Press, 2020



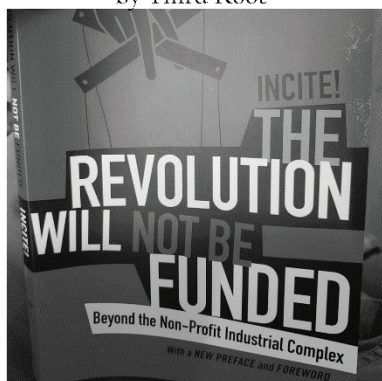
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by Third Root



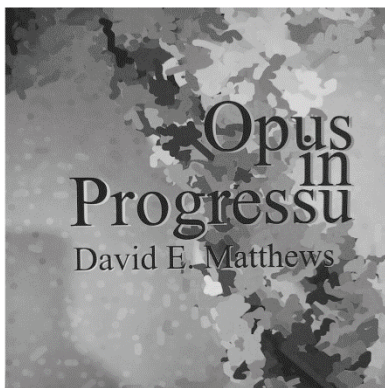
"Now Is The 'Time" mixtape from
Breakaway Records, Austin



*The Reolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond
the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*



"SHELTER IN TAPES" Vols. 1-3
by Daily Worker



Opus in Progressu by David E. Matthews



I Never Left Home by Margaret Randall

AUSTIN



SOLIDARITY



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ALTERNATIVE HISTORY LESSONS

SAN ANTONIO REVIEW | VOL. III | SUMMER 2020 | SAREVIEW.ORG

EXCAVATING COUNTER-HISTORIES



Epigenia Treviño Bazán (center left), whose husband Jesus Bazán was murdered, stands on the porch of her home with surviving family members. The baby in front is Eloisa Longoria, whose father Antonio was also killed at the hands of the state. Despite violence and intimidation, the women decided not to leave their ranch, ultimately passing it on to their children. Courtesy of Christine Molas and Norma L. Rodríguez.
Photo provided by the Bullock Texas State History Museum.

Mobbing of John R. Shillady

Secretary of the National Association
for the Advancement of Colored People

—AT—

Austin, Texas, Aug. 22, 1919

County Judge Boasts of His Leadership
in the Mobbing

Governor W. P. Hobby of Texas
Publicly Approves the
Mob Attack



—STATEMENT BY THE—
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
SEVENTY FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

October, 1919

Mobbing of John R. Shillady

THE following account of the mobbing of John R. Shillady, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, at Austin, Texas, August 22, 1919, by a County Judge, a constable and other Texas citizens, is submitted by the Association in response to numerous inquiries which have been made by branches, members and friends of the Association and from other citizens, concerning the assault. This assault upon Mr. Shillady has become a matter of national concern because of the explicit and unqualified approval of mob action by Governor W. P. Hobby of Texas, expressed by him in a telegram to the Association and in an address made at Fort Worth, Texas, a few days following the assault.

Mr. Shillady left New York on August 16th and arrived at Austin, Texas, late on Wednesday, August 20th, having spent a day and a half in Chicago en route. His purpose in coming to Austin was to learn from the Governor, Attorney General and other responsible officials what had occasioned the inquiry which had been conducted in Austin into the Association's and the local branch's affairs; to ascertain what legal objections, if any, had been raised against the Association, and to offer the fullest co-operation to all officials who desired to inquire into the Association's activities. Before leaving New York Mr. Shillady had telegraphed Attorney General C. M. Cureton and Justice of the Peace M. M. Johnson, before whom local branch officers had appeared, apprising them of his coming. Letters were also sent, together with annual reports, to all officials whose names were mentioned by the branch, speaking of Mr. Shillady's coming.*

The telegrams to the Attorney General and the Justice of the Peace included the following in ad-

dition to an introductory statement of the occasion for sending them and information about the Association and its officers (the fact being cited that a governor of one state was the president of one branch):

"On behalf of the National Office (of the Association) I beg leave to offer to you any information regarding the Association which you desire. As its national secretary I expect to be in Austin within a week."

Shortly after his arrival, the National Secretary arranged to meet a committee of the Austin Branch to secure from them an authoritative statement of their relations with Texas state officials and local authorities. Mr. Shillady made it clear that he would hold or address no meetings, and that his purpose in coming to Austin was to talk matters over frankly and fully with the chief executive officers of the State of Texas.

At the conference with the Branch committee the officers gave Mr. Shillady an account of their summons before State and local officials, about which they had already written to Headquarters. The branch president and secretary had been summoned to appear before a Justice of the Peace and to bring all books, papers, correspondence etc. belonging or pertaining to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, at which time they had been questioned by the County Attorney. The secretary had just received a half-dozen copies of the Crisis and these were taken by the officials and read.

Subsequently these two officers were further questioned by officials of the office of the Adjutant General, by the Captain of the State Ranger's force, and by the County Judge.

The Branch officers said that they had endeavored to acquaint the authorities fully with the purposes and scope of the Association's work, and believed they had convinced them of its legal and peaceful nature.

Thursday morning Mr. Shillady waited at the hotel for an expected extra supply of annual reports, of the volume, "Thirty Years of Lynching in the United

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States," of the Call for a National Conference on Lynching and the "Address to the Nation" (on Lynching and Mob Violence). He wished to be able to present a copy of each of these publications to such officials as he might call upon, as evidence of the unimpeachable character of the National Association's work and of the high standing of the leaders of American opinion, North and South, who had cooperated with it in endeavors to check lynching and mob violence.

He had a supply of biographical sketches of the Association's officers which he used to show the personnel and past careers of such officers.

Finding the publications had not come by two P. M., Mr. Shillady went to the State House. As the Governor's office, his first call, was closed, he went to the office of the Attorney General where he saw the First Assistant to the Attorney General, the Attorney General being absent.

Mr. Shillady learned from the Acting Attorney General and the Acting Adjutant General, whom he saw later in the day, what had led up to the inquiry into the local branch's affairs.

Rumors had become current, it was said, that Negroes were buying high powered rifles and ammunition and the officials asserted that investigations had shown a basis of fact for the rumors. It was feared by the authorities, so Mr. Shillady was informed, that there might be an "armed uprising" among the Negroes. For some time before Mr. Shillady reached Austin a score of colored men, said to have been participants in a conflict between whites and colored at Longview, Texas, in July, had been held in jail at Austin. Eleven of them had just been freed, he was told, some on bond, but prior to this, rumors of anticipated attempts at rescue, were said to have been rife. Some 26 white men, he was told, had been indicted for arson and other crimes growing out of the burning of Longview Negroes' houses.

Perhaps because of the part played in the Longview affair by the publication in a colored weekly of an article, which was deeply resented by some white

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*The Sheriff, a Deputy Sheriff, the County Attorney, court stenographer, Chief of Police and a private citizen.

residents of Longview, concerning a lynching which preceded the outbreak (a colored teacher had been beaten, charged with responsibility for the article, which we are informed he denied) the authorities had carefully scrutinized all Negro publications.

The Longview conflict had been brought about directly by an attempt to drive the colored teacher and a colored physician out of town, during which a white mob had descended on their homes which were defended by a group of colored men. The house burnings followed the first attack.

In interviews in both the Attorney General's and Adjutant General's offices, Mr. Shillady was told of the "evil effects" of certain Negro publications in "inciting" the Negro population.

No articles advocating violence or attacks of any kind on white people were shown or described to Mr. Shillady, the "incitement" appearing to consist of general articles on race relations and the race question.

When the matter of purchasing arms and the alleged danger of attacks on whites were mentioned, Mr. Shillady remarked that he felt certain the branches had had nothing to do with that and that the Association's sole reliance was on legal and constitutional methods for gaining its ends. Quotations in proof were offered from the 1918 annual report (page 79) to show the emphasis placed on legal and constitutional means and the sentences cited, "Its fight is of the brain and the soul and to the brain and the soul of America," and "It (the Association) seeks to reach the conscience of America."^{*}

Similarly, when "social equality" was charged as the Association's aim, and the alleged demand for "social equality" cited as "stirring up the niggers," Mr. Shillady pointed out that the N.A.A.C.P. was not concerned with social equality but with public equality, quoting or referring his questioners to

^{*}On the same page the legal purpose and method of the Association is further exemplified in the sentence: "In Congress and state legislatures and before the bar of public opinion, the Association must energetically and adequately defend the Negro's right to fair and equal treatment."

Mr. Shillady showed the Address to the Nation on lynching to both the above mentioned officers and to the court before whom he appeared later that day, pointing out the names and standing of prominent people who had signed it. The National Secretary reminded all of these gentlemen that no association which could, and did, secure the signatures of such eminent men as the Attorney General of the United States, governors of states, and others named, to an appeal against mob violence could have any connection with organizing Negroes for the purpose of inciting the colored people against the white people.

Among the signers, in addition to Attorney-General Palmer are Former Governor Emmet O'Neal of Alabama; Governor Thomas E. Campbell of Arizona; Ex-President Taft; Former Congressman and Former President of the Georgia Bar Association William H. Fleming of Augusta; Bishop Frederick F. Reese of Savannah; Former Judge of Appellate Division of Cook County, Illinois, Edward Osgood Brown; Judge Orrin N. Carter of the Illinois Supreme Court; Former Governor Edward F. Dunne of Illinois; Judge Julian W. Mack of the United States Court of Appeals; George T. Page, President of the American Bar Association; Governor W. L. Harding of Iowa; Governor Henry J. Allen and Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas; Robert W. Bingham, Publisher of the Louisville, Ky., "Courier-Journal"; Former United States Attorney-General Charles J. Bonaparte of Maryland; Bishop Theodore DuBose Bratton, Bishop Wm. Mercer Green and Former President of State Bar Association A. T. Stovall of Mississippi; Governor Emmet D. Boyle of Nevada; Former Minister to the Netherlands Henry van Dyke; Charles Evans Hughes; Elihu Root; Former United States Attorney-General Judson Harmon; Governor A. H. Roberts of Tennessee; George M. Bailey of the Houston, Texas, "Post"; Dean Wm. S. Sutton of the University of Texas, Austin, Texas; James H. Dillard, President of the Jeanes Foundation and the Slater Fund and Wm. M. Hunley, Secretary of the Southern Race Commission, both of Virginia.

citations from the 1918 annual report, whenever opportunity offered.

The following excerpt from the 1918 annual report of the Association, printed in January, 1919, eight months prior to the Austin episode, states succinctly the Association's attitude on "social equality."

"Nor should any one be led astray by the tiresome talk about social equality. Social equality is a private question which may well be left to individual decision. But, the prejudices of individuals cannot be accepted as the controlling policy of a state. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is concerned primarily with public equality. America is a nation—not a private club. The privileges no less than the duties of citizenship belong of right to no separate class of the people but to all the people, and to them as individuals. The constitution and the laws are for the protection of the minority and of the unpopular, no less than for the favorites of fortune, or they are of no meaning as American instruments of government."

In all the interviews and before the "court of inquiry" later to be mentioned, emphasis was laid by the Texas men on one resolution passed by the annual Conference of Association branches at Cleveland in June, and appearing in the August CRISIS calling upon Congress to pass legislation for "equal and unsegregated" accommodations on railroad cars. This resolution, it was said, would "stir up trouble" and further, that "Texas policy is fixed and will not change on the separation of the races."

When the conversation was shifted to lynching Mr. Shillady showed the officials the Association's "Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States." The Acting Attorney General read accounts of those which had occurred in Texas, recalling some of them. In speaking of one of the recent lynchings he told Mr. Shillady that the sheriff in that case said he was not going to have any good citizens of the county killed defending that "nigger." He also said that they were pressing the case under contempt of court proceedings; that there were a number of the leaders of the mob under arrest and that he hoped they were going to get convictions.

Before parting from the Acting Attorney General that official remarked that the way Mr. Shillady and the other national officers understood these matters (i. e., that basic changes would take a long while for achievement) was all right, but we did not know these "Southern niggers," who would want "these things" at once and thus make trouble. The Acting Adjutant General advised Mr. Shillady to read a letter from Waco appearing in the local branch minutes which he considered cause for alarm. In fact, this letter referred only to a victory Waco Negroes had won in an injunction case restraining election officials from preventing colored people from voting in the primaries and suggested a federation of the Texas branches for mutual protection.

Mr. Shillady parted from both the Acting Attorney General and the Acting Adjutant General with the understanding that he would see the Governor and the Captain of the State Rangers and was dismissed in a courteous manner.

After leaving the Adjutant General's office, a subpoena was served on the Association's Secretary and he was hailed before a secret session of a so-called "court of inquiry." Here, where the tone was hostile, effort was made to show that the National Association was attempting to violate the laws of Texas by advocating the resolution passed at the Cleveland Conference favoring equal and unsegregated accommodations on railroad cars. Mr. Shillady carefully explained that this resolution had no bearing on the laws of Texas but applied only to proposed action by the federal Congress.

When endeavors were made to lay a basis for the charge that the Association's program could be connected with, or might lead to, the purchase of arms and incitement to violence, Mr. Shillady stated most emphatically that if the slightest bit of evidence could be produced that any of the Association's branches had been preaching or condoning violence against the whites in any way they would be suspended at once by the National Board of Directors and that he himself would take the responsibility of doing so on the spot. The proceedings were dignified by such questions as:

"If you're a 'nigger' lover why don't you go and stay in a 'nigger' hotel? and similar questions concerning the witness and his family.

After it was over the judge said, "If you have a little time to-night, come around. I would like to talk with you." Mr. Shillady declined the invitation.

Throughout this hearing Mr. Shillady endeavored to maintain an even-tempered attitude and to answer frankly and fairly all proper questions that were put to him. He was most anxious to offer any assistance possible to all bona fide efforts that might be made to ascertain the real causes of friction and to show the Association's purpose and spirit.

He read into the record after the questioning had ceased statements concerning the lives and records of Mr. Moorfield Storey, Major J. E. Spingarn and other prominent officers of the Association; also the names and public positions of the high federal and state officials, judges of higher courts and other principal signers of the Address to the Nation and the call for the National Conference on Lynching among whom were mentioned the Attorney General of the United States, governors of states and some score of prominent white southerners, including two Texas men.

The next morning Mr. Shillady was shadowed wherever he went. As the shadowing was done by men whom he had seen around the court room, including officers, he regarded it as legitimate, even if hysterical. After having a conference with a representative of the Austin Branch, at the office of a colored citizen, he started towards his hotel. He heard an automobile coming, probably the same automobile which had previously been noted as lingering outside the office where Mr. Shillady was having his conference. When he had arrived at a corner near his hotel, he was approached from behind by a group of men which, according to a public statement made to the Austin press by the mobbists themselves, included County Judge Dave Pickle and the same constable who had subpoenaed him the night before. The constable put his hand on Mr. Shillady's arm. Mr. Shillady stood unguarded, expecting another subpoena, when with-

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out warning he was struck in the face, followed by a shower of blows from the other men surrounding him. After he had been knocked down and was bloody and bruised over his face, head and chest, his assailants left him.

No one offered any assistance. Subsequently, at Mr. Shillady's request, the Mayor gave him police protection until he left. When he bought his ticket the men who took part in the assault and many more were at the station standing around, menacingly. The judge who helped assault him was one of the men who had been present at the secret session of the court and had had ample opportunity to arrest Mr. Shillady had he been outside the law.

AFTER THE ASSAULT

The first news that the National Office of the Association had of the assault was through the Associated Press. The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Association telegraphed the Governor of Texas, citing the Associated Press despatch that Mr. Shillady had been severely beaten in Austin, Texas, by several men and concluding with the direct inquiry: "We are asking you what efforts are being made at once to punish the offender." The Governor replied in the following telegram:

Austin, Texas, August 23, 1919.

Mary White Ovington,
Chairman, National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People,
70 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Shillady was the only offender in connection with the matter referred to in your telegram and he was punished before your inquiry came. Your organization can contribute more to the advancement of both races by keeping your representatives and their propaganda out of this state than in any other way.

W. P. Hobby,
Governor of Texas.

In a speech a day or two later Governor Hobby is reported by the Associated Press as having said:

"I believe in Texas for Texans only, and just as strongly do I believe that Texans should say how the affairs of the state should be conducted and I believe in sending any narrow-brained, double-chinned reformer who comes here with the end in view of stirring up racial discontent back to the North where he came from, with a broken jaw if necessary."

An Associated Press despatch of August 23, widely printed, states that County Judge Dave J. Pickle said that the attack on Mr. Shillady was made by "himself, Constable Charles Hamby and Ben Pierce, none of whom, he declared, would shirk responsibility in the matter."

SUMMARY.

The foregoing circumstantial account of Mr. Shillady's experience in Austin shows:

1. That he went to Austin to confer with the highest executive officers of Texas on matters immediately related to his official duties.
2. That he telegraphed the Attorney General and a local Justice of the Peace that he was coming.
3. That he put himself at the service of these officials soon after his arrival.
4. That he neither held, addressed or attended any public or other meetings.
5. That his contact with colored people was confined to brief conferences with representatives of a local branch of the Association of which he is secretary.
6. That he was mobbed by a County Judge, a Constable and other citizens, three of whom gave their names to the public press.

11

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

70 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

NATIONAL OFFICERS

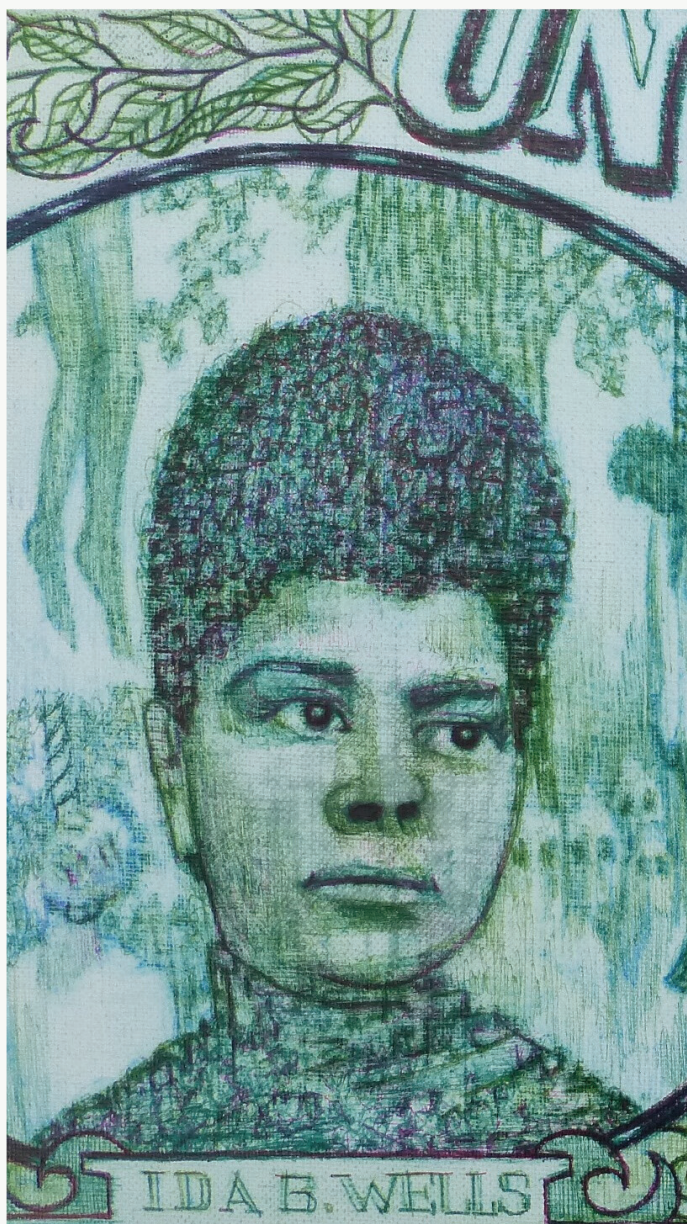
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Ida B. Wells- Barnett

Portrait of Wells by Austin artist John Weik. This is a detail from an original 11" x 14" work in ink on canvas board, part of a series called "Cash Money" that John completed this past spring. The entire series can be viewed at partysloth.org.



**WOMEN HAVE
BEEN PUNISHED
FOR BEING
COMPETENT
THROUGHOUT
MOST OF HUMAN
HISTORY; THE
MOVEMENT DOES
NOT NEED TO
REPEAT THIS
PROCESS.**

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Contributors

Born in San Antonio, **Jennifer Hill** is a writer, editor and content developer living in Austin, Texas. She graduated with a BFA in Writing, Literature and Publishing from Emerson College, where she served as a poetry editorial assistant for Ploughshares. She has worked as a story analyst in Los Angeles, a reporter in Boston and a freelance writer and editor in Austin.

Margot Kahn is the author of the biography *Horses That Buck* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008) and co-editor of the New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice anthology *This Is the Place: Women Writing About Home* (Seal Press/Hachette, 2017). Her essays, reviews and poems have appeared in Lenny Letter, The Rumpus, Tablet, The Los Angeles Review, River Teeth, Publishers Weekly, BUST, Crab Creek Review, Whiskey Island, Portland Review, Jabberwock Review and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Columbia University and lives in Seattle.

Anna Schott is a violinist and writer. She lives in Brooklyn with her family.

Joyce Schmid is a grandmother and psychotherapist living in Palo Alto, California, with her husband of over half a century. Her recent work has appeared in Poetry Daily, Missouri Review, New Ohio Review, Antioch Review and other journals and anthologies.

Neysa King lives and writes in Austin. She has been published in Chaleur Magazine, Slippery Elm Literary Journal, Huffington Post and elsewhere.

Kerry Hugins, a stay-at-home mom and lifelong artist, lives on the edge of the Hill Country in Austin. Her childhood was spent in the cities of Miami, Mexico City, Cape Town and Washington, D.C. The color pairings of native wildflowers she and her daughter find on bikes and imprinted on her memory from childhood in Mexico are reflected in her work.

Molly Knobloch is an artist and designer based in East Austin. A creative from day one, she found her love of painting at Tulane University in New Orleans. She works with acrylic paint, oil pastel, pencil and more to create pieces layered with energy and movement that allow viewer to enter and explore.

Christine Sloan Stoddard is a Salvadoran-American author and interdisciplinary artist who lives in Brooklyn. Her books include *Force Fed*, *Desert Fox by the Sea*, *Belladonna Magic*, *Water for the Cactus Woman* and other titles. She co-edited *Her Plumage: An Anthology of Women's Writings* by *Quail Bell Magazine* for *Quail Bell*, the art and literary journal she founded. 2020 will mark the release of Christine's books *Naomi & the Reckoning* (Finishing Line Press), a novelette, and *Heaven Is A Photograph* (CLASH Books), a poetry and photography book.

Eliza Gandy, eight years old, lives in South Austin. Eliza enjoys reading, drawing, playing Phase 10 and eating Carbonara.

Kimberly Tolson teaches college English at the convergence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers where she also resides with her two dogs and partner. Her essays appear in *Sonora Review*, *100 Word Story*, *Crosscurrents* and *Talking River*.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Bertiozábal was born in Mexico and lives in Los Angeles, California, where he works in the mental health field. His latest chapbook, *Make the Light Mine*, was published by Kendra Steiner Editions. His first poetry book, *Raw Materials*, was published by Pygmy Forest Press.

Emanuela Franco is a Brazilian journalist with more than ten years of experience in Brazil and Europe.

David B. Prather received his MFA in creative writing from Warren Wilson College. His first collection, *We Were Birds*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Colorado Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *American Literary Review*, *Poet Lore* and others. His work was also selected for one of Naomi Shihab Nye's anthologies, *what have you lost?* Currently, David spends his time as an actor and a director at a local theater in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. He has published two collections of poetry, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019). He studied English Literature at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, and recently returned to Dublin after several years of living in the UK and Canada.

Luke Neftali Villafranca is a graduate of San Antonio's St. Mary's University (B.A. 2014, M.A. 2016). He is a boxer and a writer from Victoria, Texas.

John Bonanni's new memoir is a rip-roaring look at life in show business. His work is in *Adelaide Magazine*, *San Antonio Review* and the *Raven's Perch*. He received his MFA from Western Connecticut State University.

John Weik is an artist living in Austin. See more of his work at partysloth.org.

Ace Boggess is author of four books of poetry, most recently *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018) and *Ultra Deep Field* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2017). His writing appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *Rhino*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and many other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

Author and playwright **Schuyler Bishop** has shared work in *Sports Illustrated*, *The New York Times* and *Alyson's Best Gay Love Stories* 2005. His first book, *Thoreau in Love*, was published in 2013. After a couple of years at sea and in Florida, he's happily back in New York City.

Rich Furman, MFA, MSW, PhD, is the author or editor of over 15 books, including a collection of flash nonfiction/prose poems, *Compañero* (Main Street Rag, 2007). His work has been published in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Bluestem*, *Chiron Review*, *Sweet*, *Hawai'i Review*, *Pearl*, *Coe Review*, *The Evergreen Review*, *Black Bear Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *New Hampshire Review*, *Penn Review* and many others. He is professor of social work at University of Washington Tacoma. A qualitative researcher whose work is situated on the boundary between the expressive arts and the social sciences, he is one of the pioneers of poetic inquiry. He received his MFA in creative nonfiction from Queens University Charlotte's MFA-Latin America program.

Robert McGuill's work has appeared in *Narrative*, the *Southwest Review*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Louisiana Literature*, *American Fiction* and other publications. His stories have been nominated for the *Pushcart Prize* four times, and short-listed for awards by, among others, *Glimmer Train*, the *New Guard*, *Sequestum Art & Literature*, and the *Tucson Festival of Books*. McGuill lives and writes in Colorado, USA.

Stephen Roger Powers started writing poetry almost twenty years ago to pass time in the middle of the night when he was too energized to sleep after coming off the stage in comedy clubs around the Midwest. He is the author of three poetry collections published by Salmon Poetry in Ireland. He also has a collection of short stories forthcoming from Closet Skeleton Press.

Brother Tom Giardino, S.M., a vowed religious Marianist brother, is a native of Cleveland, Ohio, and a graduate of the University of Dayton. He co-authored the books *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* and *Behind the Camera*. In 2011, he published, *The Promise and the Path: Starting and Sustaining Marianist Communities*.

David A. Grenardo is a professor of law at the St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. He was a four-year letterman in football at Rice University and earned his J.D. from Duke Law School.

Larry Smith is a poet, fiction writer and biographer of Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Kenneth Patchen. His most recent work is *Thoreau's Lost Journal: Poems and Tu Fu Comes to America*. He's a professor emeritus of Bowling Green State University in Ohio and director of Bottom Dog Press. He and his wife live along the shores of Lake Erie in Ohio.

John Patrick Robbins is the editor of the Rye Whiskey Review and Under The Bleachers. He is also the author of *Once Upon A Nervous Breakdown* from Soma Publishing and *Sex Drugs & Poetry* from Whiskey City Press. His work has been published in the San Pedro River Review, Ariel Chart, The Mojave River Review, Red Fez and elsewhere.

Sandeep Kumar Mishra is an outsider artist, poet and lecturer in English literature. He runs Kishlaya Outsider Art Academy. He has edited a collection of poems by various poets, *Pearls*, (2002) and a collection of poems and art, *Feel My Heart* (2016). His work has been widely published.

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Editorial Collective

Gianna Sannipoli's poetry has been published in London Grip, Red Coyote, Mason Street, The Wild Word, Panoply, Gold Dust Magazine, One Sentence Poems, Dodging The Rain, CARE, and is forthcoming in Edify Fiction, and Gnashing Teeth Publishing's anthology: Love Notes You'll Never Read. She is Poetry Editor of San Antonio Review, living, studying and writing in Brno, Czech Republic.

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Ashley Sommer Lange, known only by our publisher as Ash Lange – if this is Tuesday, it must be Cumbernauld.

Peter John Berard, Ph.D., is a writer, historian and organizer living in Watertown, Mass. His reviews have appeared in Jacobin, The Los Angeles Review of Books and elsewhere. He is San Antonio Review's inaugural Book Review Editor.

Although he insists school is for suckers, **Paul Peterson** has earned a BA in History from the University of Louisiana at Monroe, an MA in History from Louisiana State University and, most recently, an Associate Degree in Computer Programming from Austin Community College. He lives in Austin (in the same apartment complex but not the same apartment) with his girlfriend, Liz, and their dog, Chloe.

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*There where you don't understand,
in the white spaces, in the emptiness,
write: I love you.*

Elena Poniatowska
qtd. in
I Never Left Home,
Margaret Randall