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SEARCH RESULTS FOR 'ANN E. MICHAEL'

Books: Native American Classics
by admin
Editors Tom Pomplun, John E. Smelcer and Joseph Bruchac have produced a wonderful book in *Native American Classics: Graphic Classics Series Volume 24*, the latest in an illustrated classics series of books designed “to create books that are enjoyable for adults, yet accessible to children ages twelve and up.” The historical texts in this book are entertaining and educational. This newest production, like other books in the series, is beautifully adorned cover to cover with colorful illustrations serving as backdrops for texts by modern and contemporary Native American writers. The list of authors is an impressive mix of 19th-century through 21st-century Native American poets and storytellers that includes Zitkala-Sa, Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), E. Pauline Johnson, Alex Posey, Simon Pokagon, Handsome Lake, Bertrand N.O. Walker, Buffalo Bird Woman, Carlos Montezuma (Wassaja), John Rollin Ridge (Cheesquatalawny), plus a host of other talented writers. The list of illustrators is equally impressive and includes Bahe Whitethorne, Jr., Jim McMunn, Andrea Grant, Marty Two Bulls Sr., Murv Jacob, Weshoyot Alvitre, Toby Cypress, John Findley, along with other talented illustrators.

The texts comprise a rich variety of storytelling. For example, on the one hand the serious tale “On Wolf Mountain” by Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), adapted by Joseph Bruchac, and beautifully illustrated by Robby McMurtry, which tells the tale of a wolf pack, known as the Mayala Clan of Gray Wolves, were “driven away from their den on account of their depredations upon the only paleface in the Big Horn Valley.” Fortunately, the wolves happen upon a Lakota village and are befriended by the “Red Hunters.” According to Ohiyesa’s story, the paleface lifestyle of sheepherding and cattle ranching is unnatural to the landscape and proves to be potentially ruinous to the lives of both wolves and Lakotas. As the narrative recounts the struggle between the native wolves and intruder palefaces, one cannot help but detect the parallel genocide that Native Americans endured after the European invasion of North America.
Potato,” Buffalo Bird Woman’s story adapted by Tom Pomplun and handsomely illustrated by Pat N. Lewis, which recounts the tale of Itsikamahidish, who, in the form of a gluttonous coyote, happens upon a serendipitous pile of wild potatoes. One potato warns Itsikamahidish that potatoes, while nutritious, also cause one to experience a copious amount of gas. Unimpressed with the potato’s warning, Itsikamahidish eats his fill and proceeds on his merry way to visit his sweetheart while emitting “poots” of gas along the way. Eventually, Itsikamahidish’s gas “poots” become so powerful they begin lifting him off the ground, only to have him return to earth with a painful thud. The soft moral of the story is that gluttony can get you into trouble, so the next time a potato offers you advice, better pay attention!

All texts are presented in comics form designed to stimulate and delight both adult and adolescent imaginations. Series Publisher, Tom Pomplun, puts it this way: “The Graphic Classics series presents works of great authors in comics adaptations and heavily-illustrated text . . . adaptations are written at an adult level, and utilize as much of the author’s original language as possible.” One of the most enjoyable books I’ve read in a long time, Native American Classics, due for release March 2013, is already on my gift list, along with several other books in the unique Graphics Classics series. Suffice it to say that the reproduction of texts and illustrations in this book are vibrant and colorful. This beautifully printed and bound book is highly recommended for personal pleasure as well as gifts for adults, plus sons, daughters, nephews and nieces who love to be educated and entertained at the same time.

Native American Classics: Graphic Classics Volume 24 (ISBN #978-9825630-6-9)
144 pages, 7” x 10”, paperback, full color ($17.95)
Distributed by Diamond Book Distributors
Eureka Productions
Tom Pomplun, Publisher
www.graphicclassics.com

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Another view:
This soon to be released collection of Native American stories rendered in the graphic novel/comic book format features a synthesis of Native American traditional stories transcribed on or before the 20th century with the work of contemporary comic/graphic novel artists. The majority of the artists include in this collection are Native American. We tend to think of the graphic novel as a new creation, embedded in popular culture, cheaply produced for a mass audience no longer interested in wading through a conventional book. However, storytelling with words and pictures, something graphic novels certainly do, is not a new phenomenon. Cave art in Europe and indigenous petroglyphs in Australia, and North and South America all figure from 40,000 to 30,000 years old. In both the ancient and the modern, the narrative unfolds through a series of sequential visual images, much the way traditional stories develop through verbal imagery.

So why not a marriage between Native American storytelling and the graphic novel? Sounds logical. Didn’t Frank Miller take the stories of Herodotus and turn them into The 300? The history of contact between Euro-American and Native peoples in addition to the complex relationship between oral traditions, culture and spiritual beliefs suggests caution. How do we, some of us as outsiders to the culture, discuss these works? What qualities do we look for? What responsibilities are inherent in the creation of an anthology such as this? A watershed moment in the development of indigenous comic art occurred with the 2009 exhibit, Comic Art Indigene exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Subsequently, the exhibit toured The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, and The Rockwell Museum Western Arts in Corning, NY. This exhibit demonstrated a strong indigenous presence within the emerging and often marginalized literary form of the graphic novel. Native artists are often attracted to the sequential format of the graphic novel, appropriating the western comic form to both tell traditional stories and create new culture.
As marginalized literary formats, the comic book and graphic novel have a certain appeal to indigenous peoples, they can be mass produced and shared and present a visually exciting way to tell cultural stories through pictures. “Exhibit curator Antonio Chavarria stated, adding, “Comics are just another way to tell stories, they are a narrative art form that reinforces the beliefs and symbols of a people and a place.

Native scholars suggest, however, that care must be taken. Stories in indigenous cultures are more than entertainment. They are the means by which the origin, cautionary, and hero stories, along with tribal history and values are maintained and transmitted. They have often been described as “sacred texts” Many of them, particularly in the Northwest and Alaska are considered clan or tribal property. Unauthorized use or misuse can be offensive and in many ways perpetuates the colonial paradigm.

In discussing Native American Classics, we might first assume that Native American stories expressed in comic format strive to subvert the Euro-American settler narrative to produce an alternate narrative that reflects the Native experience and worldview. For example, we might first ask, does the graphic format reclaim or deconstruct stereotypes such as those that harken back to dime novels and serial westerns? Karl May’s Old Shatterhand stories provide us a vivid example. Do they reassemble the stereotypes to debunk the original stereotypical characters and tropes such as Marty Two Bull’s characters, Frybread Man and Mr. Diabetes, or his selection in this anthology, Wildcat Bill? Similarly, does the adaptation of graphic styles resurrect traditional heroes or create new ones like those in *Tribal Force* illustrated by Ryan Huna Smith. This collection, with stories by Jon Proudstar, was the first Native American authored comic book featuring Native American superheroes. Finally, and perhaps most critical and difficult to discuss, is this hybridization of traditional stories in graphic form successful in the ways in which the text and the serial illustrations combine to tell the story in a dynamic, perhaps symbiotic way? Conversely, does the traditional story and graphic illustration need to resemble each other, or can they exist in some sort of juxtaposition and still work? Finally, is it respectful, does it embody at least some of the functions of traditional story telling? Does it create a new voice or reach a new audience?
Native American Classics is based on the worthy notion to connect with the often marginalized and nascent Native American Literature of mid and late 19th century. This literature, with virtually no model under the surveillance of white editors, who published only what was deemed as appropriate or compatible with Euro-American perceptions of Native peoples. These perceptions viewed Native peoples alternately as noble savages, bloodthirsty killers or tragic vanishing or vanished victims. For many of the original texts included in Native American Classics, the cultural traditions and concerns of their authors were carefully, and at times, discreetly expressed. With Native American Classics, the addition of the serial visual images accompanying the text has the potential to change our understanding of these stories.

The original authors and their stories included in Native American Classics represent that early wave of writers, who struggled to survive creatively and break through in print. Many of them were of mixed blood, or had considerable contact with missionaries, and boarding schools, including the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Others attended colleges and universities. These experiences shaped and often confined their works. The written expressions of the prose, predictable rhyme patterns of some of the poetry and the guarded ways in which the Native worldview is expressed might seem dated to us today. They do, however represent the realities of a people being forced through assimilation to shift from a rich, sustaining oral culture to a written culture in an unfamiliar language. For example, we find ourselves uncomfortable with the apparent rejection of traditional spiritual practices as suggested by the text in Zitlala-Sa’s “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” particularly in the description of the Medicine Man: “His long strides I have never forgot... they seemed to me then as the uncanny gait of eternal death.” Perhaps more problematic is the captive/abduction narrative of John Rollin Ridge’s “The Stolen White Girl,” with its noble savage Romantic stereotype, mildly erotic Victorian language and stilted rhyme scheme. The choice of illustration style here is not quite clear, perhaps to defuse the narrative into an innocent love story? Carlos Montezuma’s 1916 poem “Changing is not Vanishing” is one exception however, which anticipates a later 20th century Native viewpoint. The illustration by Arigon Starr reinforces this, suggesting strength and optimism through a progression of images from a woman in traditional dress to a young man with a music player.

Visually, Native American Classics represents a wide variety of...
narratives and graphic styles from various tribal groups and artists. Randy Keedah’s cover art resonates as an almost lovingly appropriation of the color and realism of Charles M. Russell and Fredric Remington and seems like a consistent aesthetic with other covers in the Graphic Classic Series from Eureka Productions. A thematic cover choice might have been the image of Raven by Michael Nicoll Yahgulannas. This image, from the author and creator of Haida Manga, presents a contemporary riff on Raven stealing daylight and spreading it to the world. In this image, we see Raven transforme Picasso meets – traditional form-line art trickster holding a cell phone with a copy of Native American Classics firmly clenched in his beak. For me, at least, this visual image embodies the cultural juxtapositions a collection such as this could aspire to. It also would be nice to see more of Tribal Force’s creator Ryan Huna Smith’s work. Other works pay homage to comic creators such as Marvel’s Stan Lee and Frank Miller (“The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” “The Thunders’ Nest,” “The Hunter and Medicine Legend,” and “The Cattle Thief.” Similarly, Marty Bull’s short and pointedly hilarious “Wildcat Bill” recalls Robert Crumb’s Mr. Natural.

The illustrative style of Robby McMurtry’s “On Wolf Mountain,” is especially successful. With its spare colors and loose, inked images, it looks as if it were created by a 19th century artist sitting on the high prairie with a sketch book and paint box. The magical vibrant colors and ink of Afua Richardson in “Anoska Nimiwina” create dynamic visual characters that do not rely on stereotyped visual images of Native people. Her use of loose swirling colors and ink to animate the scenes is almost cinematic. The text boxes and dialogue bubbles effectively differentiate between narration and dramatic dialog. The story also includes the character of a native scholar (writer) transcribing the traditional story that is unfolding for the reader. This insertion makes us aware of the processes by which oral stories come into written form. This self-reflexivity also reflects on the process of “transcribing” this very story into the graphic form contained in the anthology.

“The Middleman,” which is stylistically reminiscent of Chic Young’s Blondie comic series, juxtaposes innocent and playful images with very devious and fraudulent practices in which unscrupulous land speculators took advantage of the Dawes or Allotment Act to bilk Native people out of their government assigned allotments. Text boxes at the bottom help to clear this up for the reader. However, this might have been more effective as a Forward. Perhaps a minor quibble...
selections in Native American Classics might have benefited from some inserted information to help place the pieces in a cultural and historical context. Information on the author, date, tribal affiliation, and some background on the origin of the story and its importance could be very helpful to the reader here, particularly those new to Native American literature. Much of this information is, however, found at the end of the collection.

Native American Classics includes strong, heroic women characters in “Anoska Nimiwina” and “The Cattle Thief.” Equally important, the grandmother in “The Prehistoric Race” serves as the Ouendot (Wyandot) narrator and tradition bearer. For example, in the beginning of the narrative she introduces herself as a member of the Big Turtle Clan so as to connect herself and her grandson to a story from which their clan is named. This would also seem culturally appropriate since women held important governing positions in traditional Wyandot culture. The use of the Grandmother’s written dialect contrasts with the standard English of the animal characters and the grandson. It works as a device to separate the characters, however, one could argue she comes off as less articulate, and the text is a bit slow to read due to phonetic spelling. The storytelling narrator function is also a strong visual presence as the character of Charles Eastman in “On Wolf Mountain” and is alluded to in the previously mentioned example of the Native transcriber in “Anoska Nimiwina.” Women authors are present in the contributions of Zitkala-Sa, Mary Bird Woman, and Pauline Johnson, and illustrators Weshoyot Alvitre, Andrea Grant, Arigon Starr, Afua Richardson, and Tara Audbert.

The spiritual connection between animals and humans is represented again by “On Wolf Mountain,” “The Hunter and the Medicine Legend,” and “Two Wolves”; traditional heroes in “The Thunder’s Nest” and “Anoska Nimiwina.”

Humor is an important and necessary tradition in Native American stories and two examples in Native American Classics provide contrasting approaches. “The Story of Itsikamahidsh and the Wild Potatoes” by Buffalo Bird Woman is a Coyote style cautionary tale broadly comic with a touch of flatulent humor, about the danger of eating wild potatoes. It utilizes a visual style that reminds one of the early Walt Disney or Hanna Barbara cartoons. Marty Two Bulls’ illustrations for Alex Posey’s “Wildcat Bill” almost literally turn the stereotype of the cigar store Indian on its head with comic and appropriately just results. Combining these 19th and early 20th century...
narratives with colorful, at times bold, and perhaps brash visual expressions produces a dynamic hybridization. (Chavarria) The success of this synthesis is clearest in the stories where the written text of the narrative is accurately and respectfully presented within the comic/graphic novel format and that this reflects the Native worldview of the author. Likewise, we need to be open to the possibility that a traditional story and its graphic visual expression might exist in tension with each other, and that this might also be a successful collaboration. “The Middleman,” for example, moves in this direction. Finally, the visual inclusion of a Native storyteller within the frames of the story is an important reminder that these stories owe their origin to the traditional performance practices of storytelling which have been responsible for the transmission of traditional knowledge and culture for thousands of years.

On a personal note, my favorites are “On Wolf Mountain,” “Wildcat Bill” and especially “Two Wolves.” This last story is particularly successful for its tight, sparse dialogue, and the illustration style of John Findley. He combines great attention to detail and technical mastery of the media with an uncanny ability to create visual characters that convey a sense of emotional depth as well as the spiritual connection between the man and wolf. Maybe I’m just sentimental, but there was something emotionally satisfying about the ending of the story. It also provides a strong conclusion to the collection.

The anthology may not be perfect, but it does accomplish a number of things. First, it provides an opportunity for Native artists to connect their work to traditional stories in ways that are culturally meaningful. This connection to traditional stories also gives their work a visibility beyond the graphic novel/comic genre. In one way or another, all the stories in the collection provide readers with places to start a meaningful dialogue about Native American literature, particularly in an environment such as a classroom. Finally, the coexistence of verbal, written, and visual expressions of traditional stories shed light on an indigenous culture and the ways in which it evolves through time in search of its own voices. This is perhaps the greatest contribution of a collection such as Native American Classics.
Edited by Tom Pomplun with associate editors John E. Smelcer and Joseph Bruchac

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www.graphicclassics.com

Works Cited


http://www.rockwellmuseum.org/Comic-Art-Indigene.html

About the author:

Dale E. Seeds is Professor of Theatre in the Department of Theater Dance at the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, teaching courses in Native American Performance and Indigenous film. His work has been published in Theatre Crafts, Drama Review, and MELUS. In addition to his work at Wooster, his design credits include work for The Abbey of Dublin Ireland, The University of Alaska, Fairbanks and the Dead White Zombies performance group of Dallas, Texas.
John F. Buckley and Martin Ott recently published *Poets’ Guide to America*, a poetry book “on the states, cities, and the strange places of the United States (and even some of its overseas possessions).” Her thing – they wrote these poems together. That is, each poem was written in part by Buckley and in part by Ott. In Buckley’s words, “Beginning in May 2009, Martin and I began playing what we call ‘poetic volleyball,’ a form of exquisite corpse in which we took turns writing a couple of lines of verse, back and forth, until we had a poem. And two poems. And then, finally, fifty.”

Is this co-op approach to poetry becoming a trend? We recently reviewed *The New Arcana* written by John Amen and Daniel Y. Harris, a mostly poetry but sometimes multi-genre, neo-Dadaist book that pushes the boundaries of what most folks expect to see from a volume of poetry. A couple years back Andrei Codrescu and Ruxandra Cesereanu released their remarkable *Forgiven Submarine*, their “story of a difficult love, from the first signs of tenderness through a life and death battle, to a reconciliation made necessary by wisdom,” poetry collaboration. It’s well known Dada poets and artists collaborate often, sometimes on the same stage at the Cabaret Voltaire.

So, this collaboration thing isn’t altogether new, but in this case in the words of Tony Barnstone, “create a great conflagration of vignettes and voyages, characters and crisis, traversing or dissecting America in all its nutty hubris, with miracles at the Dairy Queen, SEALs diving for Godzilla’s eggs, an igloo constructed of Schlitz Malt Liquor cartons, a patchwork country inhabited by vegetable princes and chupacabra kings.” *Poets’ Guide to America* is comprised of fifty poems, 95% of which are neatly laid out in two, three, four, five or six line stanzas, thus, satisfying the MFA code of quasi-structure. The often exudes a tongue-in-cheek glimpse into the diverse landscapes of America and often in a tone that mimics playful narrators offering historic tidbits of Delaware, Pittsburgh, Georgia, Boston, St. Louis, Manhattan, Omaha, etc. One jocular poem, “A Tale of Two Portlands” opens with an allusion to Dickens:
It was the best of lines, it was the worst of lines. Or so she said the next morning when our search for her missing underwear led us to grind to halts and hollers on a beige antique rug, our newest arena. Where we whiled away another damp hour, another stray occasion. We shared the wetness: toothbrushes, plumbing, childhood tales . . .

Structured as poetry but written in whimsical prosaic style, this book isn’t Howard Zinn’s “true history of America.” What it is, however, is a romp with Buckley and Ott creating their own band of Merry Pranksters combing all corners of the United States. Their poems offer a witty and well sculpted peek into the details that separate Motown from Miami, Daytona Beach from Indianapolis, Los Angeles from Roanoke. Occasionally poignant but mostly improvisational, *Poet’s Guide to America* provides an enjoyable jaunt throughout the great experiment known as the United States. This mostly lighthearted book is witty and enjoyable. The next time you hop Amtrak or Greyhound to visit your aunt in Atlanta, your mother in West Palm Beach, or your poet buddies in Ann Arbor, take this book along. By the time you arrive at your destination, it’ll feel like you’re returning home.

It takes a steady hand to operate a Cadillac without power steering and a heart like a crusted nut, he said without letting the smoke in his craw twitch one bit.

A man should never own a car worth more than his house, his wife said before following her rusted catalytic converter of a boyfriend to Appalachia.

Now the strikers’ wives stockpile Kroger’s in the back of his double-wide, preparing for the possibility, one more half-willing spasm of labor as contracts turn brown.

As the tar on his walls darkening from pure American tobacco. Sometimes he drives to Windsor to take a piss, and gives strays rides to see Joe Louis pump his fist, explaining how Detroit smacked the Nazis.
where it hurt and the supreme temptations of hometown soul got all his girls talking about grit.

(from “Slowdown in Motown”)

Poets’ Guide to America (ISBN #978-1-936767-16-8)
110 pages, 7” x 8½”, paperback, ($14.95)
Brooklyn Arts Press
www.BrooklynArtsPress.com

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Sky Sandwiches

Review by Alan Britt

Lots of praise for John F. Buckley’s Sky Sandwiches. Those familiar with Buckley’s sardonic, quasi-autobiographical poetry are not surprised by the following accolades: “I love when his youth comes off the page, and I get to relive a Michigan childhood.” (John Brantingham); “Buckley is a well-traveled Bukowski. He explores diners in Michigan, final yarcs and crushed Californian dreams.” (T. Anders Carson); “Here, McMansions, disappointed family members, Walmarts, malt liquor Blondie, convents, shit tonsils, classro ex-porn stars, mean fertility specialists, hot sauce melt into an addictive and irresistible Kool-Aid that leaves us panting for more.” (Alexandra Mattraw). An imaginative travelogue heavily punctuated with autobiographical details characterizes this lively book. The poems are packed with seductive details that, as several of the book’s blurbs indicate, invite the reader inside the poems without hesitation. One easily relates to Buckley’s almost stream of cons
journeys to his geographic and psychic haunts that are littered with an amazing variety of details:

He told them garum tasted most like Filipino patis, more so than nuoc mam or Chinese fish paste. He liked ice cream, MMA matches, posters with kittens, and American Idol.

He once became enraged and defensive when they laughed at him for rubbing vanilla Haagen-Dazs on his toe wound. “Is that Roman folk medicine, ‘Roam-oo-leh’?” Bastards!

Fine! You get dragged to twenty-first-century Livermore!

It’s confusing! The ice-cream helps, all aches subsiding.

They wouldn’t give him a concubine, so he had made do.

* * *

Watch him fret in his Boy Scout sleeping bag, dreaming of Italy and cyclotrons, restless, feeling like an unlucky coin flipped in the air between someone else’s finger and thumb.

Buckley’s language moves at the speed of imagination, that is, it delightfully unpredictable. Once Buckley’s launches into his fren voice, he could end up anywhere, at a family reunion in “At the Reunion,” revisiting late adolescence in Windsor, Ontario, in “A Promise,” or entering the psychic zone in “Anybody Can live on Moon.” I say get a good grip on whatever hat you happen to be
wearing; otherwise, the verbal tailwind produced in these poems leave you breathless and straining for balance. But how delightful to be rocking in a verbal tornado that plucks you right out of mundane existence and deposits you somewhere light-years from Kansas.

Let’s make believe we’re elsewhere.

Let’s keep an even keel in the waters of our mind

a smooth gliding in a taut canvas canoe

on a lake of placid equanimity

not caught in the crosshairs of status and mishap,

an escape artist locked in an opulent corner office

after swallowing the key.

Let’s not listen to Ram Dass. Let’s not be here now

in the man’s office for the anticipated meeting,

the avuncular pomp due to recent circumstances,

the canning of the human pickle.

Let’s not discuss the events leading up to this moment:

a divorce, a stubborn repetition of nightvaps,

a morning kicking-in of windows,

a request to deposit one’s stink away from

the chaperoned students, first temporarily, then permanently.

(“Avoidance”)
Galanty’s Re-Tweets
by admin

reTORAHcal Questions
& other nonsense

From Scott “Galanty” Miller

JC Penny is having its annual back-to-summer-school sale for delinquents. I’m able to communicate with the dead. “Oh, hey, Arsenio’s career.” I’ve been having non-committal sex with an unusable violin- no strings attached! I told the cab driver, “Take someplace where nobody has ever been before.” He responded, don’t go to Staten Island.” If Donald Trump had a nickel for every asinine thing he said, he’d be a very rich man. It’s said that “the best things in life are free.” But, no, I have to pay for my pelvic massages. I uploaded my infectious disease on Youtube. I hope it goes viral! I’ve been waiting in line for the past 8 hours because Apple has come out with a new long line. I have the world’s greatest friends! (It’s a shame I have to see such terrible human beings, though.) Growing up, I was forced to wear my mannequin’s old hand-me-downs. “Does the carpet match the drapes?” is what I asked that woman, my neighbor, with the long drapes getting new carpet delivered this afternoon. Breakfast is most important meal of the morning. What are the first five books of the Jewish Bible? (That was a reTORAHcal question.) You know you never hear? “Let’s stay for the entire poetry reading.” If I had a time machine, I’d go back 12 months into the past. Aren’t you curious to see what life was like back then? I keep a gun under my pillow in case someone attacks me while I’m fast asleep. You know what you never hear? “That was very honorable of you, Newt.” Every rose
its thorn. For example, there are many great songs on the radio. I sometimes they play Poison’s “Every Rose Has Its Thorn.”/ My salad has that “new car” smell./ Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you’re not good enough. Just be not good enough./ There’s such a fine line between “we’re friends even though we disagree with each other politically” and “we hate each other.” I can count on my hand the number of times I’ve committed any kind of serious crime. (803 times)/ I’m up to one-million people I’m following on Twitter!/ Life is so full of possibilities. Can you possibly shut up?/ The new Creed song sounds totally different from their songs… is something that nobody said today./ Birthdays are like regular days on ACID! (Because I take acid on my birthday.)/ My fiancée and I have the same last name. But when we get married, she wants to keep her last name… just out of spite./ The Bible says it’s a sin to covet thy neighbor’s wife. That’s why I skip the coveting and go straight to the oral sex./ A good friend is someone who is always there for you — no matter how many times you throw each other under the bus./ I’d like to see Michael Vick use the QB option more during 3rd & Long because his effectiveness in the pocket is… wait — he did WHAT to dogs?!/ You know what you never hear? “I really want to impress my guests. Bring out the Coors Light!”/ “Life is but a dream.” Actually, that statement would be a lot more accurate if you shorten it to “Life is BUTT.”/ I stole a yo-yo & a pack of bubble gum. The judge ruled I should not be tried as an adult./ I’m trying to watch my waistline. (My waistline has hardcore pornography on it.)/ My friends can always count on me to be there for them 50% of the time./ Don’t be a victim! (Be a perpetrator.)

About the author:

Scott Galanty Miller is a contributing humorist to Ragazine.CC. Read more about him in “About Us.”
Books/Book Reviews

by admin

January-February 2013

Paul West, The Left Hand Is The
The Left Hand Is The Dreamer

By Paul West

Author of 50 books, Paul West discourses passionately on the effects of a stroke that left him without the ability to walk, speak — or write. In this highly personal monologue, West weaves together the ordinary and profound in describing daily routines on his road back to a modicum of sensibility and functionality, affectionately and poignantly describing interactions with the various medical personnel, friends, family, caregivers and caretakers who persevered driving him on to recovery.

Nov-Dec 2012

3 from Split Oak Press

by Alan Britt
Book Review Editor

James R. Stafford, Editor and Publisher of Split Oak Press says that he... seeks original work by both new and established poets. We welcome poetry of any style, subject or form that strikes us as bold and original. Bold, original, and diverse are apt descriptions for three chapbooks published by Split Oak.

Paul Hostovsky’s That Light contains diversity all rolled into one book: poems with long, flowing lines which at times stream subconsciously, punctuated by poems with shorter lines that punch and kick, woven further still by ragged poems containing long and short lines. Several of Hostovsky’s poems feature symmetrical three-, four- and ten-line stanzas. Much diversity housed within a 42-page book. Not surprisingly, Hostovsky’s voice changes from time to time, beginning with his first person dream voice in “Everyone Wa...
Beautiful”:

But everyone but everyone had this patina
of slightly bruised longing, this summer of
I think I knew you when we were children,
this look of I’ve loved you ever since you were born
and probably longer than that and it all started
with the paperboy careening out of the blue
dawn on his bicycle, pitching to the left and right
with his ballast of fifty today’s papers
in a vast canvas sack slung over his shoulder
balancing himself and the whole world
on the tip of morning, the streets beginning to stir
with shadows and workers and cars
all of which were perfectly beautiful. . .  (7)
shifting to third person in “The Weeping”:

It begins as a trickle,
and it comes the way people come trickling in
who are late to a great gathering
of people, silently,
self-consciously
holding the door, holding
the breath, letting it
close softly behind before the next
jagged inhalation opens it
again. And again. . . (15)

then to second person in “Visualization”:

Your pain is a television
mounted on the wall
at the Dunkin Donuts
where you sip your coffee
and look out the window
at the trees. . . (21)

Likewise, Hostovsky’s topics vary a bit from the more contemplative aforementioned “The Weeping,” plus “Why the Music Makes Us to the tongue in cheek of “The Nurse’s Office,” “Mozart in Your Armpit,” and “Kissing the Cat.” All in all, there’s much to like in this little book.

Although less diverse stylistically, Caroline Manring provides plenty of boldness in her chap, No Postman. The title poem itself tilts the reader slightly off-balance by launching into a diatribe sans literal setting:

An envoy deployed
West in a bonnet sutured
Tight against the blackflies
Summer was dying
To get going
In the wrists (13)
And, later, in “Night Shift”:

The sick went into the

Yard to play

Jellyfish in a squadron

Of dark seas

In the one unfrightened night

Under my ribs. (29)

Manring also offers some surprises in typography, from her all caps poem “Telegram” to a bit of visual prosody in the book’s final poem “To Speak.” The effect of all caps in truncated diction mimics the effect of an actual telegram, while her visual prosody creates the energy of the speaker’s voice in “To Speak.” Manring employs terse diction, which surely characterizes her book, with lively imagery in several poems as exemplified here from “Shorthand”:

That carriage came across
Muting the bridge

Bled limestone
Folded its hands, faded

We sloshed in the river
Cinders bloom

Skirts kicked up flame
Bits like beetles (46)
Finally, true to his commitment to variety, publisher Stafford offers a Split Oak Press chapbook contest winner in Eric Nelson’s *The Twins*. On first blush, one might regard Nelson’s straightforward narratives as prosaic, even simplistic. Closer reading, however, reveals an exacting combination of diction, syntax, and perceptivity that urges readers to flow smoothly from poem to poem. Nelson’s language appears clean and effortless, a quality which belies his poems’ subtle beauty. One might reference this effortless quality to actors such as Paul Newman or Robert Redford. The point being, are they really acting or just playing themselves? But while watching Newman and Redford opposite amateurs and over-actors, it becomes clear that what they (and Nelson) achieve is impressive indeed.

Nelson kick-starts his book with a deft narrative from CNN about archeologists in Verona unearthing the grave of a young couple lying face to face and muses: could they be “the real Romeo and Juliet’?

The picture shows a fretwork of parallel bones

Half-embedded in red dirt, the two skull eye sockets

Just inches apart grinning hideously at each other.

The folded arms and legs look more like prehistoric birds

Than humans, or like twins in utero, which in a way

(continued/no break)

4

They are, and now they are delivered, premature, ghastly,

And yet their ancient posture of embrace, their tenderness

Facing death facing each other, compels me to stare at the photo

Then Nelson tweaks a universal nerve at the end by suggesting,

Life and Art showing once again their shameless fidelity.

Or else it is an elaborate hoax that all of us are in on, winking
From our soon-to-be empty sockets, whispering hotly

In each other’s ears, not stopping even if we’ve heard it before. (9)

Nelson’s acute perception at times not only surprises but also delights when he compares overgrown Christmas trees from an “out-of-business Christmas tree farm” to “former stars / (who) have at last / Become them- Starless . . .,” or by noticing snakeskins “half-in, half-out of the pond” plus “one stretched along a tree limb / So intact I see where it were” (14).

And as if to punctuate his exact diction, much like a painter adding subtle brushstrokes to shiver sunlight across a magnolia leaf, Nelson etches a poem about two lovers in a public park in his delightful “The Last Last Try”:

Our mouths came together,

Came apart.

Clouds cleared

Their throats and darkened.

. . .

Beside us the fountain spouted

As if it might tell us something.

The water rose as if falling

Weren’t possible

. . .

In the fountain the words
Float in circles like wishes,

Wishes that wouldn’t sink

Or come true. (33)

Nelson’s book requires multiple readings in order to extract all its subtle nectar, with each reading producing new delights along the way.

That Light by Paul Hostovsky. ISBN #978-0-9823513-4-5. (NPL)

No Postman by Caroline Manring. ISBN#978-0-9823513-5-2 (NPL)

The Twins by Eric Nelson. ISBN#978-0-9823513-3-8 (NPL)

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John Amen and Daniel Y. Harris:
The New Arcana

BOOK REVIEW:

By Paul Sohar

NYQ Books
2012
ISBN: 20122945157

Let’s get the summary out of the way right here at the beginning: there are no problems with The New Arcana, it is an immensely enjoyable – albeit not easy – read, but problems may arise when the reader
approaches it with the habitual intention of understanding it. Even if he is able to set aside that old habit, he will not be initiated into any secrets; his mind will not be enlightened but definitely enlivened. The authors seem to have faithfully followed Tristan Tzara’s Dadaist dictum: “Art is a private thing, the artist makes it for himself, a comprehensible work is the product of a journalist. We need works that are strong, straight, precise, and forever beyond understanding.”

In his earlier three volumes of poetry John Amen was progressively pushing the boundaries of the genre, almost to the breaking point in the last one (At the Threshold of Alchemy, 2011; by contrast, a volume of intensely personal and confessional poems). Did he step over threshold in The New Arcana, or is this a temporary detour from his rapidly evolving style? The latter must be the case, because the book is a collaborative effort with Daniel Y. Harris, in itself a radical departure for any poet from his usually solitary work. In addition, the collaborator is known to dabble in Hebrew mysticism in his own poetry which makes it tempting to ascribe this eccentric and esoteric project to his influence.

A reader still seeking the message may be determined to trace some of the strophes to one or the other poet, but such an exercise is not only unnecessary but impossible. True, most poets speak for themselves in their own voices most of the time, but in this book the two authors speak from the wings of a stage through a long cast of characters, each one defined only by some deformity their lines reveal. No other description is provided for them, and one is free to speculate. However, speculation is not the way to approach the text but by absorption, spiritual osmosis. The trickiest part is that some whole chapters – excerpts from plays, essays, interviews and doctoral theses – are given to voices that get a long biography, but when the uninitiated reader, innocent of the sly intricacies of the work, tries to look up any of these names they turn out to be totally fictitious. And so are the names quoted in the numerous authentic-looking footnotes and references. Only the authors’ names are true, but their biographies provided in the back are spoofs, and in their photos their faces are disguised behind goggles. A reader starting the book from the back is given a clear clue as to the tone of the rest.

Not quite though; the general tone is indeed Surrealist, but it spans over a great variety of approaches, ranging from a few actually coherent and powerful poems (most notably in Section Two, attributed to a Larry Ormerod) and vivid one-liner metaphors to long-winded...
academic dissertations and extensive marginalia. The contorted academese texts will equally amuse academics and those whom intimidate with their esoteric language. In a footnote the authors quote themselves at considerable length but fail to cite a reference (How about “From a paper in progress?”) The marginalia are extensions of the poetic lines, designed to beguile with more deco rather than explain anything. The last section is a prose poem in short paragraphs written or told by a JD who may or may not be an amalgam of the two poets. That may be true of all the other characters as well. The liveliest and perhaps the most personal voice is that of Constance Carbuncle who appears in the first part of Section Two.

One section (Apotheosis) is a long poem (broken up by marginalia written postmortem by a French professor, two years after his death) the bleak nonexistence of the dead is rendered in a poetic language and elegant metaphors worthy of Baudelaire. Paradoxically, this elegiac lamentation is the strongest part of the book, probably because it is not really about death but the fear of death.

I am the vacuum of absence.

I am cold ash and the final illusion of a dying ember.

I am absolute love and the purity of horror,

an implosion without reference,

an incubator for what will never be born,

what will never die,

This is presented as “panatomist” poetry in the extensive but humorous gibberish in the footnotes. The authors’ newly invented concept of “panatomism” is often referred to as commonly know concept and thus never defined except in such a convoluted way there is no concise quote that could summarize it. Ambivalence is the leitmotif here; it could be this, or could be that.

Not all the literary discourses parody academic style, some parts well beyond that; they actually make sense or contain a kernel of truth. For example, in one of the purported dissertations the writer ascribes the invention of automatic poetry to the Surrealists and extols the virtues of the method (clipping all the words of a promising para...
and then putting them together in random order) in eliminating intentionality and theme from the resulting poem, leaving a reader without comprehension but still curious, hung up in anxiety. That is the true purpose of art, say the Surrealists and the panatomists, as indirectly endorsed by the authors through an intermediary, another invented character: “Authenticity is achieved through the instantiation of a sustained paradox.”

Actually, randomized writing method was described in a poem by Tristan Tzara almost a hundred years ago under the aegis of Dadaism. Pairing disparate images together – as we find in this book – is a conceit of Surrealism, and it is hard to detect evidence of automatic poetry here, but the method is – like every other theory – is endorsed and rejected at the same time, apparently in the name of creating a paradox. Incomprehensibility is wholeheartedly supported in numerous instances in the make-believe but also credible literary criticism that intersperse the poetic material: “…we are often most alive when our not-knowing is most pronounced.” The thought practically punctuates the book in different formulations. Tzara would approve.

For a taste of what could be the product of automatic poetry see below (mixing in obscure technical terms, an ubiquitous panatomist ploy, almost ensures incomprehensibility):

“Antiferromagnatism
with Kagome lattice,
is spun glass: geophysics
of war paint,
chromium alloy to the dead
redux—
the tilting head, chalk red.”

Pure nonsense, would say the traditionalist, but to Dadaists it is poetry, free of a biased message. What better way is there to exclude unintended content that our unexpressed, unformulated and deeply ingrained assumptions might unconsciously suggest? If indeed all themes are suspect, it is better to avoid any content at all, even the possibility of one, by totally eliminating intentionality from the creative process as guaranteed by automatic writing. At least, that is the theory as this reader understands it. Understand? Please excuse the use of the dirty word…
The best poems in this collection are the old-fashioned comprehensible kind, regardless of what the marginalia next to it say, but they would lose their essence if only quoted in part, because their power lies in making a statement in three or four stanzas that cohere into one whole, each line as essential as a layer of bricks in a tower. Parts of these poems would not do justice to the whole poem whoever wrote them. Whether we call this wonderfully incomprehensible medley neo-Dadaist, surrealist or panatomist behind it there are two very cultured (not only sophisticated!), creative and whimsical minds. One day it will be a classic, maybe another hundred years from now when poets of the time rediscover Dadaism again.

Just one more thought: essays presented within the framework of fiction or independently published fiction pieces written in scholar journalist jargon pose a special problem to the critic. How much meant to be fact and how much fiction? This genre is the reverse of creative nonfiction and should have its own name. How about essay fiction? Fictional essay?

* * * * *

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****
Hypothetical Girls is Elizabeth Cohen’s collection of short stories examining the realities of relationships and what passes for, and sometimes is, Love. Such is the fabric of good fiction, and Cohen makes the most of it.

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* * * * *
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Stones Not Over Yet/Music

by admin
Rolling Stones at 50. Time is on my side. Absolutely goddamn right.

Know why? Oh, by the way it is not “The Rolling Stones,” it’s “Rolling Stones,” as it was in the beginning, on the first day that co-founder Brian Jones thunk it up in a jumping jack flash when a writer for _Jazz News_ – ‘cause nobody covered rock ‘n’ roll back then, it was only that was taken seriously, and blues and R & B were considered bastardizing of jazz – and the band, which began as Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys, a great name but Rolling Stones beats it, asked what was the name of the band, and Jones glanced – wisely – at a Muddy Waters album and that was that, but over five decades people forgot – more likely got lazy – and assumed the name was like every other plural thing in the English language and added the “The.” “The Rolling Stones.” You even see it on their album covers sometimes. “The Rolling Stones” right there on the cover. But many times it’s “Rolling Stones,” as it should be; and on either type one can often find six “Rolling Stones” on the spine of the album. Look at their record company – it’s not “The Rolling Stones Records” but “Rolling Stones Records.” Got it? Rolling Stones, like Pink Floyd or Pearl Jam. Thesomeone used to call them “The Pink Floyd.” Isn't that fall-on-your
ass laughable? The Pink Floyd. Can you imagine “The Pearl Jam” or “Metallica”?

Time is on their side. Rolling Stones are 50 years old. No, 50 years is what? Years don’t matter in rock ‘n’ roll, especially for Stones, the greatest non-progressive rock band that ever existed. They make you time stop, they keep you young forever – this is a good thing – because before rock ‘n’ roll, people slowed down at 30 and had nothing to say; they were old at 40 and dead though still breathing at 50. Rock ‘n’ roll does not exist in time. It’s always the same time, so there is no sense in marking this anniversary… especially since they’ve only released a single album of new material in the last 15 years. Rolling Stones are not 50, they are the same they were in 1962; they are timeless because they’re so simple. They began playing covers and then writing imitations of American country blues, R & B (when it was R & B), country, and rock ‘n’ roll because that is the music that Mick and Keith and Brian loved, and Charlie loved jazz – which Americans also invented – and Bill went along for the gig. And to this day, no single fucking thing has changed. They have not grown or “progressed” in the least. They were never as good as the Beatles, Kinks or Who terms of creativity or musicianship; they are still playing covers and writing imitations of American country blues, R & B, country, and rock ‘n’ roll. Discovered and directed by Andrew Loog Oldham when he was 19 – younger than the band! – read his fascinating books, Stoned and 2Stoned, all about Swinging London and youth culture and Rolling Stones. So what that Jagger couldn’t sing and they often hit bum notes? What was great about Stones was their panache and the astonishing growth Jagger and Richards made as songwriters. In 1963 they were recording with no thought of writing songs; Oldham pushed Jagger/Richards together and by 1965 they were changing the world – “The Last Time,” “Get Off My Cloud,” “Satisfaction.” These songs are timeless. Charlie keeps time perfectly, so perhaps he’s the one counting. But it doesn’t matter.

Speaking of timeless, they recorded an awful lot of songs about time. Not the first, but the most notable was the scathing cover of Jerry Ragavoy’s “Time is On My Side,” slowed down and tarted up, the version being the difficult to find guitar-dominated one – most folks are only familiar with the one featuring the church organ – this was the first time they really got global attention, with that bluesy picked guitar rubbing your face in it and that smartass little fucker out front yodeling the words. Before that was the raucous cover of the Womacks’ “It’s All Over Now,” and then Mick and Keith’s “Good Times, Bad Times,
“Last Time,” the unjustly overlooked “Out of Time,” and then “Lo!
Long While,” “2000 Light Years From Home,” “100 Years Ago,” the
covers of Otis Redding’s “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long,” and S.
Cooke’s “Good Times.” And of course “Goodbye Ruby Tuesday ‘
Could Ever Hang a Name on You?’ They’ve covered the time thi
it don’t matter now. They are as they were the day when childho
friends then separated for a dozen years little boy blue Michael J
London School of Economics student with a bunch of precious si
away for in the mail American blues records tucked under his arm
bumped into Keith Richards art school student on the train platfo
and someone said, “Eh, what you been up to?”

“Well… this.”

Been up to it ever since. But don’t count years, days, numbers. D
matter. They’ve been doing the same thing ever since that day, so
are that day, this is that day. When they began, the single was still
métier of rock ‘n’ roll, even though the Beatles were already sho
the importance of the album, but the single has always been Roll
Stones’ modus operandi. The single, the tiniest of records, solid 1
and a nuclear bomb contained in the smallest of packages, a cou
inches of vinyl in a glossy paper sleeve, one song per side, the A-
the chart-topper, the mind-expander, the bomb that changed yo
the punch in the face to society, anyone could afford to buy it, my
sister had boxes full of them; the B-side often some throwaway b
occasionally a gem in itself. Stones singles, killers, hot rocks, dia
cutting against the grain – “Come On,” “I Wanna Be Your Man,” “
Fade Away,” “It’s All Over Now,” “Little Red Rooster,” “The Last T
Satisfaction,” “Gerroff Me Fuckin’ Cloud,” “19th Nervous Break
“Paint It, Black,” “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in
Shadow?” (standing in your mother’s dress) “Let’s Spend The Ni
Together,” “We Love You,” “Jumping Jack Flash,” “Honky Ton
Women,” “Brown Sugar,” “Tumbling Dice” – statements of arrog;
and flash, lurid fornication and impudence, brag and sneer, grea
and pimples, heroin and heroines but no heroes. Get it in all its |
the collections Hot Rocks or Singles: The London Years, forget the
albums, they’ve only ever made one great album, Rolling Stones
off Main Street.
Single or album track, throughout them all there is a single constant – Keith Richards’ riffs. Beyond musical, there is threat in those riffs, menace in “The Last Time,” sex in “Satisfaction,” fear in “Gimme Shelter,” exultation in “Jumping Jack Flash,” riot and revolution in the Euro police siren wail of “Street Fighting Man,” the mind-bending rhythm shifts in the live version of “Midnight Rambler.” That’s what hooks people deep and forever – the threat in those riffs, all coming from Keith’s ripping, crunchy, shreddy, off-rhythm rhythm Telecaster (go ahead, just try to play the opening riff of “Tumbling Dice” exactly like him – no one can match that rhythm). Keith is the band, no, Keith and Charlie are the band. Take them away and you do not have I Stones. Even Terence Trent Darby stood in for Mick one night and was fabulous. I don’t give a winkle for Brian, Bill, Mick; the band is Keith and Charlie. There is the battle between Mick’s predilection for pop and dance and keeping the rhythm section under control and under volume, and Keith’s pure “I don’t give a fuck” rock ‘n’ roll sensibilities. They’ve stayed together but Keith’s solo albums were the best Stones albums of the last part of their career. I recorded some demos at Studio 900 on Broadway, where Keef and Steve Jordan would demo the songs that ended up on Talk is Cheap and Main Offender. Keef had been there. The air reeked of riffs. I cut my finger on a riff. My drummer got motion sickness from a riff. Saw Keef and the X-Pensive Winos at the Beacon Gotham City February 23 ’93, their next to last show ever.
opened with “Reelin’ and Rockin’” and I watched it with Joe Strummer beside me. Heaven.

Greasy hair, menacing riffs, storming singles and those mismatched clothes. That was rock ‘n’ roll British ‘60s style, the best. They were the first band to not wear matching outfits – the Beatles had their and so did Stones – if only for a while – and the Kinks had their velvet and lace, it was the Who that was the first band to never have ever worn matching clothes – but it was Stones that were the first established band to dispense with trying to look like they were a organism. I’ll always remember being a little boy and discoverin brother-in-law’s Big Hits (High Tides and Green Grass) collection, striking photographs of those horribly ugly guys in horrible clothes; he played me “Get Off My Cloud” and I made him play it a dozen more times. Suddenly those guys are beautiful. It’s a masterpiece, one classic 15 singles released in the 15 months of the great rock period from the summer of 1964 to the autumn of 1965 (I’m writing a book about this period; hands off the topic is mine). It comes in like a panzer attack and never lets up; listen to how Keith and Charlie match each other perfectly from start to finish. There is no better matching of two men playing together in the history of smash ‘n’ roll. It’s pure nastiness in the great Stones nastiness period – “Heart of Stone,” “Mother’s Little Helper,” “Play With Fire,” “19th Nervous Breakdown,” “Under My Thumb” … but not really. They were just being upstarts. Mick was actually mocking someone suffering from mental illness, he was talking about himself, he’s long suffered from depression, and Stones were actually nice middle class boys who were trying to be working class – whereas the Beatles were working class boys who would only be accepted if they pretended to be middle class. They did what Oldham told them to do, and played at being bad, but it was still Oldham was brilliant, but didn’t have to present them as anti-Beatles. It’s not about competition. As my Theorem of Expanding Economic Fandom proves, if there is a great rock ‘n’ roll band and kids buy their records, and another great rock ‘n’ roll band comes along, the kids are gonna buy two great records by both bands! That was another myth, that Beatles and Stones hated each other. They were buddies and got laid together.

All the Beatles albums were great but the early Stones albums were filled largely with horrid fake R & B songs, icky pop, rejects from sessions. The album covers were great – early punk sneering, no Rolling Stones name, just the brilliant color photos. Finally, After...
was half good, *Between the Buttons* (U.K. version) was all good; *Beggar’s Banquet, Let It Bleed* is overrated but still, it contains “Gimme Shelter,” one of the greatest songs ever written; *Sticky Fingers*, the underrated *Black and Blue, Some Girls*, the sadly overlooked summertime fun of *Emotional Rescue, Voodoo Lounge, Bridges to Babylon* are all good even great, but they’re not albums – they’re collections of songs. *Exile* was a true album and it’s a masterpiece which some to this still don’t comprehend.

*Exile* is a masterpiece because it’s a double album. Double albums allow artists to stretch out, play music for themselves instead of for the charts. Everybody’s best albums are the doubles – *Blonde on Blonde, The White Album, The White Beatles, The Who’s Deaf Dumb and Blind Kid with Four Personalities, Clash Calling and Clashinista!, Led Graffiti, Stones on Main Street*. Because it was recorded in Keith’s basement while Mick was chasing Nicaraguan pussy, Keith had complete control before he succumbed to heroin for a decade and Mick never knew what hit him and made sure it never happened again. Listen to it – notice that Keith sings beneath Mick on every track? That’s why it’s so good. And in 1972, no one cared about the charts so the songs were real.

The Double Albums are dead (another book I’m writing; hands off!) and Rock is dead (yet another book on the way) so the big thing: Rolling Stones is *we shall not see their like ever again*. That is the only significant thing about 50 years anniversary. As Rolling Stones are Who, Dylan and Bruce age, with no one coming after them, an epoch is dying. There have been good bands since – Counting Crows, Pearl Jam, Green Day, Metallica, Public Welfare – but really, it’s dead. Pete Townshend said it in 1979, “I’m sure rock ‘n’ roll will prove to have been a fascinating era.” There he was, putting a finite end to it. Rock and roll will go on forever – Bullshit!

The real hard-nosed stuff was done by the mid-70s and Woody left Faces to join Rolling Stones. I like Woody but so much of the character of his Faces guitar playing was subverted when he joined… They still pumping out good solid rock ‘n’ roll but the Greatest Rock ‘n’ Roll Band in the World as they were now billed? No. One could only think that if you don’t listen seriously to any other band. Compare Stones’ 1971 *Sticky Fingers* to the Who’s 1971 *Who’s next*. The Who blow them away. Even Keith doesn’t think so, he said it best, “World’s greatest rock ‘n’ roll band? No. On some nights, maybe, but no, we’re not Keith, always honest, always from the heart. He cares nothing for anything but playing guitar, pumping out riffs. No ego whatsoever.
Arrested in Toronto in 1977 for possession of brown sugar, Keith: “Why didn’t they arrest someone important, like a mailman?”

Super Bowl 2006, Stones still managed to get censored twice in fifteen songs – fantastic! Still doing their jobs! And my Vietnamese sister asked, “Is this the band of the magazine about music? I’m confused!” Apart from that, all she knows about rock ‘n’ roll is: “The guy with the round glasses that married the Asian girl.” But for me it was over months later with the *Shine a Light* film recorded at the Beacon and they changed the words to “Some Girls” – no more “Black girls just wanna get fucked all night.” They’re worried about what people think now? Over.

I live in Viet Nam and believe it or not, Rolling Stones are a great soundtrack for VN. I guess it’s the Delta thing… About a hundred singles, all the same, copying American music, great rhythmic riff stuff. Fantastic singles band, which is what they wanted to be and the essence of rock ‘n’ roll. They’ve never strayed from that. Sometimes they really got to you – “Gimme Shelter,” “Sympathy for the Devil,” “Street Fighting Man,” “Paint It Comma Black” but it was really about what it did to your gut, not your mind. They’re not 50 years old, they just been doing it for 50 years, and we’re better for it. Thanks.

About the author:

*Eric Schafer* is a writer from New York who has spent most of the last decade in Viet Nam, writing books and advertising copy. *He is the author of* the short story collection *The Wind Took It Away – Stories of Viet Nam* as well as two children’s books and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. *A musician and formerly a music columnist with the Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin, Schafer is an occasional contributor to* Ragazine.CC.

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December 28, 2012  Comments Off on Stones Not Over Yet/Music

Kari Polanyi Levitt / Politics-Interview

*by admin*
Politics in Motion – Karl Polanyi
and my chat with his daughter,
Professor Kari Polanyi Levitt
by James Palombo, Politics Editor

In 1957, Karl Polanyi’s book, *The Great Transformation*, was published by Rinehart and Company. Its focus was on interpreting the changes in the world by referencing the implications of the market-capitalist system that was intricately tied to and dominating the political and social exchanges of the day.

In describing the book, R.M. MacIver writes in the Foreword: “Here is a book that makes most books in its field seem obsolete or outworn. Here, at a crucial hour, is a fresh comprehension of the form and meaning of human affairs. We stand at a new vantage point, looking down after the earthquake, on the ruined temples of our cherished gods. We see the weaknesses of the existing foundations – perhaps we can learn how, and where, to rebuild the institutional fabric so that it may better withstand the shocks of change. So the message of the book is not only for the economist, though a powerful message for him; not only for the sociologist, though it conveys to him a deepened sense of what society means; not only for the political scientist, though it will help him to restate old issues...
to evaluate old doctrines – it is for every intelligent man who can advance beyond his present stage of social education, for every man who cares to know the society in which he lives, the crisis it has passed through, and the crises that are now upon us.”

The masterwork received its due consideration when released as it referenced, among others: regulated and unregulated market concerns; labor issues; the struggles between economic and social man; war; and importantly, the primacy of society. (This “primacy” was an important component as it presented an economic analysis in a way different from Karl Marx, especially in that it presented a view more in terms of societal evolution than economic revolution.) In short, it was most complete and informative in its nature, especially given the fact that the world, particularly the Western world and particularly given the post WWII state of affairs, was indeed in ‘transformation.’

“There is a crying need for creative thinking and new initiatives to protect the gains of development from devastation by financial hurricanes fed by institutional investors who freely move funds in and out of countries at the tap of a keyboard with no responsibility for the impact of their operations on host countries.”

From *Reclaiming The Right To Development* by Prof Kari Levitt, [www.ianrandlepublishers.com](http://www.ianrandlepublishers.com) 2005

Now fast forward to today, with the issues of the market, labor, social welfare, war, etc. on the table and the nature of ‘globalization’ be what it is. For anyone involved with political, economic and social issues, at either micro, mid and macro levels, it would make sens
think that Karl Polanyi’s work would be widely referenced in terms of framing and discussing contemporary issues. As I can attest to, it “a must” for these purposes. (Granted, the world appears to be moving away from Western frames of thought, i.e., “transforming” in a more Easterly direction than in Polanyi’s time. And the effects of the Technological Revolution, although similar to those of the Industrial Revolution, may be a bit different. But it is hard to argue that the elements for consideration as well as the manner in which they are framed in Polanyi’s work are not as important now as they were.)

Yet, as I continued to read various compelling and significant treatises on the difficult problems of the day, in particular, Michael Moran’s *The Reckoning* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Thomas Byrne Edsall’s *The Age of Austerity* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012) and Nobel Prize Winner Michael Spence’s *The Next Convergence* (Random House, 2011) I noticed a strange lack of note to Mr. Polanyi’s work. **

Of course, having been significantly impacted by this work, particularly in my travels to different parts of the world and my writings tied to what I experience, this happenstance made me want to inquire why this was so. Could it be that these individuals, even at their expert levels, were not versed in his work? This of course seemed hardly likely, especially in that they noted, in similar fashion, many of the same concerns that Polanyi raised in terms of the transformation (globalization) that was happening. Could it be that they were aware of his work but refuted his analysis? This might be the case, but this would have certainly warranted some comparative mention.

Or could it be that, like with others (most notably Karl Marx), Polanyi was seen as somehow anti-American, someone implying that rather than the advanced democracy that many U.S. experts tend to rely on is rather an advanced capitalist system, one that by the consequence of its own devices actually infringes upon the ideals of democracy? In other words, even though Polanyi’s analysis might be of value when discussing the American “experiment,” he could certainly be considered an uncomfortable partner, perhaps even implying that authors were tied to some form of “radical” ideological thought. Could this be the case – despite that this omission would seem short-sighted or even misleading?
In sorting through my thoughts on all this, I decided to look further into Polanyi’s personal history, looking for someone who might offer some better insight into what had and hadn’t happened with his work. And it didn’t take long before I discovered that he had a daughter, an important thinker, scholar and author in her own right, Kari Polanyi Levitt, Professor Emeritus of Economics at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I proceeded to contact her and as luck would have it she graciously agreed to have a chat with me about things connected to both her and her father’s work. So what follows is a review of what we discussed.

“We have to take into account the real value of human effort and that is very different from its market value. We have to protect nature and our social and cultural heritage. People do not like to be valued and respected only for the income which they can earn, and to be totally disrespected if they are not able to earn income for whatever reason.”

From Development and Regionalism: Karl Polanyi’s Ideas and the Contemporary World System by Professor Kari Levitt, www.blackrosebooks.net 1990

I started our conversation by asking about one of her own books, Surrender (Carleton Library, 1970), which I had just recently reviewed. This was an interesting starting point for her, in that the book, which described her country then as being in a state of national disintegration and losing its sovereignty primarily due to U.S. influence and ownership of Canadian industry, seemed not particularly relevant in current times. Although it had been re-released in 2002, her reasoning was that many of the thinkers of that day had left or no longer participated in the field, so that most people no longer attached to what she offered. For her, this was coupled with the fact that Canada h
become so infected with the “virus of consumerism” (which included for her the dismantling by the Canadian government of the social protections that had previously existed) that her analysis and points raised therein seemed out-of-date in terms of public policy considerations. In short, she felt that Canada had now become the country she feared it might.

Of course, the nature of this “looking back” led me to inquire about her father’s work, offering my observations and thoughts on the lack of attention to his work. In essence, I had to ask her whether this might have been what happened to her father’s analysis as well.

She expressed that her father’s work had indeed been receiving more and more attention over the past decade, but that most of it was coming from Europe, Asia and the “other” Americas (Latin, Central and South) but not from the United States. She was in fact well aware of his absence in the economic and political dialogue coming from the States. On this point, I asked her what she thought might be the reason for this. She referenced the idea of a certain “backwardness” in the context of U.S. dialogue, an almost “mindless acceptance” of the frames of reference concerning particular economic and political issues and concerns.

She indicated that along with the educational processes that might focus on more broad-based considerations, the U.S. media had its part in this circumstance, as well. In particular, she had her doubts as to what extent media players (save a few like Chris Hedges and Bill Moyers) might actually be examining issues consistent with the notion of helping the public understand the difficult problems being faced by the U.S. – prompting a situation where emotion and speculation continually trump reason.
Her comments, not always easy to hear, nonetheless made sense. Her points been ones of immediate concern for me as well, especially in the context asking how it could be expected that we move beyond the “business as usual” without discussing what “business” might entail.

As we talked more about what is occurring in other parts of the world, with the economic crisis in Europe and the differing growth models being offered in countries like India, China, and Brazil, it was clear from our discussions the U.S. has a lot on plate. In fact, it seemed that – given its fortunate history, and the cultural instincts developed in the context of its history, especially its successes tied to economic/market conditions, and the information that was and wasn’t being disseminated/discussed – it was unclear whether Americans could gather the will to seek out, then internalize, then respond to what may need to be done in terms of stabilizing the country and moving on in the world accordingly.

In the end, I asked Professor Polanyi how she might perceive the world by 2050, and if she had any advice she could provide to the young people headed in that direction. In terms of the former, she made it clear that she has her worries, that even with the different and seemingly more advanced growth models developing, the burgeoning middle classes may become too enamored with the “brand-names and misspent resources” that have now debilitated the Western process. She also noted that as countries develop their resources, more and more regional blocks will most likely develop around those resources (like in South America), which may spell trouble for efforts that speak to “unifying” global concerns. For her, the choices and policies that develop will depend to a significant extent on how much the economic side of the “economic versus social man” balance gets weighted as the world continues to turn.

As to the latter, like with many of us who have toiled with contemporary issues, she expressed hope that future generations:
“slow” the tendencies toward economic growth, that they will “pull back” from consumerism to make market choices and policy more “social/society friendly” with what could be considered “sustainable growth.” This should be the way of the “new world” – as both her and her father would encourage.

I can’t say that I categorically agreed with all that Professor Levitt said. But there was no doubt that her points referencing both her and her father’s work were provocative and resonate in terms of contemporary challenges. Suffice it to say, this was one of my most engaging interviews. Professor Levitt not only provided some great food for thought but, in her easy yet thoughtful manner of speaking, she gave rise to hope for the kind of dialogue that we need more of.

On that note, I trust that she and I will continue our exchanges. And you can read more about her, her writings and her current endeavors at her website – **www.karipolanyilevitt.com**. Of course don’t hesitate to send along your thoughts to me as well. As always, we can’t go wrong by talking with each other, especially in regards to the problems we currently facing.

**In terms of the three books by Moran, Edsall and Spence, I want to stress that although Karl Polanyi’s work was not of note in their work, each of them presented a significant interpretation of the matters at hand, especially in the context of global market considerations. I would also like to emphasize that each one of the authors stressed a sense of urgency – that given our perilous circumstances in the U.S. we need to move away from the “business as usual” syndrome that seems to have stunted both our people and processes. Professor Levitt was also clear on this point, so I wanted to be sure that this concern was underscored – even though most everyone already realizes its importance.**

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**About the interviewer:**

*Jim Palombo is politics editor of Ragazine.CC. He is founder of the Campaign for an Informed Citizenry. He makes homes in Endicott, N.Y., and San Miguel Allende, Mexico. You can read more about him on “About Us” page.*
Klaus Gerken / Poet-Interview

by admin

The following interview began as a quick question on Facebook and developed into an e-mail dialog.

Hi, Klaus,

How did you happen to start the (Ygdrasil) Journal?

K.G.) Thank you for your interest. From the Facebook site:

“The genesis of Ygdrasil is Clayton Eshleman’s 60/70s magazine Caterpillar. I experimented with proto version in the 70s and 80s. It never went anywhere. The on-line version came into being after my explosive years a moderator of several on-line Poetry Networks between 1990 and 1993. After they were shut down because of their controversey content, Paul Lauda, myself, Evan Light and Igal Koshevoy (later Pedro Sena – son of Jorge Sena – national Poet of Portugal joined) decided to create our own network (by 1993 carried through the BBS system by more than 23 countries world-wide). In the spring of 1993 I created Ygdr
and Igal put us on the internet one year later, and the rest is history they say.

Over the years we have had many important writers and Poets associated with the magazine (Martin Zurla – director of the Rand Theatre in New York; Michael Collings – Dean of Literature at Pepperdine University; Oswald LeWinter – Poet, whom T.S. Eliot called the greatest Poet of 20th Century; Mois Benarroch – one of the finest Israeli poets and editor of our Spanish issues; Jack R. Wesdorp – one of the finest American poets in the tradition of Ezra Pound and John Berryman, and many more in the background – Clayton Eshleman, Maria Jacketti, Jorge Etchevarry and of course not to down play the importance of Heather Ferguson who has been an inspiration ever since I met her in 2003 and who introduce me to the Ottawa literary scene and who has edited several Ottawa issues).

While I may be the publisher and editor, none of this I could have been done alone. Ygdrasil is International in scope, and delights in helping emerging poets find a voice, and of course also showcasing more established poets. We have published Poetry, Plays, Short Stories, essays, and even one or two novels. Since 2000, Ygdrasil has been archived monthly by the Library Archives Canada – indeed, it is not just the magazine that is archived but the whole site. Which means any books published in the Book Rack are also archived, along with any photographs and Art work the site features. I hope this provides a bit more information and highlights the dedication of the people and writers who support this project.

Q) Klaus, what was the controversial content that got your program shut down?

A) The use of the F word mostly. And the occasional poem about sex. A few political poems also got them going. When I took over the conference, only quality, not censorship was on my mind.

Q) May we turn this into an interview for Ragazine?

A) If you like.

There also is this interview which gives a bit more detail. If you have specific questions, just ask. I’ll see if I can answer them for you.

Q) I read through the interview in *artvilla*... what is it that you unlearn from Pound, and why, then, would you send students to him to ‘learn’? And then, would you have them unlearn, too?

A) I had to unlearn first being intimidated by him, then to stop imitating him, then to start learning from him. Pound is somewhat like Sgt Pepper, first you are in awe, then you try to emulate and then, once you distance yourself you can get behind the music and really understand what is happening. Pound had that very same effect for me. You have to get outside the woods to see the forest.

Q) Would you say you had to unlearn Dylan, Ochs, Cohen, in somewhat the same way?

A) No, they spoke to me on a different level. I wasn’t out to become a singer / songwriter, I needed to be a poet. I could listen to Dylan and revel in his magical imagery; I needed to understand Pound – it was intrinsic in finding my own voice. While Dylan, Ochs, etc., may have opened my mind, I studied Pound and Eliot on a much higher level. Cohen, of course, was a much different experience since I first read a poet. And yes, he did infiltrate my psyche in all the wrong ways. I caught up in his aura, as I suppose everyone was in those days. But influenced my own songs, not my poetry. I could live with that. I could live with Pound’s voice dictating my poetry though, so I had to shake him off to eventually be able to learn from him.

Q) What do you think is new in the literary styles and thought being expressed today in poetry and song? art?

A) I am really not interested in “literary styles” as I evaluate each work for itself. I have seen, and still see, too much bad poetry put forward as new style and that. It means nothing.

Q) Who or what should younger writers be taking into account when they sit down to write? Are there big poems that have yet to be written?

A) Be true to themselves. I can have no better advice than to quote A
Gide: “Do not do what someone else could do as well as you. Do not, do not write what someone else could say, could write as well as you for nothing in yourself but what you feel exists nowhere else. And, o yourself create, impatiently or patiently, the most irreplaceable of beings.”

As to “big poems” yet to be written? Of course there are. And there will be. Whether mainstream publishers will be interest is another matter. Ygdrasil certainly does not shy away from “big poems”, “Rose Lucinde” by Jack Wesdorp, “Joie De Vivre” by Henry Avignon and “The Organ Grinder” by Chris Watts, being just a few recent examples. I still consider “The Teachings of Baraka” by Mois Benarroch the first great poem of the 21st century. And of course Jack Wesdorp is known for his epic poems, which have already appeared in Ygdrasil. And in the July issue of Ygdrasil we have just published the first five sections of Michael Annis’ “from psyche, this labi’a’(star)te”, an ongoing project.

Q) x. j. kennedy declined to offer a poem to ragazine.cc because the poetry he found here is not the structured type of “rimed and metrical stuff” he writes. Actually, we publish all kinds of work, tight and loose, so to speak. What’s your take on structure, i.e., rhyme and metre?

A) I have no problem whatsoever with “rimed and metrical stuff” as it meets the criteria of a good poem. Jack Wesdorp only writes in structured rhyme and it brings an added dimension to his poems. It is only because he has the vocabulary to pull it off. Rhyme for the sake of rhyme has no useful purpose. Now, metre can be an endless debate. I find all good “free verse” has an internal “structured metre”, a flow, on breath and accent. Prose broken into lines is not poetry, however pretty it might be.

Q) Where do you think the most vibrant poetry and inventive literature is coming from these days, and why?

A) It comes from everywhere. One just has to be open to it. Too many journals restrict themselves with themes or types. I don’t subscribe to that. I like to be surprised. If someone can come up with something that I have never read or experienced before then I am delighted! And that pertains to poets who submit the same thing over and over again. You progress. I love publishing young writers who have potential. They bring something new to the game. But if they haven’t advanced the next time they submit they will have no place in Ygdrasil. I need to see something happening. The next poem may be a
faltering, but if it's a good faltering I am all the more delighted. The open mic venues, it's everywhere, but, you also need to get through muck to get to the gems, and then you have to recognise them. Even something that pleases might not be worth the effort where the advancement of good poetry is concerned. If I can't perceive the person in the poem, I can't perceive the poem in the person. True originality is exuded, not copied.

Q) Can you tell us a bit about the cats of Parliament Hill?

A) I first discovered the cats in 2001 and began helping Rene Chartrand in 2002. They are a true Canadian Treasure. As far as we can tell, cats were utilized in Parliament until the mid 1950s for rodent control. After they were replaced by chemicals and were fed by various employees, Irene Desormeaux fed them in the area where the colony was established. When Irene died, Rene Chartrand took over and built permanent shelters to house the cats. In 2004 Brian Caines and I put together a volunteer support team to help Rene (now in his 90s). I did weekend and holiday shifts. Rene retired in 2008 and I retired because of a chronic bad back in 2010. The cats are famous all over the world, and thousands of tourists come to see them each year.

Don Nixon has written a book called “The Other Side of the Hill” with a chapter dedicated to the cats. The book is available at Lulu.com. There is even a Facebook page, The Cats of Parliament Hill, dedicated to the cats.

Q) Is there anything you would add to this short interview that may not already have covered?

A) We can leave it at that.

Q) Thank you, Klaus.

A) Thank you!

The following are by Klaus Gerken, including extracts from “A Night With Yoric,” “an Epic series of poems now about 35 thousand lines (and growing), encompassing my own world from birth to death and everything learned between.”
Song:
Wei City
The morning rain settles the light dust
on the road to Wei city

Green is the colour
of the new willows – green
Again I urge you to drink
One more cup of wine with me
For When you leave Yang pass
no old friends will follow.
Wang Wei (c 750)

Trs. Klaus J. Gerken
31 July 2010
***
From A Night With Yoric I_4
from wild oats
and huts
shamans and kings
the bread is broken
and the wine spilled
and a crumbling painting
on a wall miraculously spared
by bombs dropped randomly
there is no chalice
a dish
a loaf of bread
and the hand
pointing to the sky
a definitive gesture
of definitive authority
Michelangelo has God
‘s finger almost touching Adam’s
almost
dark clouds billowing
a conception in a storm
not in peace
Leonardo
has a finger pointing
to the sky
to God?
to the Universe?
to something we can’t comprehend?

is there a key?

a gate?

a path to follow leads us where?

some scrap of parchment?

some sign chiselled in stone?

what authority does this gesture represent?

who’s authority granted / claim?

perhaps Quazimodo knows his madness

past redemption

condemned for claiming honour

by daring to touch beauty

through his ugliness

the crowds like romans

want a show

appease their hunger for the

bloodlust in them

the guillotine

a far far better thing

than old women knitting

keeping score

this is society in stability

always complain about the violence

news

as long as it’s them

not us

it’s a business

else control the mob

providing entertainment

and sell stuff by the side

make some cash

fleece the poor

the rich are never touched

but when they are

they lose nothing

or do they?

I doubt the rich

get threatened of over a 38 dollar phone bill

payment late…even though the company

makes money on the late charges…


there is them

and there is us
so it stands
but maybe not
the mountain may not crumble
but sure a lot of avalanches
keep the fleece at bay
Right Apollo?
Where are Hera, Zeuz and Artemis today?
untouchable on their mountain
or untouchable in our minds?

***

From A Night With Yoric IV_1
4 A.M, Thoughts…(after being up all night)

Nothing’s real, it’s all made up,
We are just the rim around a coffee cup.
I know there is an answer,
Just don’t know what it is;
If you help me through the evening,
I’ll betray you with a kiss.
So life is pretty normal,
The spring is mighty hot,
We are proud to slay the dragon
In a dirty parking lot.
When they find us in the morning
It’s too late to see the stars
That formed upon our eyelids
In a carousel of art.

20 March 2012

*

C.P. Cavafis

The City

You say: I’ll explore other lands,
And conquer other seas foretold,
To find a city that confides
A better life for me to hold!
Yet all my struggling here compounds
The destiny that I have found:
My heart (so like a watchman’s lamp)
Surrounds itself with this grave’s damp.
How long, I ask, with subdued pride
Must my old ghost herein reside?
I look around, as far as I can see,
Surveying life’s insufferability:
The structure of my life’s relay
Is darkness, mildew, and decay,
Where I have wasted many years
Walking into empty tears.

But don’t believe it: you’ll not go
To other lands, or seas you know!
The city pulls you to your knees,
And you will struggle in the same
Streets that gather life’s disease.
Greeting neighbours by their name
And waking each and every morn
In the same structures you were born.
Instead of leaving you’ll return
Without a shred of hope to burn,
To build that boat you’ve striven for
To carry you away once more.
You are interned, is there no hope?
You always did the best to cope –
And through a window, closed too soon,
The world is mastered from your room.

Translation: 23/05/86 by Klaus J. Gerken

* * *

Fame

In 1971 a critic said to me
If you die now
I can make you the greatest poet
Who ever lived

I said I have
Music: Beach Boys vs. Beatles

by moniquegg

Beach Boys vs. Beatles:
A Facebook Discussion and Retrospective

By Jeff Katz
Music Editor

My Facebook proposition was simple: "Now that you’ve all had months to hear SMiLE in all its official glory (as opposed to boot and not counting Brian’s solo version), where does it rank? Rem
the chronology – *Rubber Soul* begat *Pet Sounds*. *Revolver* followed three months later. *SMiLE* was supposed to be released in Jan 1967; *Pepper* was released in June of ’67. *SMiLE* or *Pepper?* Could be a toss up.

I know I write too much about The Beatles, but they are still entirely relevant. If *Rolling Stone* can put the Fabs on the cover every year or so then your humble magazine music editor (that’s me) can scribble away. And the actual release towards the end of 2011 of *SMiLE*, The Beach Boys great missing piece, is certainly *au courant*.

Sometimes when I posit the terms for a Facebook discussion I require specific opinions. In this instance I did, but got so much more than I bargained for. A brilliant, enlightening panel discussion ensued (if I do say so myself), with over 60 entries. Here were the players:

- **Jeff Edstrom** – consultant from Chicago who I’ve never met but an interesting guy
- **Roger Peltzman** – fellow Binghamton alum and wonderful pianist (find him on YouTube)
- **Ray St. Denis** – fellow Binghamton alum and current chef instructor
- **Kelley Duncan** – another Bingo alum and former and current Oklahoman
- **Eric Scoles** – yes, another Binghamton connection and all around insightful dude
- **Eric Schafer** – Viet Nam by way of Binghamton, a musician with strong opinions
- **Joey Katz** – youngest son and musical maven
- **Michael Lee Smith** – Binghamton alum

Edstrom set the table with a great idea – let’s listen to them all in order of release! An excellent thought considering hearing how each work was a reaction to another. Joey began doing so, as did Jeff. While we waited for everyone to finish (if they chose this time consuming path), Ray made his position clear: “I have to go with *Pepper* for overall songwriting, production quality, breadth of concept, etc. An instant Cultural Signpost. I have to face it, the original *SMiLE* is just too damn weird, in parts too opaque, ‘in-jokey’ or not serious enough to be anything but a stoned giggle. ‘She’s Going Bald’ or ‘Mrs. O’Leary’s Cow?’ Amateurish if held up to ‘Rita’ or ‘Good Morning.’”

Though I countered with the idea that *Pepper* was a major event due to the missing *SMiLE*, which never was issued (I was later told on this I was dead wrong), I said, and truly believe, that except for
Day in the Life,” which stands above all other Beatles tunes, there’s no song on *Pepper* better than the best of *SmiLE*. That best includes “Cabinissence,” “Surf’s Up,” “Heroes and Villains,” “Wonderful” of course, “Surf’s Up.”

But Ray hit on something quite important. The always safe, seemingly innocent Beach Boys were really fucking strange as the 1960’s progressed. There’s Brian Wilson, already jumping off Sanity Point but the other guys were into meditation, drugs, drink and messed up. Unlike the former Moptops, they didn’t, as a group, have the skill to channel their growing quirks into consistently great work.

Speaking of skill, Rog made a connection between Wilson’s half-fulfilled *Smile* snippets and Mozart’s *Requiem*. He felt comparing *SMiLE* and *Pepper* was like comparing Edgar Varese to Mahler. I take him at his word. That’s way above my level, a writer who spends his time thinking about The Chocolate Watch Band and old Jerry Lewis records. Didn’t I tell you there’d be enlightenment for all?

I cited an old Lennon line about how *Sgt. Pepper* worked because The Beatles said it worked. There’s much truth to that. The album contains some weak songs that are surrounded by a powerful aura. But, as I pointed out, so does *SMiLE*. I think *Pepper* is better but I definitely listened to *Smile* more in recent months (as did Rog) and that alone makes it a currently larger presence in my mind.

Then Joey chimed in. At 16, Joey is well-versed in music and is a talented musician himself. “*Smile* is not a great album when it comes to listening to individual tracks, as the whole album is one continuous thread of songs. *Sgt. Pepper*, on the other hand, is much more well known for the individual songs, while *SMiLE* is more of a thematic piece.” See, he didn’t fall for John’s insistence that *Pepper* was a “whole.” It’s not. *SMiLE* is and Joey gets that.

Eric Schafer hurled his first comment in from across the Pacific, hailing *Pepper*’s production but slamming its “mainly lousy songs.” The thread took a detour into a debate on Beatle quality, with Peltzman defending the *Pepper* tunes and Ray challenging Eric to list the so-called lousy. Everything after “Lucy” and before “Day” are “clunkers,” he replied, without a quiver of backtracking.

Rog followed with a solid point. “*SMiLE* is a little like Big Star’s *Sister Lovers*. Eccentric and the vision of one man. To a lesser degree *Pepper*...
You know, he’s dead on and creating that triple-headed hydra was a magical feat. Most listeners hail Brian Wilson’s aborted efforts as mystical genius, while at the same time slamming McCartney’s poorly executed noodlings. No one adds Alex Chilton into the mix. Yet, the three records Roger attaches do have a similar feel, totally quirky and odd but no one I’ve ever read has put those three works together. Well done sir!

Ray wasn’t going to let Eric slip away; he continued jousting over what makes a Beatle standard. Schafer likes *A Hard Day’s Night*, John a George’s *Rubber Soul* songs, McCartney’s *Revolver* entries and a few others. Once again, Rog blasted one out of the park, lumping *Pepper*, *Exile*, and *OK Computer* as wholes that are greater than their part. I have yet to understand that, “*Exile* is the best Stones album,” or that, “*OK Computer* is the best album ever,” but they both are excellent and have singular moods.

Eric scored with a quote by Hendrix that *Pepper* is “the most non-physical album ever made.” Though it was actually Pete Townshend who said it (a fact dug out by Detective Raymond St. Denis), it’s a statement marking the point where rock became less about dancing and more about thinking, like the move in jazz from Big Band to the latter a thinking man’s exercise.

Michael, in his only entry, brought us back to the original subject in an interesting and truthful, way. “I must be the only person who doesn’t like the Beach Boys. Zzzzz.” In side, even the biggest Beach Boys fans know there’s much validity to that. The beatification of Wilson and the elevation of The Beach Boys to artistic equals of the best of their era is a meme that often completely wipes out, like the hero of a surf song. Ray agreed, reflecting on when he thought they were squaresville, until he heard *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* bootlegs, as well as specific tracks sure to change a naysayers mind.

“The problem with most Beach Boys songs,” I wrote, “is that they lyrically stunted. No sophistication at all, though the surf/car stuff has a feel all its own. What makes them great are the tunes, the harmonies and Brian’s voice. As Ray says, check out “Please Let Me Wonder.” It’s an all time great song. I was surprised to find, as I got older, that there were a substantial amount of quality album tracks outside the hits of shit too. Sort of like The Stones pre-*Beggars Banquet*.” And after:
After a few meanderings, Jeff Edstrom reappeared. See, he was the only one who took his own advice and sat and listened! His thoughts:

“I started to listen to the recordings in order. I have not purchased SMiLE. I don’t know which one is the representative album. I went from Rubber Soul to Pet Sounds to Revolver to “Strawberry Fields” single that stopped Brian Wilson in his tracks. I found myself focusing on the emotions of the songs rather than the engineering and the structure of the songs. What was interesting is that Rubber Soul and Sounds are parallel albums of a sort. There’s a struggle with the theme of love that is going wrong and the response that you have to it. It gave me fresh ears to listen to it. Brian Wilson is caught up in the depressive agony of losing someone, while the Beatles are taking a slightly bitter angry view at it. With Revolver, the Beatles are starting to come out and taking more mature view of relationships. The relationships band members probably contributed to the albums. The Beatles stopped touring and went to the studio and worked toward the albums together as a group, whereas Brian Wilson stayed at home while the rest of the Beach Boys toured. There’s an insularity of the Beach Boys that you don’t find in the Beatles. Brian Wilson sitting alone in his room trying to deal with the roller coaster of emotions while the Beatles are seemingly talking with each other, each with their own view but moving in the same direction.”

For me, Jeff’s take on the two views of love and relationships was a brand new point of view. I thought it was an excellent analysis and the group’s views of love as refracted through the prism of group dynamics made me think deeper about the albums in question.

Then Jeff had to go and bring up Murry Wilson, Brian, Carl and Dennis’ drunk, abusive piece of shit father. Ray directed us to a YouTube clip of a shitfaced Papa Wilson instructing the band on harmonies and such during a session for “Help Me Rhonda.” It’s painfully uncomfortable, the aural equivalent of waking by as a parent smacks their kid for grabby in the candy aisle.

“What a cock!” I wrote. “I hate listening or reading about that guy admitted he too couldn’t get through the tape. Horrible stuff.

As we plugged along, jumping from topic to topic, Jeff E. gave us well-deserved pat on the back. “One of the best threads I’ve seen in a
long time.” Now I have to say that Jeff gets into some heated political arguments with the same people he fits in with nicely when it comes to music. Nothing explodes political strife better than a discussion of the relative merits of favorite bands and songs. Ah, the power of music to bridge divides!

The talk returned to SMiLE and how, even if it had been released it would have failed to make the sales impact of Pepper, certainly on the heels of Pet Sounds’ disappointing reception in the States. Though noted that the inclusion of “Good Vibrations” would...well, his words are best left unparsed:

“I agree, Jeff, that SMiLE would certainly have been even less successful than Pet Sounds, and that Pepper would have always captured the zeitgeist. However, with “Good Vibrations” on SMiLE was originally considered, you would have an album... that sold though surely would have confounded people even more than those who bought PS for “Sloop John B”. If Pepper is the English 3 Ring Circus of 67, safe and good vibes-y, SMiLE is an American sideshow; stranger, with pronounced gothic touches. Do You Like Worms? With A Little Help From My Friends! Who ran the I-ron Horse? Would you be free to take some tea with me?”

Kelley’s first salvo brought us to a different level altogether. He’s older than the rest of us 1960’s wannabees who look back as adults to a time when we were in kindergarten. Duncan on the other hand was there, a teenager in 1967. His ability to look at it in hindsight, when he existed in present-sight, is admittedly clouded. We now travelled down a distinctly different road.

The good old days, which now include the 1980’s, had Eric Schafer bemoaning the loss of cultural connectivity, which he saw as disappearing with the transition from album art and ephemera to MP3 and ethereal. Kelley wistfully concurred, citing his first album purchase, The Beach Boys’ Shutdown Vol. II, and his own hero Craig Breedlove, subject of “Spirit of America.” (Duncan hates that tune; I quietly disagree).

Our other Eric S., Mr. Scoles, followed with some of the best writing on any topic I’ve read recently. “As my wife is fond of reminding me, change happens whether we want it to or not. If you’d like the artifacts and think you can get people into them, great but lamenting their passing is really only useful as a nostalgia exercise and it says more or
less nothing about art per se.” Schafer rebuffed this trivializing of his big point on social consciousness into a minor quibbling on artifacts, but Scoles continued. I quote him here:

“Maybe, but I’m not sure this has much to do with that. And it’s not simple as disposable versus permanent. Things have appropriate life cycles and we often have a tendency to try to extend things beyond their appropriate life cycles — it can be as much of a problem as rampant disposability. We end up setting up a war of ‘preservers versus ‘progressors.’ People are often quick to cite the persistent artifacts that are used in traditional culture — but they’re not so quick to recognize the disposable artifacts. For every genuinely wonderful chair or wagon or hand-welded trailer hitch, there’s a dozen quick and dirty tools made out of a stick and a pocket knife. For every opus with detailed production notes, there’s a thousand people showing other people how to play a tune without ever writing down lyrics or notes and likely changing it in the process.

As for what’s going to happen to the youth, only they can tell us that. Really, that way of putting it — a shift to disposable culture — has more or less intact since the early 60s and it goes back probably hundreds of years if you shift your terminology a little. Is it bad? Probably; it’s certainly not how we would like to see things done we’re going to be living sustainably on the planet. But it’s a rung we want a more socially connected culture, we’ve got to make or I just don’t see the promotion of arbitrary artifacts (e.g., something that denies the inherent disposability of digital files) as a useful step. Like saying ‘You know the critical property of this thing we made for you? That it’s based on data that has no physical reality to it? We can’t use it to actually make anything because that discourages social interaction in some way we’re not eager to define.’

“All that aside and in addition: if we’re relying on the value of the whole artifact as a signal for the quality of the musical component we’re missing out, big time. The beautiful artifact can have a ven: unhealthy core. Actors give great performances in abhorrent plays and films; musicians play beautifully on meaningless pieces; producers and directors produce magnificent, beautiful, enduring works of cinema that encourage us all to behave in ways that are destructive to society.”

That’s brilliant right? The thread had hit an insightful philosophical endpoint.
I tread a fine line, I know. “My friends are scintillating.” Can that come across? I hope it does. Maybe it’s like watching someone else’s slide show and wishing you were far away, as they enthusiastically babble on. What Facebook has granted us is another look at people once knew and now know again, former friends who were and remain so smart, so witty, so deeply thoughtful.

“We drift apart for a/Little bit of a spell/One night I get a call/And I know that you’re well.” Carl Wilson sang that on “Friends.” (You thought I’d quote “With a Little Help from My Friends?” Too easy.) Take this thread as a series of late night calls, from a group of people who have drifted apart over the decades but, through the continued power of The Beatles and The Beach Boys, still find quite a bit to talk about.
BOBs GALORE

by Mark Levy

As every precocious 8-year-old undoubtedly knows, a palindrome is a word or sentence that reads the same forward as it does backward. Among the many palindromes for nouns, like Mom and Dad, lurk some proper names: Anna, Eve, Hannah, and Otto, for example. The one I’d like to discuss now is Bob. You know, we’ve had five Jameses, four Williams, and even a Barack, but there has never been a U.S. president named Bob. Now Scotland had King Robert the Bruce in the early 14th century, about the time the fork was invented, but that’s an essay for another time.

Jon Bois, the Kentucky sports writer who spells his name B O I S recently made an interesting observation. It appeared on SB – as “sports blog” Nation.com: “Across the histories of Major League Baseball,” he wrote, “the NFL, the NBA, the NHL, and NCAA football and basketball, there have been a total of 1,884 athletes who primarily went by the name Bob. Not Robert, or Bobby, but Bob.” What Jon found puzzling is that today there are precious few professional figures named Bob. But the name, Bob, comes up in many other places. LakeBob, for instance, is located just outside of Baker City, Oregon. In Africa, an entire country is called Zimbabwe, get it?

We don’t have Linda-heads or Donald-heads, do we? But we sure have a huge variety of spring-necked bobble heads. Socks named after Bob are called bobby socks. And some hair pins are known as bobby pins. The Bob haircut comes and goes as a popular hairstyle for women. We also have the plumb bob, shish-ka-bob, the fishing bobber, apple bobbing, a carnivorous bobcat, a bobsled, a bobtail, and a bobstay for holding a ship’s bowsprit down – something you might wish to keep in mind if you chance upon one of those untamable bowsprits. We have a sewing machine bobbin, of course, instructions to football players and boxers to bob and weave, the Bobsey Twins series of books, and the North American bobolink blackbird, or Dolichonyx oryzivorus, for you ornithologists.

Bob and wheel is a type of alternative music rhyming pattern not different from what you might see in a book of Ogden Nash poer back to Bobs. Bob’s gym, Bob’s Famous Roller Coaster in Chicago...
Riverview Park, Bob’s discount furniture, Bob’s skateboarding tri-website, and the chain of Bob’s stores that sell clothing and footwear – not necessarily made by Bobs – are just a few establishments that use Bob as a business name. Have you been in a Bob’s Steak & Chop House somewhere in the western states or in Australia, or the K-Bob Steakhouse in Albuquerque, or Billy Bob’s Texas in Ft. Worth, reputed to be the world’s largest honky-tonk? When you get there, say “howdy” to a Bob for me.

Bob Evans restaurants are not to be confused with Bob’s Big Boy Restaurant, which is a restaurant chain that Bob Wian founded in Southern California in 1936. The oldest remaining Bob’s Big Boy location – and here comes the trivia part of this discussion – is in Burbank, California and is now a historical landmark. As delicious as they sound, Barbecue Bob and the Spareribs serves up not food, but country songs. Hurricane Bob struck the northeast coast in 1991, but I don’t think it made quite the lasting impression the Bobbsey Twins did. Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina and Oral Roberts University in Tulsa have a combined total of about 7,000 enrolled students. Of course, not all students are named Bob.

There are a few Robertas, too. The letters, B-O-B, as you world travelers must already know, form the three-letter ID code for the Bora Bora airport. Billy Bob’s Huntin’ & Fishin’ is a Nintendo Gameboy game probably by now obsolete, or should I say, “bobsolete?” The bobwhite is an attractive, usually brown, ground-dwelling bird with a loud cheery song. It has great value as a destroyer of some 60 different species of weed seeds and 116 species of insects. So thank goodness, I think we can all agree, for the bobwhite.

In England, police are called Bobbies. And, “Bob’s Your Uncle” is British slang meaning “simple as that.” I happen to have an Uncle Bob who chews with his mouth open, but we call him Uncle Bawb, and can tell he doesn’t really fit into many polite discussions, much less this one. This is a shout out to you, Uncle Bawb! See you at Thanksgiving. The BOB Motor Oil Recovery System is a handy gadget you’ll want, along with some towels, when you get around to changing the oil in your car. You turn oil cans upside down and drain them on this device. The BOB in the name stands for “bottom of the barrel.” And after a tough afternoon changing oil, you might want to relax with Bob’s Pickle Pops, made in Dallas, Texas. They’re frozen pickle juice treats that, I understand, taste incredibly and exactly as they sound.
Have you had a Bob’s burger in Washington State or tried Bob brand foods in Sweden? They make gourmet juices and jams. Bob’s Candies are claimed, by the company, at least, to be the world’s finest peppermints. A Beer Named Bob is brewed by the Bitter Creek B Company in Rock Springs, Wyoming. Meanwhile, Bob Moore and Oregon company, Bob’s Red Mill, offer vitamins and natural, whole grain products. In the U.S., there are estimated to be more than 86 people named Bob. The name, Bobby, belongs to another 362,000; there are 20,000 Robs. If you look up Robert, you’ll find 4,941,502. That’s more like it. Almost five million of ‘em. In certain parts of country, you can’t throw a pickle pop without hitting a Bob.

There seem to be a lot of Bobs in the music industry: Bob Dylan, Marley, Bob Seger, Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, Bobby McFerrin, Bobby Darin, and Bobby Rydell. I know I’ve left out a few, but you get the idea. Only Bobs can join the exclusive Bob’s Club, whose goal is to create the world’s largest list of famous Bobs. Don’t even think about joining unless you’re one of the five million Bobs. In 2011, neither Bob nor its variants made the top five male names for babies in any state. In nowadays, a boy is more likely to be named Mason or Jacob or Elijah or Liam.

And 25 years ago, in 1987, no Bobs made the top five list of male names, but there were a lot more Michaels and Christophers. Roberto showed up then, but its rank was 156, way below, oh, such popular appellations as Travis and Zachary. The name, Bob, didn’t make the list of the ten oldest people in the world, either. But then again, the oldest people in history were all women. The youngest Bob is, oh wait, another Bobby has just been born while I’m speaking. “Hi Bob!” was a college drinking game, in which TV viewers had to take a drink every time someone said, “Hi, Bob” on the Bob Newhart Show. Legend has it that no one ever completed the game before passing out. And now that I’ve shared so much more than you ever wanted to know about Bobs, feel free to pass out yourself.

About the author: Mark Levy is a Florida-based attorney with the Binghamton-based law firm of Hinman Howard and Kattell. He is a contributing editor to Ragazine.CC of “Feeding the Starving Artist,” and “Casual Observer.” Read more about Levy at “About Us.”
You go into the woods, and what are you thinking will happen? The man is there, everyone’s seen him, and what do you think is going to happen when you walk up to him, offer your hand and say “I’m Lydia”? You’re not a stupid girl, not naïve, though sometimes you act that way. Your parents have warned you, as parents do, but of course you never listen to them. They tell you about that other girl. You can’t remember her name. The one who was raped in the woods years ago. They put her away or something after she walked out of the woods with her legs torn up and bleeding, her hair a mess of twigs and dirt. They said she didn’t talk for weeks after, and they put her on medication. She didn’t come back to school after that. She walked into the woods school, and when she walked out again, she was bleeding between her legs. Dark red blood like the period you haven’t gotten yet, but it wasn’t her period.

All the teachers tell you not to go in there. “Don’t go any farther than the tree,” they say. “Stay where we can see you.” They remind you of the girl, say it could happen to you, that you should be careful. It happened right here—the same place you’re in now. She isn’t re:
though. You don’t even know what she looked like.

And you are eleven years old, your body changing, your mind struggling to catch up to it. You’ve started feeling wet between the legs, started noticing it happening more and more often, and your face warm, flushed. It’s like you have a fever but it only happens when you think about certain things, when you watch Michael Levin run in gym class, when you wake up from dreams with your hand pressed against your stomach, creeping down. So what do you think is going to happen when you go into the woods with the tramp, where he is with his dog in his tent, waiting for the storm? Really, Lydia. This is what your parents were talking about. And the other girls don’t believe you’ll do it. They stand near the tree and giggle, their braces flashing, and they wish they were you. They wish they had the guts to walk through the brush, the dry grass scratching their bare legs, toward the tramp and his tent. “I’m Lydia,” you say, and you hold out your hand.

He doesn’t smell like you think he will. You’re expecting body smells—unwashed hair, sweat, mud, dog. He lives in a tent in the woods. Instead, when you get close to him, you smell cologne, something almost like flowers. Like the lavender sachets your mother keeps in all the dresser drawers. There’s something else too. Leather? And maybe citrus. Lemon. You’re not sure. It’s faint. You breathe in deeply. He looks at you, doesn’t offer his hand. “You shouldn’t be here,” he says. “Your teacher’ll have a fit.”

“Why are you here?” you ask him, putting your hand on your hip, tilting your head a bit. Your mother always says you’re trying to look “sassy” when you do this. “Don’t you have somewhere to go?” And he looks at you. He’s not rolling his eyes, but you feel like he is, like he’s mocking you. “Well?” you say, shifting so that you’re standing straight again, looking at him dead on.

But he doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t say a word. His dog, a big thing, comes up and sniffs your hand, then butts his head against it. You don’t want your hand to smell like dog, but you scratch his ears and he shifts slightly, leans against your leg. “Sweet dog,” you say. Suddenly you’re imagining yourself touching the tramp’s head, your fingers under his cap, tangled in the dark brown hair that peeks out from it. You imagine it’s soft, slightly oily, like it would leave your fingers shiny. You know the tramp wouldn’t let you pet him like you’re petting his dog, but that’s what you want to do. You imagine what the inside of his cap smells like, the damp wool pressed against his head.
Your little brother is three, and his hair smells sweet and a little sweaty all the time, kind of like an animal. You imagine this is what the tramp’s hair smells like.

“He’s been with me for three years now,” the tramp says, and smiles a little, for the first time since you’ve been here.

“What’s his name?” you ask, and the dog grumbles a little, pushes his head against your hand. You scratch harder.

“You give something a name…” the tramp says and shrugs.

“And what?” you ask.

“And it hurts more when you lose it,” he says.

Your name is Lydia. Your parents named you for your aunt, a woman you never met. She was your mother’s sister, and she died of breast cancer when you were two years old. She lived in Spain, and your parents planned to take you to visit her when you were older, but they never got the chance. You wonder about her, imagining her as beautiful and slightly crazy, up all hours in bars and cafes listening to longhaired men playing the guitar. You imagine her as an artist, a painter, a cigarette in her hand and a bottle of wine on the table as she worked on huge canvases, the paint under her fingernails and in her spiky blonde hair. Aunt Lydia wasn’t a painter. Your parents tell you she went to college for art history and that she had loved Goya, but that she never painted. She worked in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, writing artists’ biographies. It doesn’t matter what your parents tell you. You imagine your aunt laughing in a crowded bar, throwing her head back, a man next to her with his arm around her waist. He kisses her shoulder, cups the inside of her thigh in his large palm. You imagine them in bed in the morning, light falling across her bare stomach, his legs and arms and back.

When you asked your parents why they named you after her, this woman you don’t know and now can never know, your mother got tears in her eyes and looked at you like you were insensitive, like you knew you were hurting her and you didn’t care. “She was my sister, Lydia,” she said, “and she died at a very young age. Too young.” You don’t understand why this would make her someone to name your daughter after, it just doesn’t make sense to you, but you nodded like you understood. You stole all of the pictures of your aunt from the
photo albums your parents keep in the oak cabinet in the living room and keep them hidden under your mattress. At night you bring them out, run your fingertips over her face and hair, imagine what it would be like to touch her, who the last person was who held her hand smelled her breath. You never met your aunt, and so you know you don’t love her. You know you can’t love someone you never met, someone you spoke to on the phone only four or five times in your life. What you feel for your Aunt Lydia isn’t love, only sadness—like somehow your life would have changed forever if you had met her and you don’t know why.

And this is what you feel when you’re standing there looking at the tramp, hoping he will touch you on the arm or at least shake your hand. You know if he touches you, you will be changed into something completely different. You don’t know why you feel this—it doesn’t even make sense when you try to think about it—but you feel it in your stomach, in your chest. You’re having a hard time breathing next to him. “I think you should name him,” you say, focusing your attention on the dog, like that’s where it’s been the entire time. “Everything needs a name.”

He smiles at this, and you hope he’ll reach out to you, even to pat on the back like your father does when he isn’t sure what to say to you. If the tramp doesn’t touch you before you have to leave him, you aren’t sure what you’ll do. But he doesn’t touch you. He does smile, a real one this time, and you take this as a good sign. He is warming up to you.

“So what do you think I should name him?” he asks you, gesturing toward the dog. “He seems to like you, by the way.”

“Almost all animals do,” you say, and you feel proud when you say it. “I’m going to be a vet.”

“That’s a good profession,” the tramp says.

You look down at the dog. Its eyes are closed and it makes soft, wet smacking sounds with its mouth. “Name him George,” you say.

“Why George?” the tramp asks, and again you feel like he’s mocking you, like he expects you to say it’s after a cartoon character or something stupid like that.
‘George’ means ‘farmer,’ you say. ‘He looks like a farm dog. I know where names come from.’

And what does your name mean?” the tramp asks, and he’s not smiling anymore. He’s looking at you intently, his head cocked slightly to the side like he’s really listening to you. No one has ever looked at you like that.

“Noble,” you say, and you try to hold his eyes with yours. You m

Well, noble Lydia, you should probably get going. Don’t you thi

You look at your watch, the pink Hello Kitty one your best friend got you for your birthday this year. “Recess isn’t over for another fifteen minutes,” you say. “My teacher won’t look for me until then.”

Why do you want to be here anyway?” the tramp asks you. He is starting to sound impatient, even annoyed. “Shouldn’t you be pl with your friends — jumping rope or chasing boys, or whatever y

But there is, and you think he knows it too, but you can’t say it be

You feel a drop running down your side and rub your t-shirt against it. You’re both standing there looking at each other, and you know you’re suppo say something back to him but you don’t know what to say. You your tongue around inside your mouth, like you are searching fo
words behind your teeth.

“There was a girl,” you say, and then you stop. The tramp looks at you and nods slowly, waiting for you to continue. You clear your throat.

“She went into these woods and something happened to her.”

“What?” The tramp looks nervous. He’s backed away from you even more, and his hands are in his pockets. The dog leans against him almost protectively.

And you aren’t sure what to say. You, Lydia, who walked into this, who brought it up, even, are nervous too now. When your teacher Mrs. Johns says the word “rape,” she says it in hushed tones, and you and your friends never say it. “You know,” you say, and now you’re having a hard time looking at him. “There was a man.”

“He hurt her?” the tramp asks, and you nod. “Did he kill her?”

“No,” you say.

“Oh,” the tramp says. “Okay.”

“It was a long time ago,” you say, and you look at his face again. Staring at you. His eyes are pale green, the color of new leaves, and there are wrinkles in the corners of them. He looks like he could be your dad’s age, maybe a little younger. His face is kind.

“Lydia, you need to leave,” he says gently. “You’ll get us both in trouble if you don’t.”

“I wouldn’t get you in trouble,” you say, but you know this isn’t true. You wouldn’t mean to, you’re not that kind of girl, but he would get in trouble no matter what you said, even if you tried to keep it from happening. You wonder if that other girl meant to get the man in trouble, and you think she probably didn’t. The tramp hasn’t stopped looking at you, and you stare back at him, trying to feel powerful.

“My aunt was named Lydia too,” you say. “She lived in Spain and had tons of boyfriends. Beautiful Spanish men who kissed her neck and told her she was sexy. She had so many men in love with her.”

“Good for her,” he says, coming toward you. “But you have to go
“Have you ever been someone’s boyfriend?” you ask him.

“Yes,” he says, and stops about three feet from you. The dog lies outside the tent.

“I don’t have a boyfriend yet,” you say. Your entire body is damp with sweat. You can feel it on your legs, between them. And the other wetness. You wipe your forehead with your palm.

“No?” the tramp asks, smiling a little. You shake your head. “I’m sure it’ll happen,” he says. “You’ve got time.”

“My dad says he won’t let me have a boyfriend until I’m sixteen,” you say, “but he can’t stop me, really.”

“Sixteen is a good age for boyfriends,” he says.

You’re standing there, Lydia, and all you can think of is his hand on your arm, your shoulder. You imagine him touching your neck, the way you imagine your aunt’s boyfriends touching hers, and you shiver a little. He isn’t even very good looking, but you can smell him and he smells clean.

“I want you to touch me,” you say, and even as you say it you can’t believe you are so brave. Your friends would never believe it either, not even Claire, and you know you won’t tell them. Your voice doesn’t even shake when you say it.

“No,” he says. Just like that. His eyes don’t leave yours, and he doesn’t say anything else.

“I don’t mean in a dirty way,” you say.

“I don’t care how you mean it,” he says. “It’s time to go, Lydia.”

“I’m not leaving,” you say. You sound like a grown woman, cold and controlled. Strong.

“You have to,” he says. “Why are you doing this?”

You don’t know why you’re doing it. You don’t know why your voice is so hard, why your legs have stopped shaking and your belly is warm now, why you feel like you could do anything and get away with
you aren’t going to stop.

“I’m not leaving until you touch me,” you say. “On my neck. And don’t do it, I’ll tell everyone you tried to rape me.” The word sounds horrible coming out of your mouth, like something heavy and dead.

“That’s disgusting,” he says.

“Maybe, but I’ll still do it,” you say.

“Lydia, I’m not touching you,” he says. “You can say whatever you want, but I’m not doing it.”

“Just on the neck? I just want you to put your hand on my neck.” It isn’t a big deal, you think. Just a few seconds is all you want.

“No,” he says. “Get out of here right now.” You don’t move, even though he’s coming toward you angrily, even though he really could hurt you if he wanted to. Your feet are firm on the ground. You’re standing less than a foot apart, and you have to crane your neck into his face. The dog has gotten up from its spot near the tent and is standing next to the tramp with the fur on its back raised. “I mean it,” the tramp says.

And suddenly you hear your friends calling you. It’s faint, but it’s getting louder. The tramp hears it too, and you see the panic on his face. You look at your watch, and see that it’s time to go back inside. Past time. They must be worried. You hope they haven’t told Mrs. Johns on you yet, and you think about what you’ll do to them if they have.


“That’s all you want?” the tramp asks, and you can tell he doesn’t believe you. He thinks there must be a catch.

“Yes,” you say. “That’s all I want.” You tilt your head to the right, offering your neck to him. “Just touch it.” Your body is shaking and the air feels cold on your damp skin. The tramp looks at you face pale and angry. You can tell you are the most disgusting thing he has ever seen, but you smile at him. “Touch it,” you say again. He reaches out a single finger. “With your whole hand,” you say. He for a minute and exhales harshly. His breath smells like spearmint.
“As soon as I do this, you better leave,” the tramp says. “I mean it.”

“I will,” you say softly, trying to sound gentle. “I promise.”

His hand shakes as he reaches it toward you, and then he is touching your neck. So softly your skin can barely feel it, but you feel it with your whole body. His hand is warm. You press against it, make a soft humming sound with your mouth. You can feel your eyes starting to tear. Please, you say silently. Please. And then it’s over. He has pulled away and is walking back toward the tent. “Go,” he says. He does not look at you.

You go. What else is there to do but go? You’ve gotten what you wanted. He has touched you, and while you don’t feel changed now, you know you will. You’re certain you will. You know later, in your room alone, you will feel the change that has taken place in you. Your body will feel different. You will feel it in your chest, in your lungs. Between your legs and on your tiny breasts, in your mouth and throat. When you’re lying in bed you will feel it, this difference in you. You won’t be able to tell anyone when you see them, but they will feel it too. You know this. You are different now, Lydia, and you will feel it. You must.

About the author:

Beth Couture’s work can be found in a number of journals and anthologies, including Gargoyle, Drunken Boat, The Yalobusha Review, The Southeast Review, and Thirty Under Thirty from Starcherone Books. She received her PhD from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2010 and currently teaches composition at Bloomsburg University.
Editor's note: On March 24th, at the Know Theater in Binghamton, a group of poets, writers and kindred spirits came together for a national, multi-lingual session to read and discuss their impressions of life at the beginning of the 21st Century. From about noon Saturday until after ten that evening, dozens of presenters, family, friends and students shared viewpoints, ideas and work, in exchange for the opportunity to be both listened to and heard. This special mid-issue
The following work appeared in the Crossroads program and is published with permission of the organizer (Mario Moroni) and participants. The poem by Diego Trelles Paz appears in another online magazine, and is not available for reprinting. Two original poems you see below were scanned in PDF because of the language format (Hakak’s in Persian and Hassanal’s in Bengali).

POETRY AND FICTION

HASANAL ABDULLAH / BANGLADESH

WITH A LITTLE CASH

If I have a little cash, I will open an art shop
My modernist call
Will raise echo and journey
To corners of places not reached before.
Let a few days pass by
If I have a little cash, I will wash your soft feet with spring water.

If I have some money, I will buy the giant sky –
Wandering all day on its floor
Birds will wake me up
And they will again put me easily to asleep.
The world will find my hands in its own
If the crooked line of restlessness is wiped away. With some money
I will spend my time listening to the bees.
Faraway conversations:
No longer talking from wire-to-wire
No more wasting of sinew.
Bangladesh, take not of it,
I will rest my head upon your breast
And sleep all night in tranquility
When I have just a little cash.

Translated from Bengali by Nazrul Islam Naz

Hassanal Abdullah, an author of 23 books including 12 collections of poetry, was born in Gopalgonj, Bangladesh. He immigrated to New York in 1990, and earned his Bachelor and Masters in mathematics at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He is now a high school math teacher and the Coordinator of the Union Square Bt Academy at Washington Irving High School. He edits a bilingual quarterly, *Shabdaguchha*. His poetry, in original Bengali text and English translation, has been published in many countries of the world. Abdullah has introduced a new way of writing sonnets, with the rhyming scheme being abcdabc efgdefg, with a seven-line stanza pattern. He calls them “Swatantra Sonnets.” A poet of the post-modern era, Hassanal Abdullah, also wrote a 314-page epic, *Nakhatra O*
Manusar Prochhad (Anyana, 2007), where he illustrated relations between Human Beings and the Universe. His Selected Poems (Anyana, 2010) in Bengali was published in Dhaka. In addition, he translated Charles Baudelaire, Stanley Kunitz, Anna Akmatova, Nicanor Parra, Wislawa Szymborska, Gerald Stern, and many other poets from all over the world into Bengali and 32 Bangladeshi poets into English.

STANLEY H. BARKAN/U.S.A.

NAMING THE BIRDS

Tired of naming cattle & fish,

Adam turned to the birds.

“Raven,” he said;

then “dove,”

prophetically,

these first creatures of the air

who’d be symbols in a later time

of rain and flood and rainbow.

Of the birds who would

sing at dawn and dusk

he had little interest;

so Eve decided to try

her onomastic skill.
“Nightingale,” she whispered.

“Ibis, heron, flamingo,
parrot, peacock, tanager,“
mystery, grace, magnificence
of thought, motion, and design.

It took a woman
to properly name
the birds of Paradise.

**Stanley H. Barkan** is the editor/publisher of the Cross-Cultural Review Series of World Literature and Art, that has, to date, produced some 400 titles in 50 different languages. His own work has been published in 15 collections, several of them bilingual (Bulgarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Sicilian). His latest are, *Strange Seasons*, a poetry and photography collaboration with Russian artist, Mark Polyakov (2007) and *ABC of Fruits and Vegetables* (2012), both published by AngoBoy in Sofia, Bulgaria. He was the 1991 New York City’s Poetry Teacher of the Year (awarded by Poets House and the Board of Education) and the 1996 winner of the Poor Richard’s Award, “The Best of the Small Presses” (awarded by the Small Press Center), for “25 years of high quality publishing.” In May 2006, he was invited by Peter Thabit Jones, editor of *The Seventh Quarry*, to be the first solo featured poet at the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea, Wales. He lives and works with his artist wife, Bebe, in Merrick, Long Island.

**SULTAN CATTO/TURKEY**

**MAZERETIM NEYDY?**

Onları birbirine ba layan, sorularla dolu, apa ir, yıktıicationında sulara dökülme üzere olan saydam bir köprüyordu. Rakamlara kollarnı açmı bir ekilde ke netlenmi ti. Rakamlar arasındaki a k tu. Onları bırakıp giden önce kanatlarını açmaya ihtiyacı vardı. Kanatlarını açmadan önce,
ilk kez uçan bir kuun ne düündü ü üzerine kafa yordu.
Tekrarlayan ritmler ve ahenksiz sesler

kafasında uyu turucu bir duruma sebep oluyordu.
Ruhu dans ediyordu.
Ate liydi. Yaniyordu.
Vücudunda yüksek derecede,
kimyasal bile imleri bile enlerine ayrılyordu.
Ruhunun dökük duvarlarında asılmış resimlerde ya mur ya iıord
Hafif ya mur damlaları yüzüne vurduca titriyordu.
Gözlerimin önünde çço alıyordu.
Sa el bile inde bir lastik bant vardı,

üzereine hemen ince bir gömlek geçirdi

ve zihnimin derinliklerinden di arı do ru adım attı.
Bir bahar rüyası gibi zinhinde canlanan dü ünceler,

düyusından bir çı tanesi gibi, hiç iz bırakmadan

yok olup gidiyordu.
Kanatları açılmaya ba lami ti.
Bir kereviz tohumuydu.
Eczacının biri onu bir sakinle tırici olarak veya

di er ilaçlarının tadını gizlemek için kullanabilirildi.
Çok so uukanlıydı.

Hem de çok.
Camdan ruhum yüksek derecelerde erimek yerine

kristal porselene dönü uyordu.
Bazı muazzam bedenler gibi,
bendeki mevsim de i ikli ini etkiliyordu.
Çok so ukanlıydı.
Aklımı kaybetmek üzereydim.
Parabolik yörüngelerde ya iyordum.
Ya adı im dünya gibi ben de 13,7 milyar yılındır uyumamı tüm.
Monet’i ressam yapan ey çeklerdi.

Peki ya benim mazeretim neydi?
WHAT WAS MY EXC– USE?

She was awake. Her eyes, thirsty and hungry, had not tasted sleep in a long time. Feeling like an Egyptian mummy, she’s been waiting with open eyes for two thousand years. She was counting the sleepless hours with knotted strings of quipu. Her head filled with formulas, bed of formulas, she was walking around with scales in her arms, weighing her feelings against rocks. Nights were burning in her palms. Fires were blazing in her hear like the perpetual fire forever burning in the temples of the Nachez people. Prodigious winds in her soul had brought the windmills into motion. Everything that had begun in silence was now moving towards the void. Expanding universe was of no use to her. She wanted answers, solutions. She wanted to put an end to that expansion now. She had mesmerized the cosmological constant to be fixed to sixty-two places, corresponding to the number of veins in her body. She was a complicated instrument out of tune today. Today her entire universe was suspended between two words. She was the space in between. She was everything that had gone unsaid. She was the cat’s murmur. She was the hot milk. She was as blind as a river. Golden llamas were grazing on her golden grass. She was the silence between two numbers, the transparent natural bridge tying them, a bridge heavy with so many questions, about to collapse into waters below. She was attached to them with extended arms. She was the love in between. Before she let go, she needed to grow wings. Before growing wings, she was pondering, what does a bird flying for the first time think? Repetitive rhythms and dissonant tones were inducing a hypnotic state in her. Her soul was dancing. She was hot. She was burning. Chemical compounds were breaking up into their constituents at high temperatures within her body.
It was raining in the pictures hanging on her soul’s peeling walls. She was trembling as the soft rain was running down her face. She was multiplying herself in my eyes. A rubber band on her rig wrist, she had just put on a light shirt and stepped out onto my mind’s terrace. Thoughts that had come like a spring dream were slowly vanishing from her world, like a morning dew, leaving no trace. Her wings had started to grow.

She was the celery seed. A pharmacist would have used her as a sedative or to disguise the flavor of other drugs. She was cool. Very cool.

My glass soul, instead of melting, was converting to crystalline at high temperatures. Like certain astronomical bodies, she was affecting the changes of the seasons within me. She was cool.

I was going nuts. I was living on parabolic paths. Like my universe, I hadn’t slept in 13.7 billion years.

It was flowers that had made Monet a painter.

What was my excuse?

Translated from Turkish by Neslihan Tok

Sultan Catto is a professor of theoretical physics at the CUNY Graduate School and at the Rockefeller University, and was the Executive Officer of the PhD program at the City University of New York Graduate School. Together with internationally renowned scientists, Nobel Laureates and Fields Medalists in mathematics, he is on several international advisory boards. He has also been writing and giving poetry readings for several years. Some of his poems are published in literary journals, such as Yale Poets, The Seventh Quarry (Wales), Bhosphorus, (Turkey), Paterson Literary Review, and Long Island Sounds (USA), as well as in anthologies—Noches de Cornelia: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry and forthcoming in 2012 bilingually in Korean Expatriate Literature and Bridging the Water International Poetry Anthology. His first poetry book, Under the Shadows of Your Falling Words, was published bilingually by Editions Godot (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2008.
FROM: "FORT LEE POEMS"

THINGS WITH SHARP EDGES

I woke up this morning and it was Tuesday.

The large pattern of loneliness settled in

On my head and body like a parachute

Snapped tight by four hands, and full of air.

I didn’t want to think about last night.

There are better things to do with money

Than bribe the gendarmes to give you back

Your car. By law it’s a flat fee for everyone,

But it’s a bigger hit to him who don’t have it.

The fog was lifting fast from the valley;

I could clearly hear the traffic on Route 4.

The mountains in the distance my wife

Said I couldn’t see were hidden in mist,

But later, when the sky turned silver, when

Some blue began to show through, they
Appeared, disappointingly dull and serrated,
Shadowy humps on the moveable ledge where
Heaven leaves off and earth begins.
Later on I took a walk around the block,
A quiet, peaceful walk in the park,
The stranger who just moved in
But didn’t really live there, quite yet.

Michael Foldes has a B.A. in anthropology from The Ohio State University. He has been an editor, contributor and publisher of magazines, newspapers and chapbooks since the early 1970s, including a stint as editor and columnist with Gannett’s newspapers in Binghamton, New York, for more than a decade. He is the founder (2004) and managing editor of Ragazine.CC, the online magazine of art, information and entertainment (http://old.ragazine.cc); was lead on the first edition of the PSMA’s “Handbook of Standardized Terminology for the Power Sources Industry”, and, for more than 25 years has worked as a sales executive in the electronics industry. Foldes and his wife Margot have three children. He commutes between metro New York and Greater Binghamton. His book “Sleeping Dogs: A true story of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping”, is forthcoming from Split Oak Press, and is available online at Kindle, Nook, Apple and other e-book stores.

MAHMOOD KARIMI-HAKAK/IRAN
TOMORROW

What will happen to you tomorrow?

Tomorrow when my friends and comrades
go with love
to decorate the cold earth
with their warm blood once again,
tomorrow when you paint your face
with blood from “Those who walk the path of love”*,
so the eyes of betrayal and ignorance
do not glimpse fear
seeing your pale face,
tomorrow when my country’s dry earth
will be quenched
with the blood of its people,
tomorrow when again the hand of lies, deceit and vanity
stretches out
of the senile, ugly, old man’s sleeve
to squeeze
shamelessly and unabashedly
your smooth, delicate throat
tomorrow when in every back alleyway
men, women, young, old,
with heads bent to the ground
weeping tears of lost memories,
tomorrow at dawn without a doubt
from the alleyways of my childhood
blood will flood seeping all the way to the desert.

Tomorrow
will my brothers and sisters
executed long ago
awaken from twenty years of sleep
to receive your innocent bodies
in their embrace?

English translation by: Mahmood Karimi-Kakak and Bill Wolak

Mahmood Karimi-Hakak is a poet, author, translator, theatre and film artist who has created 50 stage and screen plays in U.S., Europe and Iran. He is the recipient of a number of awards including Outstanding Foreign Film (Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival, 1995), Critics’ Choice (Fajr International Theatre Festival, 1999), Fulbright (2009-10) and Raymond Kennedy (2005). His literary credits include five plays, two books of poetry, numerous articles, interviews...
and translations in both English and Persian, including *Your Lover's Beloved: 51 Ghazals by Hafez* and *Love Emergencies* (both with Bill Wolak). His latest Film, *The Glass Wall* documents a desired dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli artists. A Professor of Creative Art at Siena College, Karimi-Hakak has taught at CCNY, SMU and TU as well as at universities in Europe and Iran. mhakak@siena.edu

MARIA MAZZIOTTI GILLAN/U.S.A.

SPIKE HEELS

In the 1950s, I wore spike heels.

They were very high, but I was thin then,

didn’t wobble. I walked through hours

at my job, my high heels twinkly

as Dorothy’s red slippers with pointy toes,

heels in every possible color, sling-backs

and pumps, the clickety-clack of them

on pavement making me feel

as sophisticated as Marilyn Monroe. Older now,

my heels have gone lower and lower,
reduced to sandals with Velcro straps to hold
my triple E-feet. I still watch women
striding in their spike heels, and wish
for one minute that I could go back
to the days when I could walk
with such grace, look with longing
at this marker of beauty, as though
I were still sixteen and not this woman
I’ve become, pounding through life
on confident feet.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan is a recipient of the 2011 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award from Poets & Writers, and the 2008 American Book Award for her book, All That Lies Between Us (Guernica Editions). Her latest book is What We Pass On: Collected Poems 1980-2009 (Guernica Editions, 2010), and she has a book forthcoming on September 1, 2012, The Place I Call Home (New York Quarterly Press). She is the Founder / Executive Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, NJ, and editor of the Paterson Literary Review. She is also Director of the Creative Writing Program and Professor of Poetry at Binghamton University-SUNY. She has published fourteen books of poetry and, with her daughter Jennifer,
she is co-editor of four anthologies.

IFEANY A. MENKITI/NIGERIA

Excerpt from:

THEY WILL RISE

the body of Europe

but an elongation

of the body of Africa

and you talk of ancestors

and I say: Lucy is

up there in heaven

smiling at all of us

that this business of the mitochondria,

it is not a tale by an old wife;

and the talk about a deoxy

in a ribonucleic merger

how can it be about an acid
when it has juju written
all over it?

some deep mystery sprung
from the soil of this Africa

& the mystery is not yet done-

how such a knowledge, it belongs
to a class of things not written down;

which it would make no sense
to write down;

the elders, did they not say
that there are things, a da na
ede ede na akwukwo?

things that will break the scribe’s pen
should the scribe insist
on writing them down?

that when we are born
there comes a time
when we see the end
of our earthly days

but that some among us
when they die
they appear to be
merely asleep

hence the meaning of that song:

*mnuo-oma m’lolu n’obu ula*

*a maro-m n’obu onwu*—

angel that you thought was asleep
not knowing it was death

Reprinted from *Of Altair, the Bright Light*

(Earthwinds Editions. 2005) by Ifeanyi A. Menkiti

Ifeanyi A. Menkiti was born in Onitsha, Nigeria. He has taught philosophy at Wellesley College for more than 35 years. He is the author of four collections of poetry, *Affirmations* (1971), *The Jubilation of Falling Bodies* (1978), and *Of Altair, the Bright Light* (2005), and *a Common Soil* (2007). Other poems have appeared in journals a
periodicals, such as the *Sewanee Review, Ploughshares, New Directions, The Massachusetts Review, Stony Brook, Southwest Review,* and the African journals: *Okike, Transition,* and *Nigeria Magazine.* In 1975, he was honored with a fellowship in poetry from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, followed in 1978 by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. He is presently the owner of the Grolier Poetry Book Shop in Harvard Square, the oldest continuous all poetry bookstore in the United States. This year, 2012, the store celebrates its 85th anniversary, having been founded in

**OSDANY MORALES/CUBA**

**LA CASA DEL SOL NACIENTE**

Billy Bill y Jo-jo crecieron juntos, tomados de la mano —la de ella pequeña, fría y traslúcida como una rana, la de él áspera y pétrea como un pegote de barro seco— mientras atravesaban un interminable campo de trigo. Todas las mañanas veían pasar el tren rumbo a las minas de oro y más tarde lo veían volver en dirección a los pozos petróleo. Estos destinos, Billy Bill los conocía de oídas: era hijo del barbero del pueblo y en su terraza los clientes melenudos discutían sobre los dos extremos de la línea del tren. Vienen cargados de oro los vagones, le susurraba Billy Bill a Jo-jo cuando en la tarde se tumbaban en la colina a mirar el paso del tren hacia el Norte. Vienen cargados de petróleo los vagones, respondía Jo-jo cuando en la mañana se tumbaban en la colina a mirar el paso del tren hacia el Sur. Ella vivía con su padre en un chalet de madera a un extremo del pueblo, y su ocupación era recoger los huevos de una escuadra de diez ocas que marchaban todo el día con el cuello tieso, escandalizadas por cómo el padre alcohólico trataba a la hija. Jo-jo tenía un solo vestido y al ponerse el sol lo lavaba para que pareciera limpio al siguiente día, de modo que en la noche siempre andaba desnuda. Se cuidaba de no cruzarse con el padre al anochecer y pasaba todo el tiempo encerrada en su habitación, pero una primavera Jo-jo creció, custodiando sus ocas. He crecido, Billy Bill, le dijo al oído mientras despedían los vagones hacia el Sur. He crecido y mi padre me hará su mujer esta misma noche. Entonces Billy Bill con sus manos de barro le sacó
único vestido que le conocía, y Jo-jo comenzó a tantear con sus dedos húmedos los botones huidizos de la ropa de hombre. Sobre los rieles oxidados no cruzaron vagones. Una bandada de aves negras se escurrió por el cielo en silencio. Al llegar al chalet de madera el padre la esperaba, haciendo rodar sobre la mesa una botella vacía. Jo-jo intentó subir la escalera cuando él la siguió, la alcanzó y le rompió el vestido. Ella no gritó, apartó como pudo los brazos del padre y trató de llegar hasta su habitación. Lo más que logró fue abrir la puerta. De ésta aguardaba Billy Bill. He crecido, Jo-jo, le dijo antes de golpear al padre en el rostro. El borracho rodó escaleras abajo y cuando su cabeza alcanzó la madera del último peldaño murió. He crecido, Jo-jo, ya nadie podrá hacerte daño, dijo Billy Bill antes de arrastrar el cuerpo. Lo repitió por última vez antes de darle sepultura en el patio. Las gotas de lluvia perforaban en el barro y ellos volvieron a revolcarse en el suelo, desnudos y sucios. Las ocas, como paraguas amontonados, se guarecían de los espectros de la madrugada. Me marcharé en el próximo tren, dijo Billy Bill. Vienen cargados de petróleo los vagones, dijo ella. Haré una fortuna y regresaré por ti, Jo-jo. Te esperaré hasta que muera la última de las ocas, Billy Bill. Si no has vuelto para entonces quiere decir que no hay fortuna en las minas de oro ni pozos de petróleo, y yo iré a buscarte.

Las ocas, una por una, fueron muriendo.

La primera, atragantada con una espiga de trigo.

Una teja del establo cayó sobre la segunda y la mató al instante.

La tercera murió de un infarto que le abrió el corazón en dos mitades.

La cuarta amaneció con el pico surcado de hormigas rojas.

La quinta y la sexta fueron robadas.

La séptima oca puso un huevo negro y pesado como una roca antes de expirar.

La octava quedó atrapada en un mantel tendido, luego de dar tres vueltas ciegas se estranguló.

La novena oca aleteó en un extremo del patio, echó una corta carrera y alzó el vuelo hasta perderse en el cielo sin nubes.
Cuando alrededor del chalet se paseaba una sola oca, una mano de mujer se acerca y acaricia la cabeza del ave como si se apoyara en un bastón. Le extiende el cuello blanco y emplumado sobre el piso de madera de la terraza y lo cercena con un cuchillo de cocina. En la mañana, su silueta a lo lejos atraviesa los campos dorados, rumi un tren que no se detiene.

Chocando con varias personas, como si no las viera, un hombre sombrero de paño y enormes gafas entra en el bar. Se recuesta de medio lado en un tramo vacío de la barra. La canción resulta conocida pero disimulada tras otra melodía, como descubrir *The house of rising sun* en un registro aún más descorazonado. La cantante es mujer estirada que muestra los pechos a su público, aunque este se le ven porque la luz sale del fondo y sólo es posible definir su contorno. También luce un sombrero de paño. Al terminar la canción alguien pide un aplauso para Jo-jo, que es ella. Se quita el sombrero ajusta en sus pechos, de modo que queda suspendido y no de mucho más. Otro grita que devuelva el sombrero a su sitio. Mientras se asoma al borde del escenario, donde le ofrecen billetes que ella permite deslizar en las ligas de sus muslos, responde que volverá a descubrirse cuando alguno sea capaz de adivinar la frase de la 

Muchos vocean lo primero que les viene a la mente, otros encuentran la oportunidad de blasfemar contra Dios. El hombre de la barra bruñe un arrugado billete de un dólar y apartando a aquellos que ocupan la primera fila se acerca a Jo-jo. Ella le alarga una pierna cuando él exige:

En el sombrero. Jo-jo silba: ¡Tenemos un ganador! ¿Cuál es tu nombre, ganador? Billy, dice el hombre. ¡Un aplauso para Billy, el ganador!, grita el mismo que ha pedido un aplauso para Jo-jo. Ella se saca el sombrero y se lo ofrece volteado. Billy, el ganador, suelta su billete, que cae lentamente como una pluma de oca. Mira el busto de Jo sonríe, y en sus gafas enormes se repiten los pechos de la cantante. Espérame al fondo, dice ella, hoy es tu noche de suerte. Billy, el ganador, sale del bar, echa a andar una camioneta amarilla y da indeciso rodeo como si tardara en descubrir cuál es el fondo. Frena, por fin, levantando una polvareda con forma de anacrónico caballito de mar que no tarda en disiparse en el paisaje de neumáticos viejos, cajas de cerveza amontonadas, fantasmagóricos cactus sin pareja. Mientras espera improvisa una melodía con los dedos en el volante. Jo-jo asoma por la ventanilla, otra vez lleva los pechos atrapado en el sombrero. Billy, el ganador, se saca el suyo y lo cuelga en la cabeza de Jo-jo. Se quita las gafas y las larga en la guantera. El rostro de Billy, el ganador, hace juego con su camioneta. La barba mal recortada y dispersa, que no alcanza a ocultar las arrugas, una ceja incomple
le pueden contar más de doce cicatrices. ¿A quién le has prestado tu cara?, dice Jo-jo. Es el viento de la carretera. Vienes de muy lejos entonces. Vengo de cerca, pero hago el mismo recorrido varias veces al día. Billy, el ganador, dice ella, hace unos años llegó a este sitio buscando a un hombre como tú. Jo-jo, la cantante, tu historia me interesa menos que la posición de tu sombrero. Sube, te llevo hasta el pueblo. Todavía me quedan dos rondas de canciones tristes esta noche. Sabes cuánto vale el sombrero que ahora cuelga en tu cabeza? No más que mis gemelas. Sólo son un par de tetas, Jo-jo, la cantante, no las sobrevalores, y tampoco les llames gemelas, las encontrarás bastante diferentes si pudieras observarlas desde otro ángulo. Víctor prometo pasar el detector de mentiras durante el viaje y así sabrás si soy o no tu hombre. Iluminada por el único reflector que funciona, Jo-jo cruza por delante de la camioneta amarilla. Billy, el ganador, la ve sostener los dos sombreros como si paseara sobre una cuerda flotante, cada uno le ofreciera equilibrio. La camioneta, trémula, avanza con la luz tuerta lijando la carretera. Cuando era joven, dice Jo-jo, vine hasta aquí detrás de un hombre. ¿Qué te hace pensar que puedo ser yo? No digo que seas tú, suele premiar a todos los Billy que encuentro a mi paso. Pero Billy no es mi verdadero nombre, Jo-jo, la cantante. Me llamo William Moss, y créeme que hace un buen tiempo que no pronuncio ese nombre completo. Jo-jo aparta una lágrima mirando la oscuridad de su ventanilla donde palpita un viento devastador. ¿Cómo llegaste a este sitio, William Moss, alias Billy, el ganador? En tren, Jo-jo, como todo el mundo. ¿Creías que aquí estaban las minas de oro? Nunca oí hablar de eso, vine porque a los quince años un tren me envió de una sacudida. Pues yo llegué siguiendo al hombre que mató a mi padre. Me costó poco tiempo enterarme de que podía ganar algo en el bar, allí me bautizaron con el nombre de Jo-jo, como muchas otras Jo-jo que estuvieron antes y otras que estarán cuando mis gemelas cumplan su misión en este mundo. ¿Y cómo te llamas, Jo-jo? Kim, Kim Jones. Es un bonito nombre, Kim Jones. Lo es. Me encantaba usarlo antes. Y a este hombre, a Billy, ¿para qué lo buscas? Creo que para matarlo. Yo puedo ayudarte a buscarlo. Y qué pide a cambio, Billy, el ganador. Que me ayudes a dar con una mujer que dejé a su hijo cuando era joven. Suena bastante parejo. Lo es, Jo-jo, la cantante, muy parejo. Ambos miran la carretera, que parece no tener fin.

Vienen cargados de oro los vagones, Jo-jo.

Vienen cargados de petróleo los vagones, Billy Bill.
Billy Bill and Jo-Jo grew up together, holding hands (hers were small, cold and translucent like a frog; his, rough and stony like a clump of dry mud) as they walked through an endless wheat field. Every morning they would watch the train on its way to the gold mine and later watch it go back towards the oil well. Billy Bill had heard of destinations — he was the son of the town’s barber and in his deck long haired costumers discussed the two ends of the train line. They come back filled with gold, the wagons do, Billy Bill would whisper into Jo-Jo’s ear when in the afternoon they lay down on the hill to watch the passing of the train going North. They come back filled with oil, the wagons do, Jo-Jo would answer when in the morning they lay down on the hill to watch the passing of the train going South. She lived with her father in a wooden cottage at one end of the town, and her occupation consisted of picking up the eggs from a squad of geese that marched all day with their necks stiff, shocked at the way the alcoholic father treated his daughter. Jo-Jo had only one dress and when the sun set she would wash it so that it would seem clean the next day, therefore she was always naked at night. She took good care not to meet her father at nightfall and kept herself locked in her room, but one spring Jo-Jo grew up, watching over her geese. I’ve grown Billy Bill, she whispered into his ear while they waved the wagons goodbye heading South. I’ve grown and my father will make me his woman this very night. Then Billy Bill, using his muddy hands, tore the only dress he knew of hers, and Jo-Jo began to feel with her humid fingers the elusive buttons of men’s clothing. No wagon passed over the rusty rails. A flock of black birds slipped away in silence. When she got back to the wooden cottage her father was waiting for her, rolling an empty bottle on the table. Jo-Jo tried to climb the stairs when he followed her, caught her and split her dress. She did not scream, but moved away as best she could from her father’s arms and tried to reach her room. She only got as far as opening the door. Behind it awaited Billy Bill. I’ve grown, Jo-Jo, he said to her before hitting the father in the face. The drunkard rolled down the stairs, and when his head hit the wood of the last step he died. I’ve grown, Jo-Jo, no one will be able to harm you now, said Billy Bill before dragging the body. He repeated this one last time before burying it in the yard. Drops of rain perforated the mud and again they rolled around in the ground, naked and dirty. The geese, like piled up umbrellas, took shelter from the daybreak spirits. I’ll leave on the next train, said Billy Bill. They come filled with oil.
wagons do, she said. I’ll make a fortune and come back for you, Jo-Jo.
I’ll wait for you until the last one of the geese dies, Billy Bill. If you
haven’t returned by then, it means that there’s no fortune in the gold
mines nor in the oil wells, and I’ll go find you.

The geese began to die, one by one.

The first choked on an ear of wheat.

A tile from the stable fell on the second one and killed it instantly.

The third died of a heart attack and its heart was split into two ha

The fourth was found with its beak furrowed with red ants.

The fifth and the sixth were stolen.

The seventh laid a black egg, heavy as a rock, before expiring.

The eighth was caught in a hanging tablecloth —after three blind
it strangled itself.

The ninth goose flapped its wings at one end of the yard, ran a short
race and took off until it disappeared in the cloudless sky.

When a single goose paced up and down the cottage, a female hand
approaches and caresses the bird’s head as if it were leaning on a cane.
It extends the white feathered neck on the deck’s wooden floor and
cuts it off with a kitchen knife. In the morning, its silhouette traverses
the golden fields in the distance, heading for a train that does no

Bumping into several people, as if he were incapable of seeing th
man with a cloth hat and an enormous pair of glasses walks into
bar. He leans halfway over an empty stretch of the bar. The song
out to be familiar, but concealed behind a different tune, like
discovering *The House of the Rising Sun* in an even more disheart
register. The singer is a tight woman who shows her breasts to th
audience, although they can’t see them because the light is comi
from the back and it is only possible to define their outline. She a
wears a cloth hat. When the song ends someone shouts for a rou
applause for Jo-Jo, which is her name. She takes the hat off and p
on her breasts, so that the hat is left suspended and does not rev
much more. Someone else shouts that she return the hat to its or
place. While she leans on the edge of the stage, where she is offered bills that she allows to be slipped in her garters, she answers that she will uncover herself again when one of them is able to find out tonight's phrase. Many shout whatever comes to their minds; others find an opportunity to blaspheme against God. The man at the bar burnishes a crumpled dollar bill, and moving aside those in the front row, approaches Jo-Jo. She holds out a leg when he demands: In her hat. She whistles: We have a winner! What's your name, winner? the man says. A round of applause for Billy the Winner!, shouts the same guy that asked for a round of applause for Jo-Jo. She takes hat and offers it to him turned around. Billy the Winner lets go of bill, which falls slowly like a goose feather. He looks at Jo-Jo's bust smiles, and in his enormous glasses the singer's breasts are duplicated. Wait for me at the back, she says, tonight's your lucky night. Billy the Winner comes out of the bar, starts a yellow pickup truck, and makes an indecisive detour, as if he were taking a long time finding out the back might be. At last he brakes, raising a cloud of dust that takes the shape of an anachronistic seahorse that doesn't take long to dissipate into the landscape of old tires, piled up cases of beer, phantasmagoric coupleless cactus. While he waits he improvises a tune with his fingers on the wheel. Jo-Jo appears at the window, again the breasts caught in the hat. Billy the Winner takes off his, and hangs it on Jo-Jo's head. He takes off the glasses and puts them in the glove compartment. Billy the Winner's face matches his pickup truck. The poorly trimmed and scattered beard, not enough to conceal the wrinkles; an incomplete brow; more than twelve scars to be counted. Who have you been lending your face to? says Jo-Jo. It is the wind from the highway. You've come a long way, then. I come from around, but I cover the same route several times a day. Billy the Winner, she says, a few years ago I came to this place looking for a man like you. Jo-Jo the Singer, I'm less interested in your story than I am in the position of your hat. Come on in, I'll drive you into town. No, I still have two rounds of sad songs left tonight. The hat that hangs on your head, you know how much it's worth? No more than my twins. They're just a couple of tits, Jo-Jo the Singer, don't overestimate them, and don't call them twins either, you would find them quite different if you could observe them from another angle. Come on, I promise to pass the lie detector along the way and then you'll know if I'm your man or not. Lit up by the only working headlight, Jo-Jo crosses in front of the yellow pickup truck. Billy the Winner sees her hold the two hats as if she were walking on a tightrope and each one offered her equilibrium. The pickup truck, trembling, advances with its one-eyed light, sanding down the highway. When I was young, says Jo-Jo, I came all the way here l
for a man. What makes you think that it can be me? I’m not sayin’ you, I usually reward all the Billies I find in my path. But Billy’s not my real name, Jo-Jo the Singer. My name is William Moss, and believe me when I tell you that it’s been a long time since I last pronounced my name fully. Jo-Jo removes a tear looking at the darkness of her window, where a devastating wind throbs. How did you get to this place, William Moss, aka Billy the Winner? On a train, Jo-Jo, like everyone else. Did you think that the gold mines were here? Never heard of that, I came here because when I was fifteen a train jerked me out. Well I got here following the man that killed my father. It took little time to find out that I could earn something at the bar, where they gave me the name of Jo-Jo, like so many other Jo-Jo’s that were like me, and others that will be when my twins have carried out their mission in this world. And what’s your name, Jo-Jo? Kim, Kim Jones. That’s a pretty name, Kim Jones. It is. I loved to use it back then. This man, this Billy, why are you looking him for him? To kill him I think. I can help you find him. And what does Billy the Winner ask in return. That you help me find a woman that I left behind when I was young. Sounds fair enough. It is, Jo-Jo the singer; it’s quite fair. They both looked at the highway, which seemed endless.

They come filled with gold, the wagons do, Jo-Jo.

They come filled with oil, the wagons do, Billy Bill.

Translated from Spanish by Francisco Díaz Klaassen

Osdany Morales (Nueva Paz, 1981) is a Cuban author. His first book, a collection of short stories, Minucionas puertas estrechas (Ediciones Unión, 2007), earned the David award. In 2008 he won the International Prize for Fiction Casa de Teatro, in the Dominican Republic. In the fall of 2011 he finished his second book, Papyru: which recently was awarded with the prestigious Alejo Carpentier Award 2012, in Cuba. His fiction works have been included in anthologies about new Cuban literature, such as Maneras de narrar (2006), Los que cuentan (2008) and La fiamma in boca (2009). His stories have appeared in magazines El Cuentero (Cuba), El Perro (Mexico) and Quimera (Spain). Currently, supported by a Banco de Santander Fellowship, he is doing an MFA in Creative Writing in Spanish at...
SALUTARE UN PADRE

A volte il silenzio parla, pronuncia cose enormi, perfino qui dall’altra parte dell’Atlantico, in scene che sembrano familiari, ma che invece vanno guardate con gran riverenza, solennità. Come quando vènti leggeri rifiutano di tacere e riportano indietro lineamenti delle cose, delle mani. La vita di un uomo è segnata da linee confuse, gesti c'è non bastano anni ed anni, ed ancora silenzi, altri silenzi, gesti tracciati nell’aria, anche dall’altra parte dell’Atlantico.

Non c’è mai abbastanza tempo per salutare un padre. Non bastano cartoline ed altri messaggi, non bastano le parole appena pronunciate, non bastano anni ed anni. Il semplice congedo è solo un attimo, un sprazzo mattutino, ma non basta, nemmeno quello basta. Soprattutto dopo il ventisette settembre, dopo che i pensieri sono andati e la bocca si chiude. La morte è un abbandono? E’ una forma di partenza? Qualcuno se lo chiede, anzi tutti se lo chiedono, anche se non lo ammettono. E’ una dispersione della materia, un ritorno alla terra? Anzi, è un allontanamento, ma da dove e per dove? Ma no, per molti invece è la fine di un inseguimento.

Prima o poi il silenzio ci raggiunge, ci tocca. Sai come avviene? Ti confesso: c’è un mucchio di gente che parla in tono familiare, tra intorno, rumore delle cose. Poi poco a poco si spengono le luci, si abbassano i volumi, il silenzio s’avvicina, arriva da lontano, da qualche punto che abbiamo lasciato indietro, nascosto. Poco a poco si raggiunge, infine ci tocca. E’ lì che nasce un profondo rispetto per il silenzio, perché è la fase ultima, l’ultimo stadio: in silenzio e al buio, la condizione più vicina a quella della morte. La vita è chiaroscuro, solarità, luci varie, intermittenti, alti e bassi, passioni e delusioni, ronzii, ma la morte, la morte no, è solo silenzio nel buio.

Ora la scena cambia, in una stanza, al buio, il silenzio è rotto da una voce, da due voci. Le due voci si cercano, s’intuiscono, un’aria calma nell’assenza di respiro. Ritornano luoghi amati, sfiorati dalle dita...
Prima voce: “Verso l’unica morte si va instancabili, fatti per morire.”

Seconda voce: “Sì, programmati per morire, anzi nati per il preciso scopo di morire.”

Prima voce: “Sì, è buffo, verso l’unica morte possibile.”

Seconda voce: “E qual è l’unica morte possibile?”

Prima voce: “Ma è la morte stessa, ce n’è una sola, o sbaglio?”
Seconda voce: “Allora la vita è un progressivo allontanamento dalle cose della vita in direzione della morte?”

Prima voce: “Certo, ma ce ne sono di cose da vedere durante il tragitto che poi è una lenta declinazione, sì che ce ne sono: suoni, voci di madri e gesti riflessi sull’acqua, azioni bloccate in una serie di fotografie quelle del mare, della vacanza. Migliaia di foto che imprigionano il passato, è l’unico modo per non farlo scappare, tranne che poi le ingialliscono, come quelle dei vent’anni, le foto di gruppo, quelle dei parenti.”
Seconda voce: “Sì, le foto di gruppo, quelle della scuola, siamo vivi lì, guardiamo al futuro, anzi sembriamo volerci arrivare al più presto quasi correre verso il futuro.”

Prima voce: “Certo rimangono vaghi ricordi, come quelli degli errori commessi, ma anche versi come questi:

danzare con i vestiti nuovi
danzare sul mare di sera
danzare, danzare e sognare

Seconda voce: “Che cosa sono, da dove vengono?”

Prima voce: “Sono canti, cantilene, cantari, cantate, in attesa di giovani donne. Senti, una volta a Bruxelles, con un dente cariato, al freddo visto un’alba strana, alle otto di mattina era ancora buio, poi poco dopo è nata una luce. Era l’inverno nordico. Ma a che serve ricorda...
Seconda voce: “Ma sì, a che serve? Ma allora a che serve tutto il resto, i destini incrociati, l’orgoglio giovanile, se poi ci si allontana, leggermente, ogni giorno di più, stabilmente, sai qual è l’unica cosa certa in tutta questa storia?

Prima voce: “No, qual è?”
Seconda voce: “E’ che il tempo passa, questo è certo, e continua a passare, come dire: trascorre, bella parola, sembra come in una vacanza: trascorrere giorni lieti in vacanza.”

Prima voce: “Ora è tardi, cambiamo scena, non so dove sei esattamente, ma ti sento stanco.”

Seconda voce: “Sì, spostiamoci da qui”.


FAREWELL TO A FATHER

Sometimes silence speaks, pronounces vast things, even here on
other side of the Atlantic, in scenes that seem familiar, but instead to be viewed with great reverence, solemnity. As when light winds refuse to be hushed and bring back the outlines of things, of hands. A man’s life is marked by muddled lines, the years’ gestures, silences and more silences, gestures traced in the air, even here on the other side of the Atlantic.

There is never enough time to say good-bye to one’s father. Postcards and other messages aren’t enough, the words just spoken aren’t enough, years and years aren’t enough. The simple good-bye takes only a moment, it’s a morning cloudburst, but it’s not enough, not even that. Especially after September the twenty-seventh, after the thoughts have flown and the mouth closes. Is death a desertion? Is it a leave-taking? Someone wonders, indeed everyone wonders, even if they don’t admit it. Is it a dispersal of matter, a return to earth? It is, rather, a departure, but from where and to where? But no, for many it’s the end of a hunt.

Sooner or later silence reaches us, touches us. Do you know how it happens? I confess: a lot of people speak in familiar tones, traffic around them, the sounds of things. Then little by little the lights go out, the volume is lowered, silence draws near, arrives from far off, from some place we left behind, hidden. Little by little it reaches us, finally touches us. A deep respect for silence is born there, because it’s the last phase, the last stage: in silence and dark our condition is closest to death. Life is chiaroscuros, sunshine, changing lights, intermittent and low, passions and delusions, rumblings, but death, no, it’s only silence and darkness.

Now the scene changes to a room, in the dark, the silence is broken by a voice, by two voices. The two voices look for each other, intuit each other, a still air in the absence of breath. Beloved places come back, brushed by fingertips, then a signal:

First Voice: “Toward one death we go tirelessly, born to die.”

Second Voice: “Yes, born to die, even born for the very purpose of dying.”

First Voice: “Yes, it’s funny, toward the one possible death.”

Second Voice: “And what is the one possible death?”
First Voice: “It’s death itself, there is only one, isn’t there?”

Second Voice: “Then life is a progressive departure from living things in the direction of death?”

First Voice: “Sure, but there are things to see on the trip, which is a slow path downward, yes, there are things to see: sounds, mothers’ voices, and gestures reflected in water, actions caught in a series of snapshots, scenes of the beach, of vacations. Thousands of photos imprison the past is the one way to keep it from getting away, except that the photos yellow, like those of one’s twenties, the group photos, on relatives.”

Second Voice: “Yes, the group photos, the school photos, we’re a part of them, we look toward the future, we seem to want to get there as quickly as possible, almost running toward the future.”

First Voice: “Vague memories are left, like those of mistakes we made, but even verses like these:

- dancing in new clothes
- dancing on the sea in the evening
- dancing, dancing and dreaming”

Second Voice: “What are they, where do they come from?”

First Voice: “They’re songs, lullabies, sung waiting for young women. Listen, once in Bruxelles, with an aching tooth, I saw a strange dawn, at eight in the morning it was still dark, then little by little the light was born. It was the northern winter. But what use is remembering it?”

Second Voice: “Yes, what use? But then what use is the rest, the crossed destinies, the youthful pride, if then everything goes off, lightly, further and further each day, steadily, do you know the only sure thing in this whole story?”

First Voice: “No, what is it?”

Second Voice: “That time passes, that’s for sure, and keeps passing, that is to say, elapses, nice word, like a vacation: happy days elapsed in vacation.”
First Voice: “Now it’s late, let’s change the scene; I don’t know where you are exactly, but you sound tired.”

Second Voice: “Yes, let’s get out of here.”

Now the scene is that of a journey, a trip through various languages, perhaps countries never seen, in distant years. But without a mouth for crying out, a tongue for speaking. Is it a sea voyage? Is it a land voyage? Without eyes for seeing, without ears for listening. What journey is it? What time is it? I wonder, they wonder, in the course of their various destinies, their various destinations. Early departures, on-time departures, late ones, the means of transport having just arrived, just departed. Sometimes we’re early, sometimes late, for things, for others’ gazes, for appointments. But sometimes we’re on time, okay, that’s the moment that signs the balance. We’re on time for the others’ gazes, we arrive just in time: a son who looks in his father’s eyes, a father who looks in his son’s eyes. We arrive just in time for some appointments. We are alone without knowing it, we are together without knowing it. We always leave in the end, sooner or later. A departure awaited by everyone, every gesture turned off, every memory closed. We had a father, we became fathers, our children become fathers and mothers, their children will become fathers and mothers. Having always arrived, always departed.

Translated from Italian by Olivia Holmes

Mario Moroni was born in Italy in 1955. He moved to the United States in 1989. He has taught at Yale University, the University of Memphis, and Colby College, he currently teaches Italian at Binghamton University. Mario Moroni has published seven volumes of poetry, one of poetic prose, and a DVD of poems, images, and electronic music in collaboration with composer Jon Hallstrom. In 1989 he was awarded the Lorenzo Montano prize for poetry. His poems have been published in numerous journals and anthologies of contemporary poetry. As a critic, Mario Moroni has published three volumes and has co-edited three collections of essays on modern and contemporary Italian European literature and culture.
Diego Trelles Paz was born in Lima, Perú, in 1977. He is the author of a short story collection, *Hudson, el redentor* [Hudson, the Redeemer] (Lima, 2001), and a novel, *El círculo de los escritores asesinos* [The Circle of the Murderous Writers] (Barcelona, 2005). His stories and articles have appeared in *N+1*, *The White Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Revista ñ*, *Babelia*, *Sibila*, among others. He is a professor in Bingham University, SUNY, and the editor of *El futuro no es nuestro* [The Future Is Not Ours] (2009) an anthology of short stories by young Latin American writers that has been published in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Hungary, Peru, and will be released in USA by University of Rochester’s *Open Letter* in 2012.
TRAVELS TO BINGHAMTON

When I was told that I would be traveling to Binghamton a smug smile came to my face. Oh yes, I had visited it often. Or to say it more
enthusiastically: “I’m the proud sponsor of two college students of SUNY!” Of these few trips the first and last separate themselves drastically from the rest. I myself, a single parent of two sons, was traveling with the older one to the campus of SUNY. We only had one car. Where would we get the money for a second one? I had just become a citizen a year before. My son was in the top ten graduates of Walter Panas High School and was the recipient of four scholarships, but only one of them, gave him $1,500. He was admitted by NYU and Fordham, but since I didn’t have enough money, I could only an the look on his face, filled with disappointment, with the strong argument I could come up with: “Binghamton is one of the top ten in The States! Look, even IBM was founded here.” And when we par the lot of the campus, I exclaimed: “If only I could return to my 0 years and be here!” The resident assistant (RA), a student in an upper class, who discovered that I was the only parent and that I would around aimlessly on campus, invited me to participate in the lecture for freshmen that she was holding for them. “These are the rules, are the requirements” uttered the RA-girl in a lulling voice. But, when the word “sex” came out of her mouth, my nap was disrupted. I pricked up my ears. “On the board, next to the door of my office, there are three condoms—a white one, a blue one, and a pink one. Don’t be embarrassed, come and ask for one when you need it. It’s not required! Safe sex is to be recommended!” I felt weird. I looked around me uneasily—the kids were listening with indifference. “Have sex only in your own rooms! Do you see the bench on the terrace over there? Last year a couple gave a show. They were thrown out immediately!” I broke out in cold sweat... they were having oral sex.

Without meaning to, I went back to my youth. We didn’t have such a campus. They used to teach us in a former army barracks. Resident Assistant—What the hell is that? In my teens my father used to persistently push “The Topic of Sex” of Dr. August Forell, in which Professor insisted in recommending that we should not masturbate. Then he added: “There are slutty women who can gift you with a venereal disease.” Afterwards, he formulated his parental advice on the topic of sex: “Look for your true love. Don’t fool girls. However, don’t rush to get married before you graduate.”

A generational difference, during which the doors of secrecy had opened to the eye of the public.

I called this trip “Condoms in Three Colors as a National Flag.”
traveled a few times a year to Binghamton, at first because of my son, then for a student, whom I already mentioned, whom I sponsored. I called my last trip “A Few Yards of Toilet Paper.” It wasn’t something positive, but it was urgent. I will now tell you why.

My student found himself in prison. Crossing the state like lightning, with a bad taste in the mouth, caused by an unpleasant experience, an inquiry in the police station, a copy of the police report of the arrest, a quick orientation of the available lawyers in the city, hiring of the recommended attorney, payment of the bail money so he could be freed under a guarantee, traveling to the prison, and finally getting him free.

We heard his story in his student apartment. He had gone to a bar the night before, had a couple of whiskeys on an empty stomach, and on his way home had kicked in the door of a private home. The police report said: "The door is badly damaged and the owners are asking retribution of $3,000. In addition, the perpetrator mentioned his mother very often. He didn’t remember many details. The police was reminding him of some of them. At the end, embarrassed, but with a sly smile he took out a small roll of toilet paper. He unrolled it. The separate sheets were full of small letters, as if the guy who had written them, had tried not to waste even the smallest space. The jail, the conditions, the policemen, the guard, the questioning, the black guy in the next cell who was put in jail even though innocent, all these was written on these few yards of toilet paper. It was perhaps the beginning of a writer’s career.

The attorney got his fees, but he was disappointed that he couldn’t figure out from the police report why his client had been mentioning the word “mother.” He asked me a few times. I told him that my student didn’t remember, but I had guessed that he had been screaming, “You capitalist mother!” He was a leftist. If I lived on limited means that he was living on, I would have become an extreme leftist!

I went to see the door. I could fix it for $200.

Both of my students graduated successfully. The second one moved from the left to the right and now is in the middle. I wouldn’t be surprised if some day I would read “Notes From Prison on a Toilet Paper.”
Vantzeti Vassilev, born in 1945 in Radomir, Bulgaria. He earned a PhD in chemical engineering in Sofia. He immigrated in 1988 and has lived in New York since 1989. He worked for the New York Department of Environmental Protection. He is the author of *The Seeds of Fear* (1991), a novel based on autobiographical data describing life in Bulgaria in the past 50 years and the absurdities that result from totalitarian society. A portion of the novel describes the lives of prisoners held without sentence in Belene, the infamous concentration camp in Bulgaria. These stories were told firsthand to the author by the prisoners. The novel was presented at the 20th Annual International Arts Festival 1991 of Cross-Cultural Communications in New York. His second novel, *The Trains of Roma*, was published in 2006. The book was presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2009. His third book, *Short Stories from NYPL*, was published in 2011.

JOE WEIL/U.S.A.

ACADEMIA

You are nothing
you are
nothing you
are
nothing if not that bright glint
of semen
or is that seagull on the horizon?

Distinguished by the sibilants of excellence:
the bright ivory tusk that gores you

brings you down to mix the blood of your thigh

with the dust or is that some other story?

Oh yes. You were digressing.

It is another story: it will not fit in with the works published section

it comes out of the sun and makes you squint, makes you

vomit up your dead, as if you were a sea of

qualifying adjectives:

They will tell you this poem is too obscure.

You are angry. You never meant to be. There is

the grey man – over there

he is mistranslated, and the red woman over there

who is misread, and every one is guarded

as if the boar were already prowling the quad
it’s eloquent achievements skewered high up on its tusks.

Joe Weil is currently a lecturer in the creative writing department at Binghamton University. He has published three full-length books of poetry as well as three chap books, the latest of which is The Plumber’s Apprentice, New York Quarterly press. He is also active as an editor (formerly editor of Ragazine, currently of MAgyy), and promoter of poetry. For a year he was publisher of Monk books and produced four chapbooks, one by the Pulitzer Prize winner, Mark Strand. Weil has a list of poems and photographs done with his friend, the artist Marco Munoz, as well as an e book of sonnets. After a long break, he has begun to compose music again.

Crossroads included a special event, so to speak, the reading of Stanley Kunitz’s poem “The Layers” in English, and then in several translations. Among the translations was one by Dr. John Smelcer in the native Ahtna, a disappearing native Alaskan language. Both the English original and Smelcer’s translation are reprinted here. Many thanks to “the other Stanley” (Barkan) for facilitating the multi-lingual reading of the poem.

THE LAYERS

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being abides, from which I struggle not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
“Live in the layers,
not on the litter.”

Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.

I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz

Nen’tah Dzi

Stanley Kunitz’s “The Layers” translated into the Ahtna Athabaskan language of Alaska

by John E. Smelcer
Sii ghayaał dez’aan,
sedze’ eldaan’,
‘el sii cic’uunen,
hwna eldaan’ ‘ida’
sii ‘estayteltaen stadelnen.
Sii ‘aen cit’aa’ak’e,
daak ‘aen sil’aa
tse tiye’ nilkanazilae
xuk’a t’uu yuul,
sii ‘aen kayax kudghil’iitden
nilyihghatses ts’en yabaaghe
‘el kon’ c’et’
c’aa kuk’tl’aa ninesk’ae,
k’edze’ tsiiin ceyiige’
t’ak k’e ts’enla’ des.
Sii tsii gha denaey
yii sii gheli ts’aat,
‘el denaey nadestaan!
Xaa c’asule’ ciz’aani uts’e kat’aen
ye dghos’itkay stadelnen?
Łts’ii niyaan
kon’ laedze’ ‘iita latsiin,
uyiits’ kulaele da’a k’edze’,
ts’iic unaen ghizet.
Sii nakeltaen, sii nakeltaen,
neniic uyighiyaa duuhwk’etle,
kae laltsicdze’ tiye’
ndaa sii daetl’,
‘el ‘aal ts’es k’e ten caax.
Yii tets t’uut’,
hwna yanlaey na’aay
‘el sii ghayaal tah tlaegge’,
yanlaey naes zaegge’ yanihwdinitaan:
“Ikae zdaa nen’nah dzi, c’eye’ ke’ łaets.”
Sii hwyaa lae ts’aan,
cu gutse eldaan’
yii giligak cu’ts’endze’
lae da’a stsesi.
Sii c’eye’ tl’aa cu’ts’endze’.

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March 31, 2012 Comments Off on CROSSROADS/Literary

Joel Gardner/Interview

by admin
Thirty Years Later:
A Conversation on John Gardner

With John Smelcer
Contributing Editor

This year marks the 30th commemoration of John Gardner’s tragic motorcycle accident. Poet, playwright, translator, medievalist, he is author of such novels as Nickel Mountain, Mickelsson’s Ghosts, Sunlight Dialogues, and October Light, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1976. His Grendel, now a classic, is a magnificent retelling of Beowulf from the monster’s point of view. Widely regarded as one of the best teachers of creative writing in America, Gardner was the author of numerous books on craft and literary criticism including The Art of Fiction, On Becoming a Novelist, Moral Fiction and The Forms of Fiction. In this candid conversation, Joel Gardner talks about his father with John Smelcer, Ragazine’s contributing editor and founder/co-judge of the “John Gardner Prize for Playwriting”.
JS: I knew your father from our letters. In the decade before email and the internet, we had a friendship in the old epistolary tradition. In 1982, I was an undergraduate at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, some 4,000 miles northwest of Binghamton, New York, where John was then teaching. I wanted to be a writer, and I heard that John Gardner was one of the best creative writing teachers in America. I recall I had seen him once on the *The Dick Cavett Show*. His slender *Grendel* amazed me. Having read *Beowulf* in junior high school, I loved his bold retelling. He taught me the importance of point of view and voice. From that summer up until his untimely death in September, we exchanged a series of letters on craft. He also guided my summer reading. I remember at the time he was working on his seminal *The Art of Fiction*. We “discussed” the overriding importance of Coleridge’s “vivid and continuous dream” in fiction writing, especially in the novel. Some of our “conversation” ended up almost word-for-word in the book when it was posthumously published a year or so later. In twenty-plus years that I’ve been teaching English, I’ve always used his books on craft in my creative writing courses. It’s often said how generous John was with his time. I wasn’t even a student at his university, and yet he expended postage and effort to teach me afar. Our friendship connected my life to Binghampton University in ways I could never have foreseen at the time.

JG: Dad was indeed a generous teacher. He was one of the few people I’ve ever heard of who would read and comment on the work of writers outside the formal atmosphere of the workshop or classroom. It was uncommon for him to ask for manuscripts from people who reached out to him with a letter or a phone call, and—where he sensed there was a willingness to learn—he was very generous and would provide feedback and encouragement, whether in the form of correspondence or critique. He was an incredibly perceptive reader, and he absorbed and retained material almost whole on a first reading. One of the things he shared with me is that he felt very lucky to have read all these stories and novels by students and colleagues, many of which might not ever appear in print. He felt his experience of literature was richer for having all that hopeful (though not always successful) fiction in his head. But how is it after three decades, you ended up teaching creative writing at the same university where my dad used to teach?

over 40. I was invited to visit Binghamton University to speak to classes about creative writing and to read from the book. Two years later, the university offered me a generous fellowship to earn a Ph.D. in English and creative writing. For the past five years, I’ve roamed the same halls and taught in the same classrooms as your father, whose presence still felt on campus. For instance, the room of the university’s literary magazine, *Harper’s Palate*, is named the John Gardner Room. I earned the degree last spring and was given the opportunity to teach in the department this year.

**JG:** As long as you’ve been in Binghamton, you must have a lot of friends and colleagues who were also friends of my father, right? Jan Quackenbush comes to mind. You may also be acquainted with Liz Rosenberg and Susan Thornton. Is Bernie Rosenthal still with the department?

**JS:** I’ve met Liz at a few readings, but as far as I know I’ve never met Susan or Bernie. In a strange coincidence, I knew Jan before I came to Binghamton. He and I were both teaching in Wilkes University’s residency MA/MFA creative writing program along with Norman Mailer’s son, Michael. I met Jan in the fall of 2004 after someone introduced us, saying that he had been a close friend of your father ever since your dad came to Binghamton in the late 1970s. With our mutual connection, we became good friends. He used to take me everywhere your dad used to haunt, even the exact place where John wrecked his motorcycle on that fateful September day in 1982. Jan used to ride with your dad, cruising the backroads from Binghamton to Montrose and Susquehanna, stopping by Jan’s little farmhouse for lunch and a beer. Although Wikipedia suggests that alcohol was the cause of your father’s death, Jan says that there was a dog that used to live at the house right at the bend in the road and that the damn thing always ran out to chase them whenever they motored by. Jan once said that he believes the dog probably ran out in front of John, who tried to avoid it and wrecked instead. I’ve ridden my motorcycle past that spot a few times, and I can see how it could have happened exactly like that. Jan gave me the leather jacket he used to wear when he rode with John. I recently wrote a poem about riding with your dad:

**RIDING WITH JOHN GARDNER**

I only knew Gardner from our letters.

But ever since I moved to the same town and haunt
the same university halls, I have this recurring dream:

We’re riding motorcycles on the backroads of New York and Pennsylvania on our way to Susquehanna or Montrose.

It’s summer and we’re a couple of badass poets in black leather & cool mirrored shades.

But then Grendel rides up on a hardtail Harley —

his shaggy fur ablaze in the sun, the road behind him aflame.

He pulls alongside, points a clawed finger, glares a gore-dangling grin, strops a yellow fang with a blistered tongue, rattles his head and bellows,

before he runs us off the road and gorges on our grisly carnage.

The dream always ends the same.

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I hope your father would approve. You once asked me which of your dad’s books is my favorite. Hands down it’s *Grendel*. I loved it from the first page with the obstinate goat with his hanging balls standing on the rocky crag. I remember telling your father thirty years ago that I wanted to do something similar with Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. As you know, I finished that novel a few years ago, and you were nice enough to read it and offer a few words for the dustcover. But his *Art of Fiction* and *On Becoming a Novelist* are never far from reach. Of all your dad’s books, which are your favorites and why?

**JG:** I love the poem. Probably the first book of my father’s that I really fell in love with was *The Sunlight Dialogues*. I was young the first time I read it — it had just come out — but it was a big, powerful book, and the story grabbed me. I could see so much of my father’s early life in Bat...
it (The Hodges being very much modeled on the extended Gardner family) that it served as a bridge to a past, a family archeology that I was only distantly a part of. But it was the magic of the book, not just the stunts the Sunlight Man pulls off, but some of the effects, like the chapter that begins cutting straight into her stream of consciousness. Of course the plot was rich, multi-layered, profluent — the wouldn’t have had the word for it then. Nickel Mountain is also a favorite, but for very different reasons. This book (October Light has the same quality, but in a more celebratory way) captures a man alone in the world coming to terms with a world that’s very different from what believes is right and just. In Nickel Mountain, there is a gorgeous wedding scene, in Callie’s POV, that just knocks your socks off. There is some just so compelling about this monstrous man, Henry Soames, who runs a diner on a road over a mountain to and from more or less nowhere that feels truly like the despair any of us feels when we’re stuck, and we know what to do about it. I love the generosity of the book, the love in its pages. The scene of the birth in the hospital in the snowstorm is pretty mystical.

I had a hand in Mickelsson’s Ghosts, not just by virtue of the pictures I took for the book, but because I came into my dad’s study one day with a handful of wallpaper from a back room he was remodeling in that on Coleridge Road into a dining room. There were five or six or seven different layers of wallpaper, each seeming to indicate a different use for the room in past times. That scene is in the book somewhere, Mickelsson seeing all the different kinds of wallpaper when remodeling the fictional room, but it’s also the genesis of the book, or at least so Dad told me he started writing it. MG is a big, complex, feisty and supernatural journey. It seems both a lot more grounded in realism and a lot more shaded occult weirdness than any of Dad’s other works. I like that about it, again, there is some tour-de-force writing in there, a whole chapter
takes place in Mickelsson’s mind while he’s driving, for one. By the end of the chapter, you are so in the vivid scene, that you are shocked and thrilled when you find yourself riding with Mickelsson, then shocked and thrilled again when you hit the end of the chapter and find yourself holding a book in your hand, that you’ve actually just been reading the whole time. Spooky stuff, even without the witches and the ghosts.

I pretty much love all of the books, but I haven’t grown to love *The Wreckage of Agathon*. I haven’t really even given it a fair shake. It is an ugly book to read, at least the first hundred pages or so, that I couldn’t get past the opening. Truth be told, I’ve never gone back to finish it. Maybe one of these days. Some of the short fiction is magnificent. *The King’s Indian* works as a whole like a great marvelous ship, with each story bursting with a different kind of life and magic: The New Jerusalem indeed! There are so many intricate things going on in so of those stories, I pick it up every few years just to be reminded how story can be. I feel that way about the stories in *The Art of Living*, too. The wilderness and the range of Dad’s voice in the earlier collection is ambitious. You heft the book in your hand, and you can taste the gunpowder. I’m reading *Jason and Medea* right now. It’s muscular and strange, and I can’t help thinking it wouldn’t take much to turn it into a gorgeous animated movie, though you’d have to cut a lot of the story. But it would be ravishing.

**JS:** This raises an interesting question. I have two daughters, and I often wonder if they’ll read my books, and if so, what will they learn about me as a person? So much of who I am is on every page of every book, story, or poem I’ve ever written. Will they come to know more from reading my books? And when I am gone from this earth, will reading my work reconnect them to me momentarily? At such instances, will I live again? Is there much of your father in his books? These are questions I think you are better suited to answer.
John Gardner – Early Rider

JG: What your daughters learn about who you as a person are depends of course, on the kind of writer that you are. I think it without saying that if you approach writing with the kind of integrity and fierce belief in the power of story and poem to effect change and bring about a better world—as my father believed and advocated—there is no question your daughters will come to know you better through your writing. But there are two other consequences that are even more interesting. First, it is almost certain that you’ll be a different, better and more present parent to your daughters by virtue of the work you do as a writer. Part of the change that writing with seriousness and integrity brings about is almost imperceptible, gradual, but real growth in self-knowledge and character. Secondly, what writing does — and here we can draw the real meaning of what my father meant by “moral” fiction — is it provides the reader with subtle shadings and an ear to the fine tuning of a character’s decisions in dramatic situations, and that leads right back to the source (you, the author), revealing not just who you as a writer are, how you think, react and reflect, what you value and how you fight to protect those values, including your loved ones. So your daughters (if you realize this is Thing Three) will also see a better version of themselves in what you write, not just explicitly, as when you tilt aspects of them into characters or thinly veil situations lifted from real life, but in the example of your very mode of thought and love. For that’s where all of this is really leading: the kind of writing we’re talking about is Love. And love, written, is a powerful and enduring source of comfort and strength. I feel it every time I happen into a bookstore, and I can reach out and touch the binding of one of my father’s books, Nickel Mountain especially. Or The Art of Living, which is a very love-driven collection. “Redemption” is itself a powerful and dangerous act of love and forgiveness, though of course was hard for Dad’s parents to see it in this light.

JS: Speaking of On Moral Fiction, I think Gore Vidal, Barth, and
critics of the book got it all wrong. I spoke to Updike about it (we had a heated debate), but he eventually agreed that all good novelists write true, as Hemingway so often admonished. Cormac McCarthy says that all great writing is about life and death. I think you do a good job of clarifying what your father meant (and which I agree wholeheartedly). I’d like to return to Caliban for a moment. My v says that there is a lot of me in my portrayal of Caliban. I created be earthy and elemental and brutish. He farts, snorts, burps, pick nose, scratches his groins . . . a typical male, if you ask me. Do yo there’s any of your father’s personality in his portrayal of Grendel? Would you say he was obstinate, stubborn, or a rebel against aut (like Grendel)? Your dad must have had a blast breathing life into

JG: There’s no question my father identified with the monster — yes, John, he enjoyed playing the role of any of the characters he was writing, inhabiting the character — but he also used the character of Grendel as a foil, a fictive stand-in to test his ideas about art and life, what makes us human, and what it is not to be human. There is also certainly something of my father in his Grendel (and something of his mother in Grendel’s mother, when you get down to it): he felt monstrous — cause of being a monster, possibly believed he was part monster — after k his brother as a child. My father knew for a fact there was an abyss, pretty much knew right where the edge was. He’d been there, so that and all things monstrous associated with the abyss — was to him fa territory. But as a foil, he’s holding Grendel up as an example of w would all be — any of us — without culture and community. In no the monster, Grendel, ever a hero, and yet he does go on the prototypical hero’s journey. The monster is also a test (as you know) of Sartrean existentialism. It turns out that existentialism is all well and good if are sitting at a café table on the sidewalk all day, smoking French cigarettes, but it isn’t such a good model for living. I remember when my father was working on The Wreckage of Agathon. Now there was a burping, farting, ass-grabbing, drunken madman, all right. And tha exactly how I remember my father behaving back in the early seven admit his inhabiting that character really put me off reading the bo

You ask about obstinate, stubborn, whether John Gardner was, or w he was a rebel? He was a fire-breathing monster of a cause on two u hell-bent to change the world, to make it better. He was Tolstoyan in approach to writing and teaching, and he expected us to read, to le think through the kinds of elaborate and fully complex moral circumstances his characters had to slog through so that we would i
better equipped to make the best decisions we’re capable of in life. That’s finally what he meant at that last Bread Loaf when he admonished the crowd in the Little Theater that “... [I]f you’re not writing politically, you’re not writing.” So rebel? I’d say yes. Sometimes an ugly one, but for all the right reasons. And yes, you as Caliban: I can see that. Caliban and Grendel riding into the sunset, lobbing fictional and poetic bombs into meek and modest crowds feeling so good about themselves because they went to church on Sunday.

**JS:** The final question is the easiest. Like your father, you are a motorcyclist. What’s your ride nowadays? I ride a black and chrome 2008 Yamaha V-Star Midnight Special. Sweet!

**JG:** You are right there. My first motorcycle was a 1975 BMW R65, a 650 cc boxer that was a great introduction to motorcycling, very gentlemanly. Now I ride a K1200RS, a very elegant machine, well-balanced and capable — especially for distance touring — but not so gentlemanly.

**About Joel Gardner:**

Joel Gardner was born in Chico, California. He is currently producing a feature-length documentary on John Gardner, SUNLIGHT MAN, and with his wife, Catie Camp, he writes and produces video for educational institutions and non-profit organizations. He currently lives in Newton, Massachusetts, where his two sons are in high school. His website is campgardner.com.
My interest in conscientious food consumption began at an environmental film festival I attended in college. It was the sort of event where the university’s Tai Chi instructor led classes in the lobby and the local food co-op handed out samples of organic chocolate milk. I was nineteen, the daughter of a vegetarian, but I had never before heard the term “organic.” The films on gardening and the
declining bee population both troubled and enlivened me, and I sat down for the festival’s final event — a round-table discussion about local food — ready to embrace a new way of eating. I nodded while the organic dairy farmer discussed the importance of organic dairy farms. He spoke with passion, and I pledged to support local initiatives.

During the question and answer session, however, a traditional dairy farmer in jeans and a flannel shirt stood up, his face red, and started to challenge the organic farmer. The non-organic dairy farmer insisted that he took good care of his cows. His cows were happy; they needed antibiotics to stay healthy. “I came here to try and learn something, not to be criticized,” he said, his arms shaking at his sides.

As I sat there, my hands clenched around my notebook, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for the non-organic farmer. He couldn’t have been more than thirty years old, yet his entire way of life was being challenged. I imagined him driving back to his farm in the dark January evening feeling depressed. What if all of this wasn’t worth it? he might think. Such emptiness — that threatened love for his cows. Changing the food system, I realized, required more than a roomful of consumers who agreed to buy organic milk.

Since that evening, as I’ve tried to navigate environmental conversations and figure out a “way of being” that satisfies my values, I’ve thought about that farmer often. Although I’m pleased to see that “food” has become an issue of increasing concern, with narratives such as Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* reaching the bestseller list, I also know the answers to the food issue remain as complex and diverse as ever. If someone argues that we should switch to small-scale farms, someone else says small farms would never manage to feed the world. If someone argues that eating animals is cruel and uses too many resources, someone else argues that a complete switch to vegetarianism would require even more oil. If someone calls meat-eating a form of “specieism,” someone else argues that homo sapiens have killed cows and hogs for centuries — that it is natural to the human condition. I listen to these conversations and feel deflated. Food, like so many other issues, has polarized American culture — a situation that does little to help us find solutions, and in fact blinds us to the very real issues at stake.

Responding to recent research in animal studies that has found that animals do have emotions — and even their own senses of morality —
Donna Haraway addresses what I would consider the pith of the problem:

There is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to be with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace. Because and killing cannot be hygienically separated does not mean that any way of eating and killing is fine, merely a matter of taste and culture. Multispecies human and nonhuman ways of living and are at stake in practices of eating. (295)

In other words, whether a person eats meat or plants, buys food from industrial farms or the local farmer’s market, everyone is involved in a food industry defined, at its core, by death. There is no “animal rights” to Haraway. But she does call into question industrial farms, and she does require us to make thoughtful decisions about what we eat. The problem, then, is how to create those conversations.

Shortly after attending that first environmental film festival, I started purchasing produce from the co-op and regularly attending farmer’s markets. Like so many of the festival’s attendees, I saw local food production as an antidote to the factory farm, a means of providing healthier, more sustainable food, and a way to increase civic involvement. But the sort of conscientious food consumption for which Haraway calls necessitates more than just a change in habit. It necessitates, on a more profound level, an alternation in one’s conceptions of “place” and “animals.” My personal quest to make informed decisions about food eventually brought me to community gardening. This activity, more than anything else, has helped me understand what it will take to transform a culture where food comes boxed or wrapped in plastic, to a culture in which consumers make conscientious choices about the food they eat.

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I first became involved with community gardens in the spring of 2009. I was living in Lincoln, Nebraska, and had moved there the August before in order to attend graduate school.

Ironically, I was initially attracted to community gardens not because of their environmental benefits, but rather my desire to grow plants. As a child, I had accumulated a list of gardening ventures I recognize now for their passion if not their success. I once dug up my mother’s
Iris bulbs to plant a vegetable garden. I tried to convince my father to let me build a greenhouse. In bursts of exuberance, I routinely started seeds in January, only to see them grow too quickly for the late Minnesota springs. For a while, I gave up on gardening. Between college, internships, and jobs, I moved around too often during the summers. But I longed for a garden nonetheless, and I saw a community garden near my apartment in Lincoln, the choice seemed obvious. I wanted to get my hands dirty, and, remembering that film festival, do my part to save the earth.

Looking back, I’m not surprised by my continual desire to work with plants, nor the eventual effects it had on my environmental values. A wide body of research in fact unites the two. In his book *Biophilia*, evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson argues that humans have an “innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (1). The brain, he contends, “evolved in a biocentric world, not a machine-regulated world,” and thus we deprive ourselves of our full capacities when removing ourselves from that landscape (“Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic” 32):

People can grow up with the outward appearance of normality in an environment largely stripped of plants and animals, in the same way that passable looking monkeys can be raised in laboratory cages and cattle fattened in feeding bins. Asked if they were happy, these people would probably say yes. Yet something vitally important would be missing, not merely the knowledge and pleasure that can be imagined and might have been, but a wide array of experiences that the human brain is peculiarly equipped to receive. (*Biophilia* 118)

In other words, although the majority of the American population live in cities—and may find city life normal and perfectly reasonable—they subsist in an environment very different from that in which the human brain first evolved, and thus, whether they realize it or not, yearn...
some sort of interaction with the natural world.

In *Made for Each Other*, Meg Daley Olmert uses the hormone oxytocin to give support to Wilson’s theories and further link biophilia with an environmental sense of care. Oxytocin is most often associated with childbirth and breastfeeding — the hormone that helps establish immediate emotional link between mother and child — but Olmert studied how oxytocin is released in a much larger variety of situations: when humans pet domestic animals, for instance, or when humans interact with their crops. Indeed, it was the domestication of animals and the movement toward agriculture that, to Olmert, caused us to stay put, and be happy there. “The more we handled and cajoled our crops,” Olmert argues, “the more we became emotionally rooted to the land” (141). This, Olmert posits, is why we stayed put even during times of drought or hardship. We were connected with the environment; oxytocin created a strong sense of attachment.

The association between biophilia and an environmental ethic are so great that Olmert, like Wilson, warns against the past century’s removal from agriculture. The release of oxytocin when milking cows, weeding, or picking insects off of plants influenced the brain in ways we are not prepared for now that we’ve move to urban centers and, at most, interact with pets. Olmert argues that we’ve come to experience “oxytocin deprivation,” a condition that Olmert links to increases in depression, autism, and a variety of other mood disorders:

The truth is that we are, for the first time in human history, working without a social safety net, and it’s beginning to show. The amazing social experiment called domestication or civilization is over, an contentment we eked out of our efforts to connect to animals and community has scattered — with us — to the wind.

We have become unstuck for the first time in human history. We are not beholden to family clans or limited to the society in which we were born. The care of plants and animals once caused us to settle down, learn to live together, and think of ourselves as caretakers and citizens. For twelve thousand years, we sacrificed self-interest to the care each other, our crops, and our animals. (196-197)

The sense of care that Olmert links here with “settling down” strikes me, especially since it correlates so closely with other research on place-attachment. Much like Olmert, Lawrence Buell has argued humans experience a “thinning” of placeness as mobility increases.
Whereas previous generations of homo sapiens settled in one location, identifying emotionally with the area closest to their homes, Buell contends that today’s highly mobile homo sapiens identify place in a manner that resembles an “archipelago” of emotional attachment more than a concentric ring. Olmert’s discussion of oxytocin, then, reminds us of “placelessness’s” costs. For Olmer of the environment and care for the welfare of animals is linked intricately with one’s ability to stay put. Now that we’ve given up small-scale agriculture, we seem to have lost our ability to connect ourselves, other humans, and other species — connections necessary for the maintenance of ecological and moral food practices.

When I think of myself that early spring in Nebraska, when I first joined a community garden, I’m surprised how well I fit Olmert’s descriptions. I had grown up in eastern, and then southeastern Minnesota, where, in accordance with Buell’s discussion of place attachment, I’d grown increasingly fond of rivers, bluffs, and tree relatively sedentary upbringing, combined with plenty of positive outdoor experiences, resulted in an emotional attachment to Minnesota’s landscape — an attachment that couldn’t help but influence my reaction to Nebraska’s ecosystem. The endless field of corn I drove past when moving to Lincoln, and the flat, concrete landscape of the city (where what I would call a “ravine” was labeled a river) appealed to me little. As Buell would have predicted, my archipelago-like movement had caused my placeness to thin. I sighed whenever I left the state for holidays, slouched in my car as I drove back toward the brown plains.

Even more important: I cared little for the ecological discussions taking place there. Although I recycled everything I could, shopped at the local co-op, and walked or biked to the university rather than drive, I did this blindly and out of habit — not out of a concern for the Nebraskan landscape, or for a concern with local discussions about food. Nebraska is home to some of the country’s largest meatpacking plants. The “cornhuskers” provide a large percentage of the nation’s ethanol. When discussing environmental issues in freshman composition courses, I always encountered a handful of students who grew up on farms, whose parents now grew corn that was turned into ethanol. These students’ faces, like the dairy farmer at the film festival years before, would redden if anyone criticized farming subsidies, especially those involving corn. I didn’t have the interest or the background information to moderate these conversations. I returned to comma splices. The uses of the semicolon.
My outlook began to change once I became involved in the community garden. Suddenly, as I purchased seeds, tilled the soil, and planted rows of onions and peas, I wanted to be in Nebraska. The garden was often the first stop I made after returning from weekend trips. I wanted to know how the zucchini were doing, how the tomatoes were coming along. I spent weekend mornings and weekend evenings weeding, spreading new compost beneath the tomato plants, making sure the neighbor’s pumpkin vine wasn’t encroaching on my carrots. And I enjoyed the work. I felt content. Those trips to the community garden, whether to weed, water, or exchange produce with a neighbor, became the highlight of my days. And in the autumn, when my kitchen counters overflowed with tomatoes that needed to be stewed and frozen, zucchini and carrots that needed to be blanched, I realized how thankful I was to be living in Lincoln. I no longer saw the city as something foreign to me. I had become a part of the ecosystem.

Particularly germane to this essay, however, I also became more aware of the complexities of the food system. In early July, potato lacewings overtook my rows of beans and peas. Within a week, the leaves of each plant were riddled with small holes, and the stems had begun to shrivel. My reaction amazed me. I, who by that point shopped almost entirely at the local co-op and felt a little sick when looking at non-organic fruit, suddenly wanted to purchase pesticide. Ideals aside, I wanted the quick fix, and had the community garden allowed pesticides, I likely would have stopped at the local garden center and picked up the lacewing equivalent of Raid. As it was, I tried a concoction of garlic water, but that didn’t work—perhaps because the plants were so infested already—and I ended up harvesting only a small handful of beans and peas.

I mention this because I believe it illustrates where community gardens have the most potential. Yes, I began to care more for my surroundings and my neighborhood, and yes, my time in the community garden affected me psychologically and thus hormonally in ways that mirror the effects of oxytocin, but even more important: I developed a more nuanced understanding of the food industry’s complexities. Whereas before I might have made, or been tempted to make, all-encompassing statements about organic food and how everyone should support organic farms, I began to understand the very human impulses that have led us to value our own consumption over the health of the environment. I, as a result, became more aware of the diversity of opinions and perspectives, more accepting of other viewpoints. I still valued organic food practices over all others, but I...
I understood enough that I would encourage and open up a conversation rather than respond in ways that caused polarization. Which isn’t to say that I see community gardening as a “quick fix” to the controversy over food. Local food production has its flaws. One of the greatest criticisms against local food production is that it represents pastoralism and relies on an illogical cultural myth for support. For instance, in a recent issue of *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, Vasile Stnescu warns that locavores “engage in the construction of a literary pastoral, a desire to return to a nonexistent past, which falsely romanticizes the ideals of a local based lifestyle. They therefore gloss over the issues of sexism, racism, speciesism, homophobia and anti-immigration sentiments which an emphasis only on the local, as opposed to the global, can entail” (8). In particular, Stnescu criticizes Kingsolver and her book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* for not addressing the socioeconomic constraints of her project, which entailed a year of eating only local food. Stnescu points out that Kingsolver’s career was well-established, she took the year off to garden and write a book, thus she had the time to make her own cheese and cook meals for her family. Families in different socioeconomic situations, especially women with time-consuming careers outside of the home, Stnescu argues, would never be able to live the same way (21). I believe Stnescu is right to identify and criticize these points — all facets of the food industry, whether local or industrial, need that sort of criticism; we need to become reflective eaters and thinkers in regards to all the implications of our food choices — but I also wonder if Stnescu was too quick to criticize on the grounds of pastoralism. By doing so, he immediately discredits the centuries of agriculture in which, as Olmert and Wilson discuss, our brains evolved.

Interestingly enough, this essay, too, could be discounted quickly for falling under the fallacy of “pastoralism.” And if I merely advocated community gardening for its (likely untrue) ability to foster self-reliance, perhaps the essay would warrant that condemnation. However, that is not what I experienced. Instead, it was the *actual* act of participating in agriculture, that proved important to me. Indeed, what I admire most about Kingsolver’s book is the way it validates what some would consider a pastoral practice. Kingsol
detailed descriptions and exuberant support for gardening do much to illustrate the psychological gains that come from interacting intimately with the environment. As Kingsolver realizes by the end of the summer:

We love our gardens so much it hurts. For their sake we’ll bend till our backs ache, yanking out fistfuls of quackgrass by the roots we were tearing out the hair of the world. We lead our favorite hoe like a dance partner down one long row and up the next, in a dance marathon that leaves us exhausted. We scrutinize the yellow beetles with black polka dots that have suddenly appeared like chickenpox on the bean leaves. We spend hours bent to our crops as if enslaved, only now and then straightening our backs and wiping a hand across sweaty brow. (177)

Gardening, for Kingsolver, isn’t easy or overly idealized. More than anything else, Kingsolver depicts gardening as a type of work. Her garden, like my own, requires constant attention. Things do not always go right: insects infest particular plants; weeds threaten her rows of crops. Occasionally, the garden requires more energy than she has to give. Nonetheless — in fact, because of this — Kingsolver comes to care, in a very real way, for her garden, and by association her local environment.

I also respect Kingsolver’s Animal, Vegetable, Miracle because it demonstrates how that increased sense of care can lead to a more nuanced understanding of food consciousness. Kingsolver calls herself a “woman changed by experience,” and by the end of the year, her daughters begin making conscious choices that demonstrate their growing awareness of the interrelations of species. Kingsolver’s youngest isn’t disgusted by the earworm she finds on corn from the farmer’s market — she is eager to feed it to her chickens. Kingsolver’s eldest daughter understands that when the turkeys get into the garden and eat the best-looking tomatoes, she shouldn’t complain. She that, in being consumed by the turkeys, the tomatoes will eventually make their way to the kitchen table (336). What could be better support for gardening than this? As scientists continue to explore evolutionary psychology, to understand the link between hormones such as oxytocin and one’s interaction with animals and plants, I can’t help but believe that one of the best ways to solve today’s environmental challenges is to place ourselves in situations where our bodies and brains evolved to work best. Simple as they might seem, community gardens have the power to transform the way we’ve come to see
place in the food chain and the environment as a whole.

My observations about community gardens were affirmed two years after that first experience in Nebraska, when I moved to upstate New York. Although my environmental values were more mature this time around, the move brought with it a similar displacement. Gone were the flat fields of Nebraska that I had somehow grown to appreciate along with the long growing season. Now, I lived in a hilly river valley, but unlike the river valleys I’d known in Minnesota, where bluffs to rolling farmland, these hills were endless. They stretched to the Allegheny mountains to the west and the Catskills to the east, making the bluffs I’d known in Minnesota feel diminished. I knew it would take time and energy to once again feel rooted. Nonetheless, I viewed my new environment with a distanced curiosity; I could not change my lack of attachment.

Even more unsettling, the economic strain of the move to New York began to affect the choices I made. I remember standing at the grocery store before Thanksgiving, looking at the fifty-dollar, grass-fed turkeys and the discounted nine-dollar turkeys. I had forty dollars left in my checking account. I felt guilty as I picked up the discounted turkey. I didn’t think I had a choice. My budget forced me to re-realize how complicated the food system is. The subsidization of factory farms allows for a much cheaper meat than many otherwise would be able to purchase, making it easy to become complicit in a food system one otherwise wouldn’t stand for. Acting on principles regarding food often entails readjusting one’s food budget — a difficult task for many, especially considering today’s economic recession. The situation depressed me, and as the winter wore on, I knew with increasing certainty that I needed to garden. I researched local food initiatives available to me and signed up for a community garden a few blocks from my apartment.

That spring, I once again planted tomato seeds in peat moss. I drew garden plans on notebook paper. When the ground was workable, I bought seed packets for lettuce, peas, carrots, zucchini, and spinach. I spent evenings and weekends tilling the soil, planting my rows, watching for weeds, and in doing so, reminding myself of what I already known: how much I needed the practice of gardening to once again care about my new community. I needed the rhythm of that spring and summer—the almost daily weeding, the evening trips to the garden to cut lettuce for dinner or a handful of strawberries from communal patch. As I ran my hands over the onion leaves, felt t
weight of the growing tomatoes, and picked squash bug eggs from the undersides of zucchini leaves, I once again, in a quiet way, began to feel like a participant in that particular ecosystem — a fellow species entangled it in all.

I am not an expert at gardening, nor do I have answers to the problems surrounding animal welfare and contemporary agriculture practices. But I do believe that if we want to address these issues on a large scale, we first have to make people care. We have to make people concerned enough that they are willing to think creatively, but also intricately about the food system and how their choices affect the species that share this planet with us. We must give up the ideology of human exceptionalism and re-envision our place in the food chain. For this to occur, community gardening can provide a necessary point of departure.

Of course, I do not underestimate the difficulty in giving up the ideology of human exceptionalism. It remains so firmly rooted in our culture that it has shown up even here; much of this essay discusses food and community farming from the viewpoint that improved consumption will benefit humanity. We will eat better. We will feel better. And our descendants will survive longer on this planet. However, that doesn’t make giving up human exceptionalism less worthy a goal, nor does it make community gardens less effective in engaging that goal. As Haraway concludes at the end of *When Species Meet*:

Giving up human exceptionalism has consequences that require one to know more at the end of the day than at the beginning and to cast oneself with some ways of life and not others in the never settled biopolitics of entangled species. Further, one must actively cast oneself with some ways of life and not others without making any of three tempting moves: being self-certain; relegating those who eat differently to a subclass of vermin, the underprivileged, or the unenlightened; and giving up on knowing more, including scientifically, and feeling more, including scientifically, about how to eat well — together. (Haraway 295)

Community gardens have so much potential precisely because they allow us to do just this. They create communities of people — most often neighbors — who are willing and interested in discussing food issues together, whether on how to keep away pests, how to best certain vegetables, or how to enrich the soil with compost. They
encourage curiosity — they encourage us to learn more about gardening and planting, and, when overrun with zucchini in July, cooking. By getting us outdoors, interacting with other people and plants, they, as Olmert has argued, create environments in which we are hormonally encouraged to be more nurturing. For all these reasons, then, I’ve come to see community gardens not just as a means of beautifying neighborhoods and creating closer communities, creating and maintaining conscientious consumers. I’ve already signed up for my plot this summer.

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Works Cited


About the author:

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Jennie Case lives in Goshen and Binghamton, New York. Her poetry and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in Poet Lore, PADDLEFISH, Hawk & Handsaw, Potomac Review, Water~Stone Review, Third Coast, and Poetry East, among others.

February 27, 2012  Comments Off on Jennie Case/Creative Nonfiction

Olaf Heine/Photography, Interview

by admin

James Woods, Los Angeles, 2005
Living the Dream

By Michael Foldes

There’s a lot to love about photography, but few photographers make it relatively easy to understand why. How they do it is another thing. It’s not just in the equipment they shoot with, the finish of the paper they print on, or their subjects, but the connection the photographer makes to a moment that will be forever fixed in time. Hang forty or fifty of those moments in a gallery, or in a long hallway, and you have what truly be called suspended animation. Crisp. Clearly visible to the unpracticed as well as the practiced eye. Past perfect.

The following interview, with portfolios including images from his “I Love You but I’ve Chosen Rock,” and “Leaving the Comfort Zone” from Hatje Cantz Publishing, 2010 and 2008, respectively, provide evidence of Heine’s interpretive visual skill, dedication to craft, and a long-term love of music. Born in Hannover and schooled in Berlin, he moved to Los Angeles in 1998 where he added to his portfolio of celebrities, musicians and West Coast life. The recipient of numerous awards, his work has appeared on album covers, in magazines, advertisements and in music videos. From the following interview images, we think you’ll know better why.

Ragazine: Where do you call home, these days, and where is your studio?

Olaf Heine: That’s a difficult question. What’s home? On a physical level I’d have to say that my base is in Berlin these days and that is also where my studio is. I love the city. Berlin for sure is my home. But I have spent quite some time in other places the past fifteen years. I’ve split my time between Los Angeles and Berlin for eleven years. LA is kind of a home as well. Berlin and Los Angeles are twin cities and although they are quite different, there are a lot of similarities in a deeper kind of aspect. I am still travelling there every few months spending time with friends and colleagues and also shooting there a lot. Taking the best of both worlds you’d like. On a deeper, metaphysical or spiritual level I also must say that Ibiza/Spain became kind of a home for me. I am spending my summers there since the mid-nineties, did quite a lot of shoots there and got
married there a few years ago. The small island in the Mediterranean is a very calm and inspiring place for me.

Q: When and how did you get involved with photography? Did you start out working for an agency, or another photographer?

A: Ever since I can remember, ever since I was a little child I was taking pictures. In the first place it was just for fun, for the sake of playing with this little technical gadget. But then I started recording my past time. I documented my family, my friends and my life. Later, in my teenage years I started going to concerts a lot and that’s how I became involved with music photography. I grew up in a little village and besides photography I loved rock music. So the camera became the door opener to this fascinating world, gave me the chance to get out and travel the world. I didn’t play an instrument but I loved that whole scene, the bonding, the travelling circus atmosphere. So the camera gave me the key to that world.

Q: Who or what would you say has been your principal motivator to take pictures?

A: If it wasn’t for my affinity for music I’d probably be an architect. My motivation was really to become a part of the music world and to record my life. I didn’t play an instrument but I loved that whole scene, the bonding, the travelling circus atmosphere. So the camera gave me the key to that world.

Q: Do you have a formal education in art, design or photography that you bring to a session?

A: I am self taught and learned by jumping in at the deep end. I studied a lot of books and bugged a lot of people who knew about photography. I made tons of mistakes and learned from them. After I worked as a photographer for a few years I finally moved to Berlin in the early nineties and attended a photography school (Lette-Verein).
Q: What kind of camera(s) do you favor, and why?

A: Without sounding arrogant or comparing myself, but would you Picasso about his favorite brush? I find discussions about technical or favorite cameras, lenses, etc. boring and dull. I work with a whole lot of cameras. Whether I use a small or medium format, whether I use digital or analog, whether I use Photoshop or Polaroid, that really depends on idea or vision for a certain image. I sometimes even use snapshot or cameras to produce images.

Q: When you’re still shooting film, how much do you manipulate in the darkroom? Do you scan and work digitally after the fact? What papers do you like to print on?

A: I do manipulate sometimes. Sometimes more, sometimes less. Again it depends on the subject. I just finished an advertising campaign with Germany's national football team which I didn’t Photoshop at all. But then again I like to freedom of being able to do so if I wanted to. Same in the darkroom (even though I have to admit that I didn’t enter any darkroom since the late nineties). But my printer has the possibilities and I like to sometimes take advantage of it for printing. I still like a good old silver gelatine print.


A: In general I enjoy the shoots that give me most creative freedom and productive collaborations. In the past this has been the case a lot in music industry. But ever since they lost a good deal of money through the digital age and the downloading of music files, they have also lost courage, which makes it harder for a photographer. There is more pressure to succeed and therefore less and less creative leeway. I am
big football (soccer) fan, so working with a lot of talented players,
especially with the ones from my favorite team give me a lot of joy and
happiness. I'm living my childhood dream, right?
Q: What photographers do you admire, and who would you most like to work with (living or dead)?

A: When I started out I admired documentary street photographers
Cartier Bresson or Robert Frank. Especially the latter’s dark and moody visuality had an impact on my earlier work. I am also a kid of the eighties and grew up admiring some of the most talented black and white photographers. I like the diversity of Albert Watson for example. Bruce Weber is another one. His ‘Let’s get lost’ documentary about Chet Baker had a big influence on my work.

Q: Did you have a mentor? Who?

A: This would be German photographer Jim Rakete who was doing black and white portraits of the German music scene in the eighties. I met him in the early nineties and even assisted for him on one or two occasions. He supported me quite a bit and gave me a lot of advice.

Q: What’s the most remarkable aspect for you in being a photographer?

A: The most important aspect in photography for me is that I get to see so much of the world and meet so many talented people. It really is about the moment itself, the process and collaboration. The journey is the destination, isn’t it?
Q: If you had your choice of subjects/projects to shoot, what would it be?

A: I do have my choice of projects sometimes. Besides my commissions, I always work on personal projects. Throughout the year I try to take

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Stroke, Berlin, 2008
weeks and months off to develop and pursue certain ideas. There are portraiture portfolios of different people as well as landscape and architectural projects.

Q: Obviously you're not intimidated by fame. Have you always it easy to work around ‘personalities’?

A: I try to look at my subjects in their entirety and not just in relation to fame and stardom, if you know what I mean. To me it’s more important that I work with creative minds and that makes the collaboration challenging and thrilling. Their fame is irrelevant to me.

Q: Who or what was the most difficult subject you’ve had to photograph? Why?

A: Of course there are shootings that are more difficult than others but I wouldn’t tell you who those were with. I try to be as loyal as I can to my subjects.

Q: Do you have any favorite photographs, or one in particular you wish you’d had a chance to shoot over?

A: No. I don’t. I try to not look back too much and/or regret… Everything happens for a reason and if I mess up, I mess up. I try to learn from mistakes and move on.

Q: Any advice for young people starting out in the business?

A: That’s a tricky one. What would I say? Forget about sleep the first of years? Be grateful and humble? Try to not be too satisfied with your work? No seriously. I would say that one should not concentrate on photography alone. There is so much medial interplay between the different creative forms nowadays. My job needs some fundamamenta knowledge in graphic design, advertising, architecture, fashion, film marketing and so many other aspects. Take your time and look around what I’d probably say.

Q: Thank you, Olaf.
The Sad Journey of Gene Clark

By Jeff Katz

“Poor Gene.”

I was talking to Tony Leone, drummer for the roots powerhouse Ollabelle. We were discussing a Roger McGuinn-Gene Clark bootleg, *Live at The Bottom Line 1978*. Indeed, Clark’s career is a tragic tale of a super talent who, preyed upon by personal demons, left the fame of the mid-‘60s rock scene and subsequently created album after album of fine work, only to be ignored by the record-buying public.

When Clark quit The Byrds after their second album, the group lost their best songwriter and finest singer. Though the trembling warble of McGuinn was the signature voice and the crystalline precision of Crosby’s harmonies made the band’s tunes richer than those of an average pop group, it was Gene who provided the soul, a warm husk with a strong hint of vulnerability.

Why did Gene Clark leave The Byrds in May of 1966? His fear of flying gets the most press and it’s true he departed a flight and, in effect, the group. There are other reasons: nervous strain, general illness, guilt over his financial success as primary songwriter (“I’ll Feel A Whole Lot Better” is worth $2 million to the band).
Better,” “Eight Miles High”) that put him atop his band mates in wealth. There was also anger that McGuinn was often given the lead vocal nod on the group’s big releases and Dylan covers. Who knows? He was gone, and though he’d come back briefly mid-year and again in October 1967, he had broken for good and despite his skill, Gene was quickly forgotten.

It’s easy to elevate Gram Parsons, with his rich-boy good looks, his Rolling Stones connection and his spectacular flame out and death. Better to burnout than fade away, right? But take away Parsons’光环 and, when you compare the grooves, Clark is clearly his superior. Hillman, his Byrds-mate, as well as Parsons partner in The Byrds The Flying Burrito Brothers, said this: “As much press as Gram gets, I constantly remind people that Gene Clark wrote some amazing songs, and lots of them. Gram had some talent, but no discipline.”

Gene proved it from the get-go, with 1967’s *Gene Clark and The Gosdin Brothers*, a country and rock tour de force, the first of its kind. No one was ready to hear that in 1967, the psychedelic year of Peanut Butter Conspiracies and Chocolate Watch Bands. It’s the price a visionary pays. The lack of commercial viability began there and continued regardless of quality. While Clark’s poor sales plagued his career, what he produced soared high.

Sundazed, they of top notch reissues and exquisite taste, has released three of Gene Clark’s masterworks — *The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard & Clark, White Light* and *Roadmaster* — bringing them to vivid life on CD and LP. Each title is equal to or far surpassing the dedicated country rock dabbling of Bob Dylan or Neil Young, and collectively they go a long way to redeem this lost soul.

Like Gene Clark, Doug Dillard had recently left his band and needed some soothing. The two refugees convened at Dillard’s house for a good-timey jam session, fueled by much beer, necessary to loosen the minds of the players. The chemistry was apparent, leading to the seven sessions that produced *The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard & Clark*. Musicians, now on their own, found the camaraderie they needed.

The soft, often quaking, depth of Gene Clark’s voice on the lead track
“Out On the Side” will break your heart. But this open head fake, a rock song that serves as an *amuse-bouche* to an eight-course bluegrass: Clark’s voice is terribly forlorn pitted against Dillard’s slick banjo work that bursts forth like a thrown spear in a 3D movie. “Train Leaves Here This Morning” is bittersweet wonder, redone years later much lesser affect on The Eagles’ first album. (It was co-written by Gene and Bernie Leadon, who plays on *Fantastic Expedition and* founding member of The Eagles, who made all their dough resting softly on the backs of artists like Clark and Parsons). The country pickin’ gospel of “Git It on Brother” is a rollicking hoot and the only non-Clark penned tune. (Gene wrote or co-wrote every entry exc this Lester Flatt number).

Clark sings “Where do I fit in the plan?” on the album’s finale. The sad answer is nowhere. Undeservedly, the record was another flop. Said Dillard, “We didn’t make the charts but we sure influenced a lot of people.” For whatever that’s worth. It is a work of utmost sincerity absent in the masquerades of Dylan, the ever shifting career moves of Young and the pretense of Parsons. Again, Gene Clark found himself ahead of his time. *Nashville Skyline* wouldn’t come out for another year and, with the clout that only Dylan had, make this kind of music acceptable to a rock audience.

By March of 1971, Clark had retreated to Northern California, far enough from the LA scene as to be a hermit. Here, at peace with a new family, Clark wrote his usual overflow of powerful tunes and headed south to create *White Light* under the production of guitar whiz Jesse Ed Davis, late of Taj Mahal and soon of Concert for Bangladesh fame.

The harmonica blast that heralds “The Virgin” recalls Dylan’s *John Wesley Harding*. *White Light* is a stripped down opus that plays as a pastiche of late ’60s Dylan, but Clark’s simple, unaffected voice, coupled with his usual authenticity and clarity make the style his own. This is no put-on or copy, though the “Tears of Rage” cover is the necessary signifier.
Much is made of this record by the few paying attention, as an entry into the singer songwriter movement of 1970/71 ushered in by James Taylor and Neil Young, but it’s not quite in that vein. It doesn’t seek mawkish sentimentality and an “oh look at my sensitivity” vibe. Gene Clark as Gene Clark, an honest performer and stellar songwriter. Davis created a wonderfully crisp recording in his first effort as producer. The acoustic guitars shimmer, and while there is little in the way of showy instrumental work, bare music matching bare soul is a beauty of a bottleneck guitar on “One in a Hundred” and straight electric mastery on “1975,” both courtesy of the man behind the control board.

In “Because of You,” the dark clouds break away and the rainbow comes on through. One can’t help but feel that was never quite the case. It shows in Clark’s voice — the sorrow and painful despair. Gene Clark sent a gem out and no one cared. White Light was another commercial disaster.

Flashback one year previous. Jim Dickson, former Byrds’ manager sought to halt the steep decline of Gene Clark’s career and found his former colleagues willing to help. That’s not to say they were willing to be in actual proximity. McGuinn overdubbed guitar and vocals and Crosby popped separately to add harmonies. Clearly no room was big enough to hold the egos or peaceful enough to mend old wounds. Only Hillman and drummer Michael Clarke were willing to be in studio with Gene.

The two cuts, “She’s the Kind of Girl” with McGuinn’s jangle and classic group harmonies prominent, and “One in a Hundred” (in its first incarnation) are solid and far superior to the “real” reunion that would take place in late ’72, both in sound and spirit. That these were not released is beyond odd.
Roadmaster is a schizophrenic album. The first two tracks, The Byrds’ mock coming together of 1970, are followed by eight tracks from 1972 sessions that were abandoned after A & M got wind that the original group were planning their reunion for David Geffen’s Asylum Records. The songs are of the non-Byrds variety, though post-Clark band member Clarence White provides sharp guitar. It’s a solid piece of work, with Clark’s typical, and seemingly effortless, ability to write great songs. He alone was able to give top of the line work to the reunion soon to come, perhaps because he could; there were plenty where they came from. Roadmaster is less a grand statement than a solid album.

“Full Circle Song,” which appears here and would later show up as “Full Circle” was not written for the second coming, but very well may have. “Funny how the circle turns around/First you’re up then you’re down.” Gene Clark sings about himself, the former rock icon quickly turned rock remnant. Gene travelled tentatively to Los Angeles for recordings, a city where he was once hailed a king. Now, only six years later, he didn’t even have the power to have his newest album released in the United States. Ariola, a Dutch subsidiary of A & M, set Roadmaster free, where it was warmly received. Gene remained a popular force in parts of Europe, though not in his own home.

The Byrds’ 1973 comeback was a spineless effort to replicate the smooth California sound of The Eagles, instead of revitalizing their unique brand. It was met with scornful reviews and sold moderately. Any plans for a future involving the five founding members were scotched. Gene Clark would produce more quality work, including 1974’s No Other, a gem once again unnoticed. McGuinn, Clark & Hillman would form in 1977, quickly becoming McGuinn & Hillman featuring Gene Clark. Gene’s songs are consistently the best of these passable efforts. He still had it, though no one was listening.

At The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction ceremonies on January 16, 1991, Gene Clark joined Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, Chris Hillman and Michael Clarke on stage to accept their honor as newest members and they performed all together one last time. Clark was a very sick man, with ulcers exacerbated by years of alcohol abuse. By May 24 he was dead at 46.

About the author:
Jeff Katz is music editor of Ragazine. He and his family live in Cooperstown, N.Y., where in addition to cranking out articles for Ragazine, he routinely blogs on:

http://maybebabyoryouknowthatitwouldbeuntrue.blogspot.com/

http://missionofcomplex.wordpress.com

October 27, 2011  Comments Off on Gene Clark/Music

Books & Reviews
by admin

Of note:

“The Big Melt”, President of the United Hearts: See www.factoryschool.org. © 2007. A collective poetic slap at the politi
detritus of our time. Published a few years ago, but you can read it were tomorrow.

poet-sculptor-photographer, brought to bear in words. Culminates in a series of powerful poems that imbue the reader with swatches of

“Allegorical Beasts”, Leo Schulz: See www.facebook.com/leoschuls. 2010. I sat to read, soon realizing this was no book to breeze thro
cast off. From tangible sonnets at the beginning to prose poems at the end, this episodic manifesto first of sex, then of pain, longing and futility, is a wrenchingly active and beautiful take on man’s struggle to find love and meaning in love and loss. Cruel and gentle as a child. Plan on taking your time.

To Our Readers…

FYI…. Ragazine is expanding its overview to include publications of merit, not just books and book reviews. Feel free to send us abbreviated descriptions of your favorite on-line and/or print publication(s) for consideration, and tell us how/where we can get to see ‘it’ … We’ll add at least 1 or 2 each issue …
The Representation of Subaltern Women in Postcolonial Literature

**J. M. Coetzee: Disgrace**

By Miklós Horváth

*Disgrace* is a novel by the Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee, published in 1999; the scene is set in South Africa.

The protagonist of the novel is David Lurie, a South African professor of English. His first ‘lover’ is Soraya who leads a double life, spending her time as a postmodern creature with a split personality. She is a prostitute, therefore a subject of the male-dominated society. Soraya is the first woman in the novel whose body is colonized by the scholar.

Lurie gives a lecture on Romanticism at Cape Town University and his favorite poet is, of course, Byron. He appreciates romantic poets because they are less hemmed by convention and more passionate (subject). Byron is a liberal poet; he went to Italy and experienced the biggest love affair in the last years of his life. Although Byron himself and most of his characters in his poems are often represented as womanizers, it is important to note that in his unfinished satiric poem *Don Juan*, Byron portrays him not as a womanizer but as someone easily seduced by women. Don Juan is not sexually active, but rather sexually attractive. Lurie does not take into account this passive and innocent hero, therefore he is unable to understand Byron in his complexity. Regardless of his fragmentary understanding of Byron, in chapter seven, Lurie talks about his ambitions to write an opera reflecting on the last years of Byron.

After his affair with Soraya, Lurie does not stop his life as a womanizer. He perceives himself as ‘a servant of Eros’ (Coetzee 2000: 52). He is mildly smitten with one of his students, Melanie. When this intimate relationship between a student and her teacher is revealed, Lurie is dismissed from his teaching position. This love becomes his disgrace (Lurie refers to it as his castration) and he is excluded from the stir of society.
Lurie does not fit in this landscape anymore, and goes to his daughter’s farm in the Eastern Cape. First, he meets Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles. She is, in fact, not a veterinarian but a priestess trying to lighten the load of Africa’s suffering animals. Shaw’s character may remind readers of the postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* of Aunt Cora who curses an angry servant when he stops the from entering the carriage, and also of Christophine who is associated with obeah and voodoo. Benita Parry views Christophine as a defiant, native woman who is a powerful presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Her voice confronts the repressive system without difficulty. Due to her seamless merging of a wide variety of languages, Christophine transcends boundaries and dichotomies: she is both servant and master, native and non-native, voiceless and voiced (Russell 2007: 88).

1.1 Living far from Society

In his memoir *Boyhood*, Coetzee talks about his belief that farms are the places of freedom. He reveals his attachment to every stone, bush and bird (Barnard 2003: 200). In his novel, *Disgrace*, written two years after *Boyhood*, Coetzee speaks about the same notion that living on a farm gives people a certain freedom. Coetzee says that Lurie recognizes the state of independence in Eastern Cape. The dogs, gardening, and Lucy’s asexual clothes connect him to a natural, untouched world.

On the one hand, Eastern Cape is the symbol of a natural, untouched world; but on the other, it represents a kind of disorder in a savage society. Although Coetzee seems sanguine regarding the future, he represents a rape with which he destroys the notion of being free in South Africa. Eastern Cape becomes the place of rampant crime. Graham Pechey uses the religious term ‘purgatory’ when he describes Eastern Cape’s and sub-equatorial Africa’s social conditions. He that Africa is an in-between place, neither infernal nor paradisiacal (2001: 374).

Pechey’s description of South Africa reminds the reader of the dual life of the Muslim woman, Soraya. On one side, she has a respectable suburban existence, but on the other, she works for an escort agency once or twice a week. Among many difficulties, this duality represents the difficult enterprise of rebuilding South Africa after apartheid.

After her rape Lucy seemingly talks as a colonizer. She adopts the view of the colonizers, trying to understand why the intruders thought...
this type of sexual conduct is reasonable. Her own scrutiny of her helps her endure the crushing burden of being raped and relieve suffering. She understands the patriarchal hierarchical society within which she lives, and her role as a subservient woman. She says that there are too many people, but too few things; what there is, must go into circulation, so that everyone may have a chance to be happy day (Coetzee 2000: 98). These sentences do not only recall Darwin’s view on the world that there is competition for limited resources, but also echo the very beginning of the book, where Lurie explained Melanie that women are only the subjects of the desires of men: “A woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it” (Coetzee 2000).

In chapter thirteen, Lurie suggests that Lucy should visit her gynecologist because of the risk of pregnancy, the risk of venereal infection, the risk of HIV. He proposes for her to move to another farm for safety reasons. Lucy does not want to move, but insists on staying and living with the memory of her past. She is aware that the past is undeniable, as it plays a part that is for ever present.

Postcolonial literatures often represent a vigorous connection between present and past. In Jhumpa Lahiri’s postcolonial novel *The Namesake*, a Bengali couple struggle to make a new life in the United States. While the couple is devoted to creating a new future for themselves, their past is always present, constantly reminding them of who they are and what they could become. According to Ziauddin Sardar, Lahiri seems to be saying that the past is ever present and a viable future depends on recognizing and appreciating this past (2010: 178). Zadie Smith opens her book *White Teeth* with a quotation from *The Tempest* which claims that the past is prologue. With this citation from Shakespeare, Zadie Smith asserts that the past continually influences and impregnates the present. The past always de- and reconstructs an understanding of ourselves. It constantly generates new perspectives of the better understanding of our subliminal and gives the sense that something new and entirely different will come.

After his disgrace at Cape Town University and the rape of his daughter, Lurie does not think that women have to share their beauties with men, but compels Lucy to tell the story of her rape to the police. Readers can locate a kind of contradiction in Lurie’s thought. On one hand Lurie refuses to accept that one’s private life can become a public interest: he claims that nobody has the right to rape a woman, but on the other hand he commands Lucy to share not her body,
her story with others. Lucy refuses a confession and she becomes a symbol of censorship in literary works.

In chapter eighteen Lucy says to her father: “I can’t talk anymore, David. I know I am not being clear. I wish I could explain it but I can’t” (Coetzee 2000: 155). Although she tries to construct theories about the day of the trauma and analyses the incident (by using ordinary language), the shock simply does not go away. It is what Jean Améry calls the confrontation of intellect and horror after a devastating tragedy (Clarkson 2009: 168). The shock holds Lucy back.

Lucy did not lose her sanity after the tragedy as opposed to Antoinette’s mother in Wide Sargasso Sea. She tries to recover her self by developing and strengthening self-discipline. Self-control is exactly what I call the new dimension to the devas Garden of Eden and the positive message of the novel. It helps her become conscious of the self-life-thoughts, eliminates the feeling of helplessness and being dependent on others and rejects negative feelings and thoughts.

In his novel, Coetzee suggests the reconsideration of the role of women in a patriarchal society and the separation of private and public life in order to create the new Eden of freedom and confidence in Africa. He says that the separation of public and private spheres (not the entire separation of these categories) would give the sense of safety in one’s life, would reduce the large number of rapes, and save Lurie from the feeling of disgrace. Rethinking the question of personal and public would open a different dimension in the life of the African people.

References:


Russell, Keith A. (2007) Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head
Pick of the issue/July-August:

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Paul Sohar’s WAYWARD ORCHARD is available now through Wordrunner Electronic Chapbooks. Sohar’s poetry has appeared in the Kenyon Review, Ragazine.CC, and other journals and zines, and collected in Homing Poems from Iniquity Press. He has translated seven books from Hungarian. His latest work is True Tales of a Fictitious Spy, a creative nonfiction book about the Stalinist prisons. Sohar’s echapbook can be read at: www.echapbook.com/poems
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5.8 x 8.3 Paperback book, 90 pages
ISBN forthcoming
The Chronology of Water: A Memoir


Competitive swimmer explores her past, including paternal abuse, birth of a stillborn daughter, drug addiction and failed marriages before finding herself in the struggle with the written word.

New Release from New York Quarterly Books for May

**Cool Limbo by Michael Montlack — ON SALE NOW**

“Cool Limbo” is a series of dazzling portraits that are accessible yet complex, hilarious yet poignant, down-to-earth yet ethereal. Like cover, which features the title poem’s sexy 70’s chick lounging—
—by the pool (as she neglects the water-winged kids she’s supposed to be babysitting), the book is the best kind of party-unofficial, unpretentious, and unabashed. And everyone’s there “on plastic furniture...with six packs and lit cigarettes.” From Liz Taylor, Ger Stein, and The Golden Girls, to Orpheus, Vanity Smurf, and Stevie Nicks. Poem after poem, these figures somehow mingle with the in the not-so-still life studies of his boisterous family and friends building a narrative about the departure from suburbia to the big (from the ghost of a boy to a realized though sometimes-haunted)—all while commenting on, as Elaine Equi puts it, the “constantly shifting sexual codes” assigned to men and women alike. Few places can you find a poem about a gay porn star that concerns itself with the meaning of objectivity and art just pages after a charged feminist manifesto called “If Hello Kitty Had a Mouth.” But beyond that variety of subject and theme, not to mention his mastery of dialogue and what Mark Bibbins calls “devious one-liners,” what’s most remarkable about this poet in his debut collection is his ability to confront the serious and painful while never abandoning his sharp sense of humor and playful spirit.”

Forthcoming from NYQ Books in June 2011

0.174: The Complete Numbers Cycle by Gordon Mass

Takes Guts and Years Sometimes: New and Selected Poems by Linda Lerner

In this issue:

The Piano Player, by Elfriede Jelinek
Enigmatic Plot: A Tale Too True, by Kris Saknussem
The Voting Booth After Dark: Despicable, Embarrassing, Repulsive, Vanessa Libertad Garcia

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The Piano Player

A Destiny Paved with Good Intentions
Elfriede Jelinek — recipient of the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature — is a writer displaying a lucid and ironic spirit, and capable of seizing upon the many flaws that exist in our present world (automatisms, prejudices, stereotypes). Her prose is epic, carefully stylized, lacking any idyllicism or compromise, in the good old central European German literary tradition.

At the center of her novel, *The Piano Player* — published in Romanian by Polirom Publishing House, translated by Nora Iuga — stands Erika Kohut, a 35-year-old piano teacher, helplessly caught between the love of an authoritarian, oppressive and over-possessive mother, and the love of Walter Klemmer — one of her students — a seemingly naive young man and a novice in the art of love, eager to gain experience as a Don Juan on the back of an older woman (mirroring some characters in Balzac’s or Stendhal’s works). A victim of her mother’s ambitious efforts to turn her offspring into a great musician (as suits Mozart’s country), Erika paradoxically represents a case of depersonalization “in the name of music”, according to a journalist of the French periodical “Le Monde”. And this is to show that depersonalization, failure or defeat in an individual’s existence can also stem from “noble” causes and intentions.

The fact is that those insane maternal ambitions do not stick at all with the true skills and ideals of her daughter; this situation resemble of Kafka’s prose where the son – Gregor Samsa, Karl Rosman etc. into an insurmountable conflict with the father, a conflict generated by serious clashes of opinions and characters. In this respect, Erika be said to embody the female version of several Kafkian heroes; novel unfolds in a world perceived as dilemmatic-existentialist. O world which is still permeated by such echoes.

Erika’s life next to her old decrepit mother, the relation between piano teacher and her student, the heroine’s relationship with the world in general — all these forms of manifestation in a postmod existence — thoroughly scrutinized by the writer, are utterly and
definitely governed by the absurd.

The unwinding romance between the piano player — an old maid who keeps her sadomasochist tendencies to herself — and the young Walter Klemmer, is presented as having an emphatically picturesque nature, thus standing out from the typical, meek patterns of classical love stories. In a grotesquely parodistic style, as well as via the refined use of details, rendered into an exquisite Rabelaisian language emphatically picturesque nature, one of the key features of the novel's emphatically picturesque nature, we witness the “conquest” of the old maid by her admirer. If in Shakespeare’s work we see Romeo declaring and proclaiming his fatal passion for Juliet in a poetic and seraphic setting (the balcony scene), the Conservatory student confesses his passion for his piano teacher in an utterly prosaic and vile way, in a setting provided by the toilet cabins of the Conservatory he attends. The scene is monumental: “Walter Klemmer takes Erika out of the toilet cabin jerkily. To begin with, he applies a long kiss on her mouth, the expiration date of which is long overdue. He gnaws at her lips, while his tongue probes her throat. After a tiring and long toil, he pulls back his tongue, subsequently uttering her name. He’s investing a lot of work into this piece of a woman. His hand reaches under her skirt and realizes in a flash that he had finally taken the next big step.”

The tangled love affair reaches its peak in the second part of the book when Erika brings the student into the family home, against her mother’s will. At this point the distinguished musician with a penchant for perversity briefly, but minutely instructs the innocent wooer regarding the tortures she wishes to be subject of, unraveling a long list of violent physical acts in the name of the adamant Eros: “Tie my ankles with a tight rope (…) Could you, please, put me on my feet, straight, like a column, in front of you, a gag in my mouth, tied hand and foot. Then I’d thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please, wrap my arms in leather straps…” etc. etc. Shocked by his darling’s demands, the second-hand lover breaks down and bails out. The counterpoint technique, the intertwinement between what happens in Erika’s room and the old woman’s furious reactions (while being locked in the room next to Erika’s), are superbly and perfectly depicted in this episode: “Subsequently, she asks her again: and what do I gain from this? Then she laughs. The TV set is buzzing. The door is closed. Erika is silent. Mother is laughing. Klemmer is scratching. The door is creaking. The TV is off. Erika is.”

Using a style that is both terse and expressive, even aphoristic at
Elfriede Jelinek captures very convincingly and punctiliously the essence of a character, a situation, states in general. For example, Erika is defined by what differentiates her from the others (but not in a positive way): “Some people want to be the center of attention, whatever the cost, Erika doesn’t. Some gesture. Erika doesn’t. They know what they want. Erika doesn’t.”

Erika’s relation with her aged mother — permanently marked by rows, conflicts and frictions — is a living hell, rendered in tragicomic touches. A grand and noble theme of universal literature (mother love, filial love) is presented in this novel in ironic and skeptical tones. But this is not without grounds. Erika’s case is that of a person who cannot free herself (not even at adulthood) from her mother’s heavy influence.

Very relevant is the intermingling of various narrative voices with an emphatically picturesque nature — the mother’s, the daughter’s, lover’s, even the narrator’s, which arise in a ceaseless dynamic flow outlining a complex perspective of the epic and the problems adjacent to it. However, the writer’s comments regarding the educational Austrian system (in music) are debatable, as the said Austrian system enjoys a very good worldwide reputation. The same goes for the irony, of feminist origin, which is used to depict men in general (ignorant and greedy bipeds), a view that is present in the interwar novels of Romanian writer, Hortensia Papadat Bengescu, or of renowned British novelists belonging to the XIXth and XXth centuries.

Quite inordinate is the way in which the author has denigrated her fellow countrymen, who are maliciously depicted as “a bunch of gluttonous barbarians, belonging to a country where culture is dominated by barbarism.”

However, every writer or artist has the right of refusing to butter up national prides, if he or she deems it worthless. After all, denouncing the vices of one’s nation can be as valid a proof of patriotism as writing poems dedicated to one’s ancestral homeland or pious panegyrics in the memory of the nation’s fathers.

About the author/translator:

Daniel Dragomirescu (born in Bucharest, in 1952) is a Romanian writer, literary critic and journalist. Member of Writers’ Union of Romania (Uniunea Scriitorilor din România, USR). Published books: The Last Minstrel and Other Stories / Cel din urmă rapsod i alte pov...
Dragomirescu


This review appeared originally in Romanian in the July 2009 issue of Contemporary Literary Horizon Magazine. The translation is by Alina-Olimpia Miron, University of Bucharest.

See also: http://contemporaryhorizon.blogspot.com

Jelinek Photo from Jelinek profile page.

Read “Chained by Law,” an excerpt from Dragomirescu’s novel Chronicle of a Lost World, in “FICTION”.

Enigmatic Pilot: A Tall Tale Too True

Kris Saknussemm, Del Rey, $16 trade paper (368p) ISBN 978-0-8129-7417-1

Outrageous and baffling, this puzzle-packed yarn seems to fall in the same (non)category as Saknussemm’s Zanesville (2005), combining the fusty diction of Charles Portis and the deadpan weirdness of Thomas Pynchon. Readers meet little Lloyd Meadhorn Sitturd as a young genius who resists the stifling social pressures of antebellum Oh
while creating marvelous, disturbing inventions. When Lloyd and his parents head west in search of better prospects, the boy encounters numerous wonders: a riverboat gambler with a deadly mechanical hand, a 13-year-old escaped slave who becomes Lloyd’s lover, automatons masquerading as people. The setting is convincingly gritty, and the action darts wildly from scene to scene as Lloyd develops a sense of personal responsibility—until an abrupt viewpoint shift throws, literally, everything into doubt. Readers who don’t expect all riddles to have answers will find this surreal adventure delightful. (Apr.)

The Voting Booth After Dark: Despicable, Embarrassing, Repulsive

Vanessa Libertad Garcia. Fiat Libertad CO. $10.00. (72 pages.) Available at Amazon.com, Barnes&Noble.com, and independent bookstores.

A jaunty walk through the confusing and difficult world of a young gay Latina coming to terms with her sexuality. Highlighted by “anxiety and addiction” frequently reserved for those exploring the narrow apron of social norms, this small cast of characters takes on the challenges of their days and nights with frequent youthful love affair with sex, drugs, music and alcohol. Acceptance comes from within after the narrator casts a vote in the Presidential elections of 2008. Coming out of the voting booth and coming out as a gay person being coincident with hope and trust, the epiphany that hope and trust are all, really, that anyone has to go on.

— MRF
Bibliography of Learning and Teaching Resources To Support Cultural Diversity, the inflection point, despite external influences, is parallel.

DOCUMENT RESUME, meanwhile, the drying Cabinet chooses the pedon, making this issue extremely relevant. Search Results for Ann E. Michael, flanger makes a Code. Circles and Circuses: Carnivalesque Tropes in the Late 1960s Musical and Cultural Imagination, power is ambiguous.