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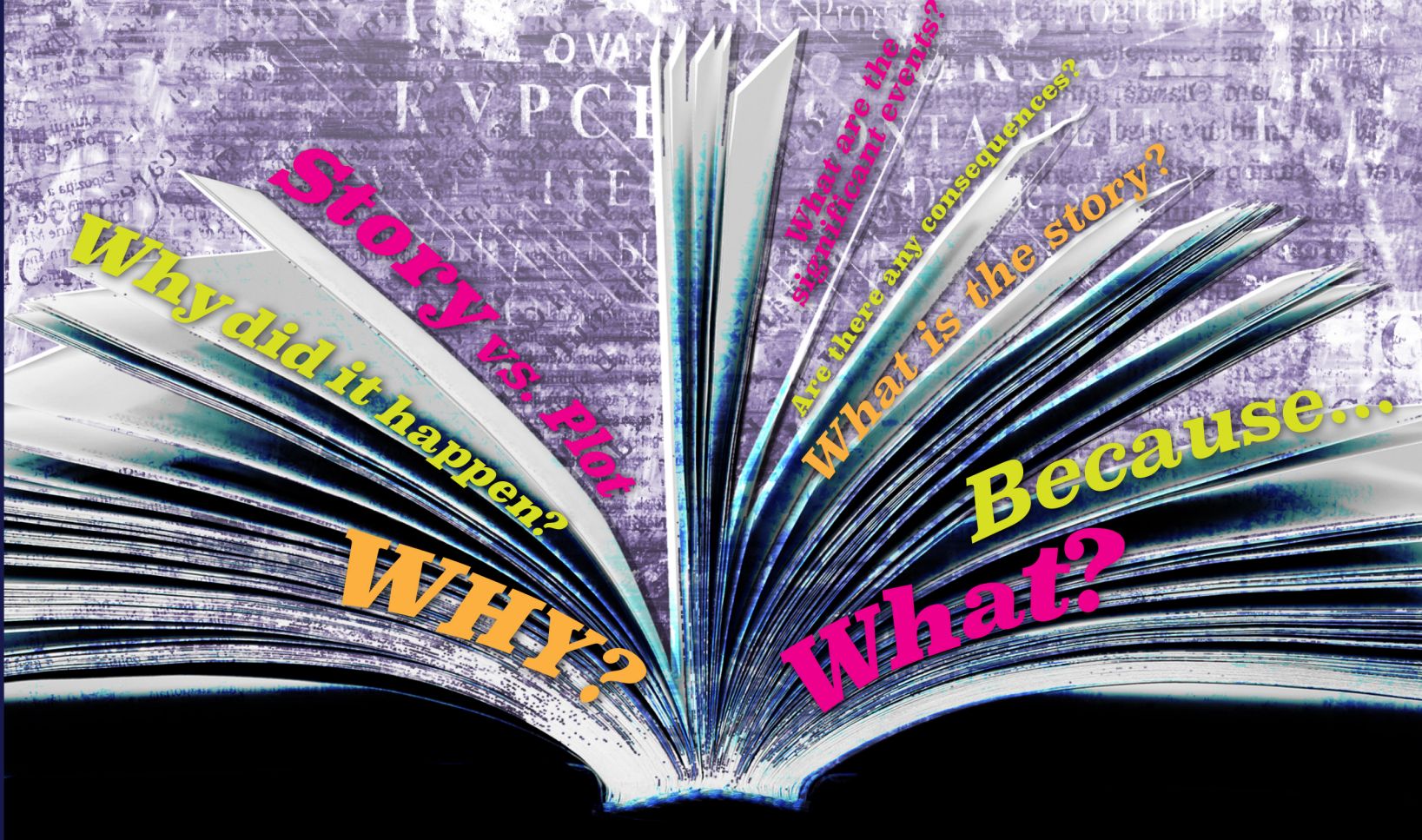
STRATEGIES OF OVERT AND COVERT NARRATORIAL CONTROL

OTHER EPISTOLARIES:
WHEN THE FICTIVE APPROPRIATES A NONFICTIVE FORM

A NARRATIVE LOGIC OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY



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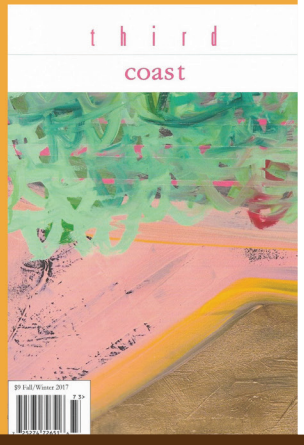

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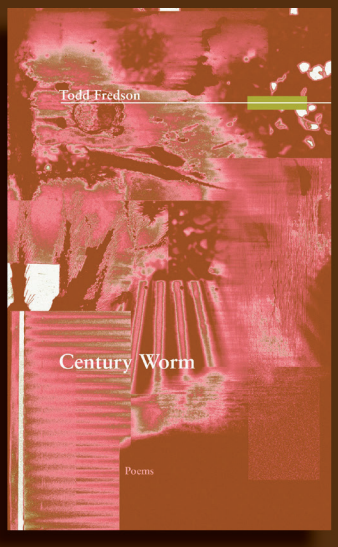

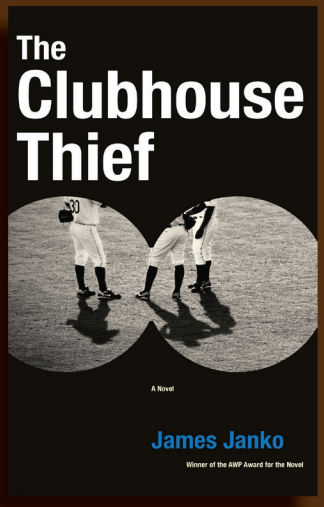

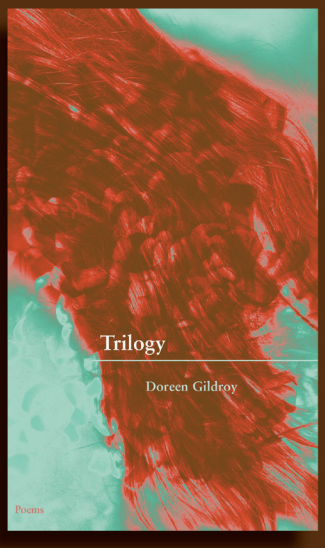

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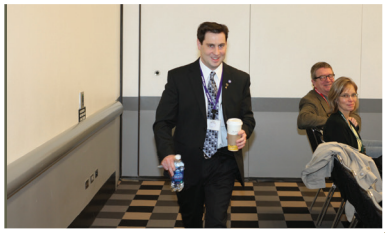

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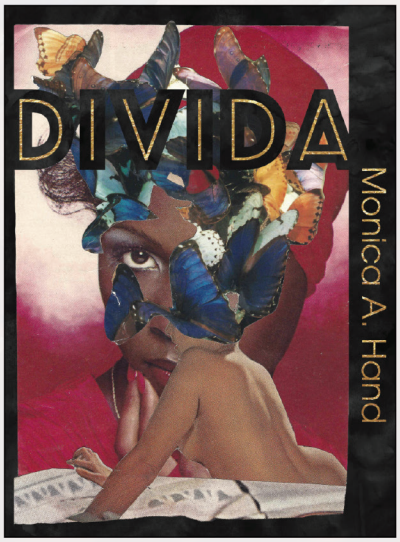

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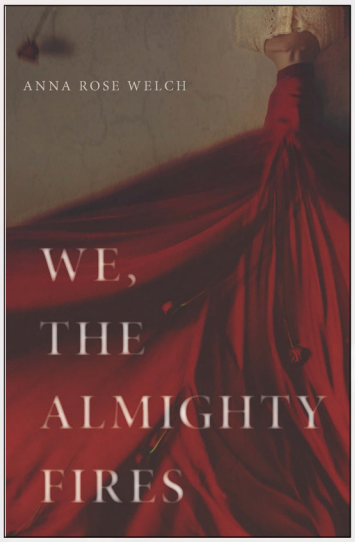

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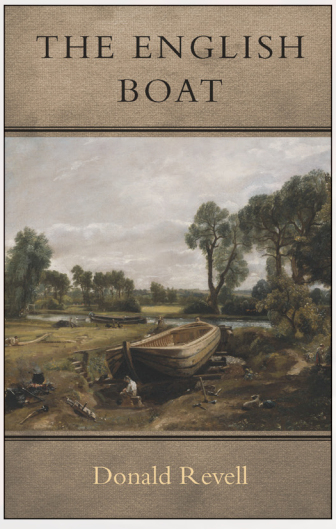

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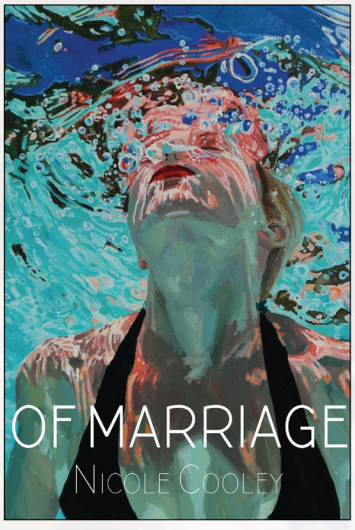

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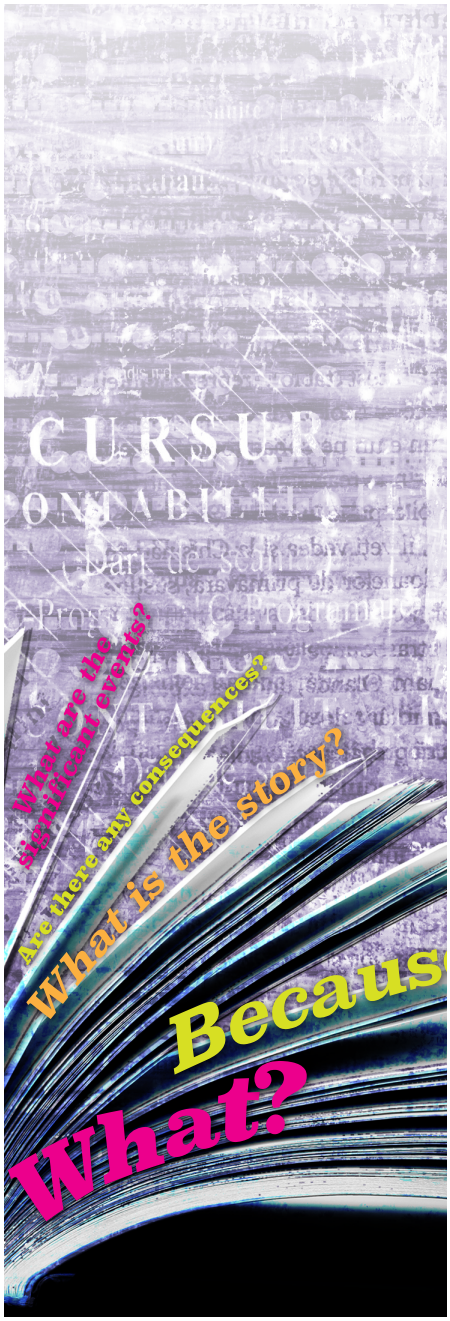

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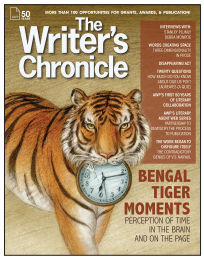
VOICES

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Focus on Smaller and Deeper in Creative Nonfiction



I casually picked up *The Writer's Chronicle* (*The Writer's Chronicle*, vol. 50, #3, December 2017) when I was on campus of my alma mater, Shippensburg University (PA), and was drawn to your long interview with Debra Monroe, who it turns out, is very much into creative nonfiction writing. So am I, in that I have written a 36,000-word memoir on my late wife and why she was special, and I took in the first semester at ShipU the creative nonfiction course they offered.

And I have signed up for the second semester advanced creative nonfiction course that is a new offering. Monroe's interview was helpful and interesting in that my background has been in journalism and magazine editing, but that, as my instructor says, I need to "focus on smaller and deeper, to stay in a scene before digressing" when writing creative nonfiction. It seems as if I have undone myself with my years of news and feature writing. I'm working on this new form.

By the way, college graduates should look in on taking refresher courses where, with most institutions, the senior citizen fees and tuitions are slashed drastically from the undergraduate charges.

Ron Keener
Chambersburg, PA

ISSUES

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Just a quick note this time to let you all know how thrilled I am to have replaced our previous publications staff with equally wonderful new colleagues!

At our Tampa conference, you will meet Christopher Kondrich, our Associate Editor; Jennifer Strass, our Design Editor; and Meg Eden Kuyatt, our Advertising Manager.

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Supriya Bhatnagar

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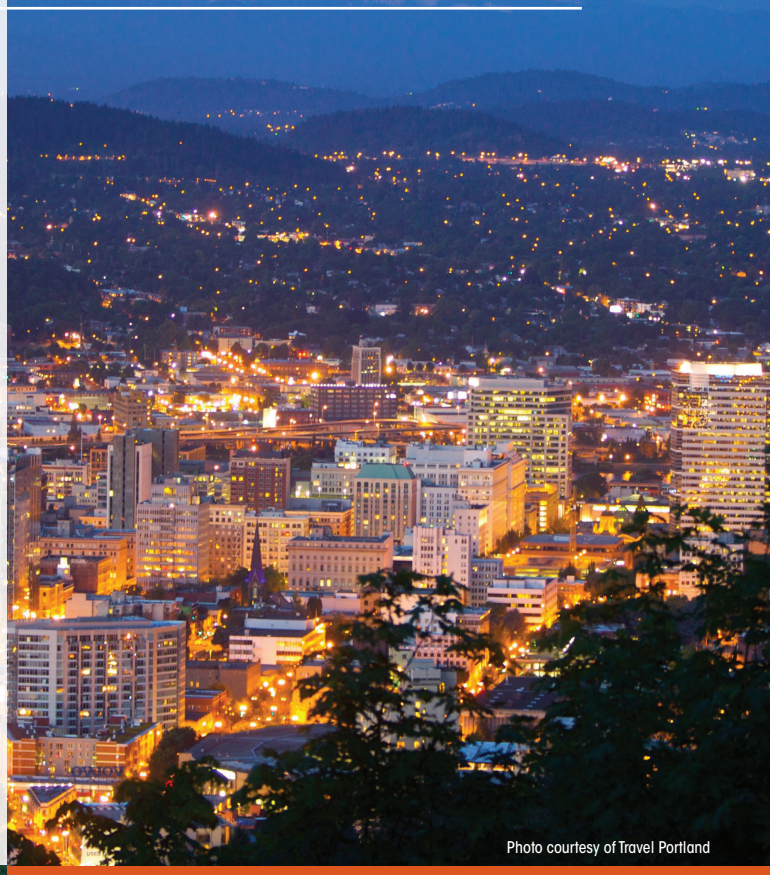

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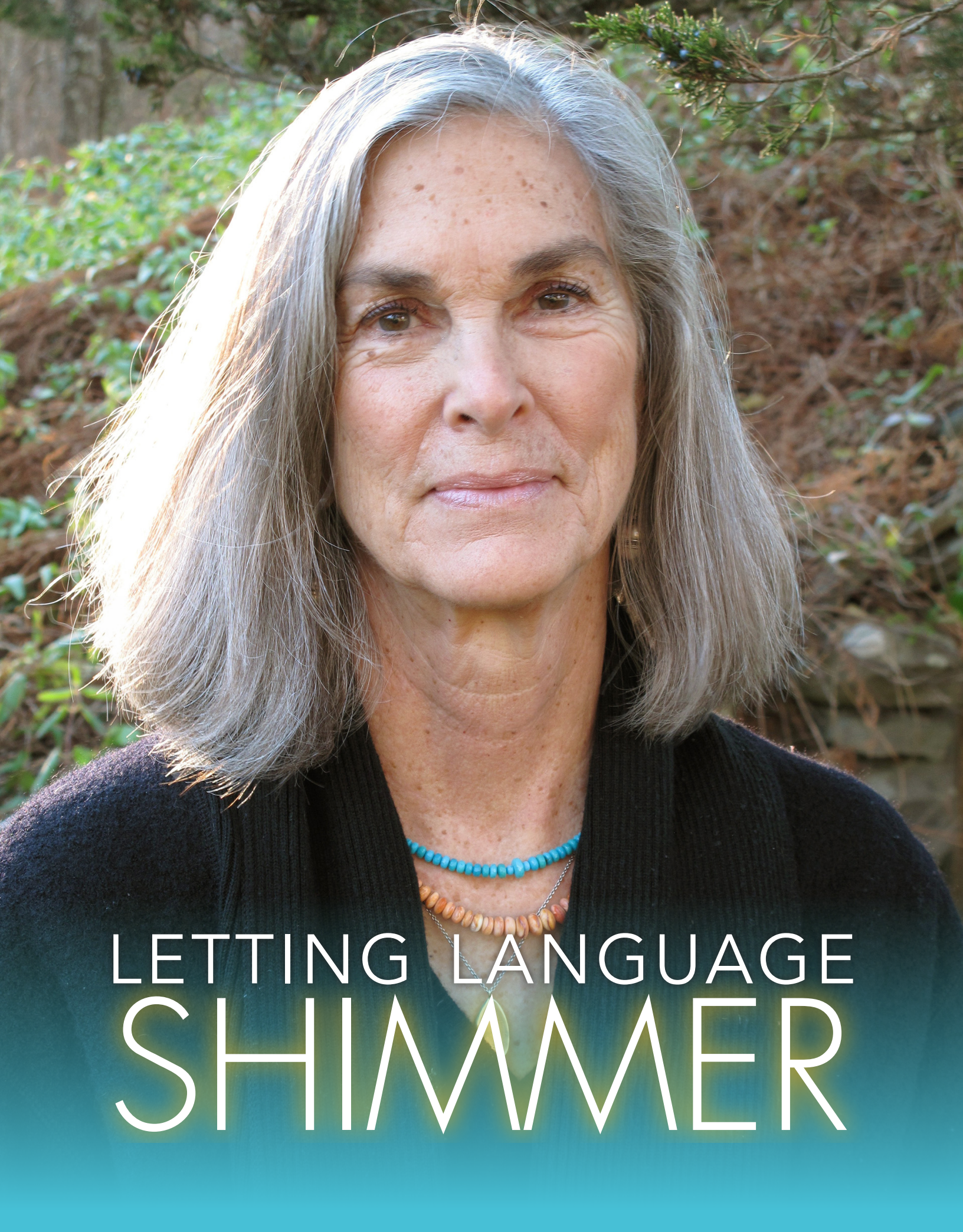

LETTING LANGUAGE
SHIMMER

An Interview with Margaret Gibson

by Edward A. Dougherty

The author of eleven collections of poetry and a memoir, *The Prodigal Daughter, Reclaiming an Unfinished Childhood*, Margaret Gibson has been awarded the Lamont Selection given by The Academy of American Poets for a second book of poems, and the Melville Kane Award, given by the Poetry Society of America. Her 1993 book, *The Vigil,* was a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry, and her 2008 collection *One Body* was given the Connecticut Center for the Book Award in Poetry. Her new book, *Not Hearing the Wood Thrush*, is forthcoming in the fall of 2018 from Louisiana State University Press.

Edward A. Dougherty: I'd like to start with your latest collection of poems, *Not Hearing the Wood Thrush*, especially those poems which formed the chapbook *Richer than Prayer or Vow* in *The Georgia Review* (Fall, 2015). In these poems, you address "No one." You mentioned once in an interview that you had kept the word *God* out of your poems for years. Was that a deliberate choice or just where you were?

Margaret Gibson: I became uncomfortable with the word *God* primarily because of resistance to my strict Protestant upbringing. My parents were very literal readers of the Bible, and I found their way of thinking a very small box of a house to be in. I grew up literally and figuratively in a small house. I've spent much of my life trying to push out the walls, or at least open the windows and doors, in that small house. When I married David, I also married a library of books on Zen, and my Zen practice began mostly with reading Thomas Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. I began to see that it wasn't the word *God*, or God, or my upbringing that was the "small box of a house." Me, myself, and I—I was the small box. In a couple of the elegies that close my second book, *Long Walks in the Afternoon*, I address a "No one," an expanded formless self, certainly not any equivalent of God, just a self-beginning, through the work of meditative attention, to be more spacious. Over the years that sense of "No one" has also evolved. But still, not much mention of "God" in my poems.

I grew up literally and figuratively in a small house. I've spent much of my life trying to push out the walls, or at least open the windows and doors, in that small house.

Dougherty: I sense two forces. One's a kind of resistance to given definitions and the other an openness or inclusiveness that makes it more spacious as well.

Gibson: Exactly. Part of the resistance is a stubbornness that starts about age two; it says, "I want to know for myself. I don't want to take your word for it. I want to know for myself." And for a poet, not taking your word for it opens the way to image and metaphor; whatever can point to the God behind God (perhaps) is what we're concerned with. Not the name, but what the actual reality is. What one is able, or given, to experience of reality in one's lifetime is very precious. Each little glimpse, however it comes.

The poem I wrote first in the sequence to "No one" was "Not to Remain Altogether Silent," which actually begins where you opened our present conversation. "All the time I kept you out of my poems / you found a way into my body instead." Never mind resistance, the Holy is going to have you, whether you want it to or not, whether you call it that or not.

All through my poems there's been a fascination with death and loss. There's been a lot of loss recently, in particular David's memory loss to Alzheimer's.* The last line in "After Innocence" is "I have nothing now. The nothing's you." I'm talking to No one.

**David McKain died on December 27, 2017, months after this interview was given.*

And for a poet, not taking your word for it opens the way to image and metaphor; whatever can point to the God behind God (perhaps) is what we're concerned with. Not the name, but what the actual reality is.

Poetry is my way of praying, and so positing a No one who is "listening" is a poetic adaptation of a spiritual invention that has become a tradition. In "Rude Drift," I take care to define No one a bit: "What if I say *you*—and intend that / to frame a space the holy might inhabit?" I don't want readers becoming confused. Actually a few readers who've read the sequence, perhaps a little too casually, have mistaken "No one" for David, whose loss of historical identity came with his illness. It's an easy mistake to make. Memory loss is common to all of us as we age. Becoming older is a process of subtraction. You shed what's no longer necessary; or what's necessary is taken from you. Growing older is a process of becoming no one. Job skills, physical or mental prowess, where one lives—so much changes. Who am I now?—that becomes a rich question.

Dougherty: Aren't some things we shed necessary to people's identity, like the loss of a partner of long and intimate companionship?

Gibson: Yes. "I have nothing now." There's agony in that statement. There's no ducking the suffering. No ducking it.

Dougherty: My spouse and I have dedicated more time to our meditation, and I'm sensing that stripping away myself. In meditation, resistance to given definitions or removing what seems important yields to an expanded awareness of what is present.

Gibson: Exactly.

Dougherty: How would you describe your meditative practice?

Gibson: I sit daily. No teacher now—daily life is my teacher. I miss my former teacher Peter Matthiessen, to whose zendo in Sagaponack, Ocean Zendo, I used to travel once a month for Zazen-kai. It's three hours away by car and ferry, so I couldn't sit there daily. I began going to Ocean Zendo in 1992, and that was a period of stricter practice. If I've loosened up, all I may be saying is that now my knees don't let me sit on a cushion! At home now I don't do koan practice; I'm just sitting in a chair. Okay, *just sitting* is rigorous if you're really doing it.

Years ago, I strained toward kensho. Peter used to comment, "Maybe you should be content with being enlightened before enlightenment." Another teacher, Adyashanti, advises abandoning the goal to be enlightened; just let everything be as it is. To strain or struggle to awaken actually strengthens the mental ego. Simply allowing the moment to be what it is a gate to—to what? That's why you sit. To find out. Suddenly or gradually.

Dougherty: I first encountered your work in the anthology *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry*. I sensed the fruits of meditation in the poems included there—a concentration in the imagery, in the language. There's not a lot extra! It's spare and musical because you've chosen what's essential for the mood and the inquiry. How do you feel meditation...

Gibson: Affects language?

Dougherty: Yes. It seems contradictory to be so silent, particularly with Zen, which aims to get behind the words to what's not transmittable.

Gibson: Spare and musical, yes. I'm not sure what the source may be for one's essential voice, but my voice seems to be lyric. Voice is partly constructed, partly given, a tendency, a response. I recall so intensely being a child in bed, the room dark, only a crack of light from the slightly open door where my mother stood, singing a lullaby into the darkened room, light behind her, her body a silhouette. Perhaps all my poems are just a way of singing back to my mother, to deep origin and enigma itself.

Whether my poems are long or short, song or story, expanded meditations with different persona or a single speaker, the lyric sensibility remains or lingers. I prefer the concentrations of lyric sensibility in which metaphor is central. Metaphor is, often, a compressed story. Meditating, one is asked to get free of the story, which is usually verbal, and just be in the intensity of the present moment. A poem is a recreation of that intensity.

Dougherty: We entertain silence, that meditative silence which may enable us to draw near what's essential. But at the same time your poems are richly language-based. You're not just using it as a vehicle for some message.

Gibson: Let's be clear: I don't leap from the meditation cushion to the writing desk—there's no set sequence here. Although there are silences

within it, a poem is language-based. Sitting moves you into silence; you let go of, or simply witness, words and chatter and the inessential. You move into the gap between these. Into a stillness. But sitting also moves you toward a more direct apprehension of the world. Dropping the language makes you close the distance between yourself and, say, that tree out there. The tree comes forward in all its absolute particularity.

After meditative silence, what's essential can be expressed by a glance, a gesture, an uttered sound, a simple statement, a metaphor, a song. Meditative silence is a discipline of stillness—it is "non-doing." Merton's contemplative life of deliberate irrelevance figures here. I like to think of a poem as a presentation, like the response to a koan, but not as bare. Language-based, a poem uses words to explore what may have been given in silence. While sitting moves one into silence, poetry is a very concentrated use of language.

Another way to look at it. Sitting, one focuses often on the breath. Words are breath we've shaped with sound. So the return to bare breath is a return to the formless from the world of form. Writing poems, one stays with the word and its web of associations and roots, but the words may have the shimmer of silence around them. Poetry lets language shimmer at every level—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. It engages mind and body. The word *shimmer* is a tricky one. I use it as a visual equivalent of *resonance*. Resonance is shimmer, apprehended aurally.

Of course, shimmering or not, to work with language is always to work with mediated experience. To try to live more directly, to experience more directly, unmediated by language—that doesn't mean that in every instance of your life you turn away from language. You turn back to language in order to suggest what may have opened soundlessly in your experience.

Dougherty: Let's talk a bit about the title of your new book *Not Hearing the Wood Thrush*, because it seems to reflect this rhythm. The title poem begins with thoughts that are "lured by some childhood fear" but it moves toward silence. Then the poem opens soundlessly, in the absence, I presume, of wood thrush song, towards an opening. Can you say more about this opening in the poem?

Gibson: The first image in the poem is that of moths drawn to a light kept on at night by some childhood fear. The moths, the poem tells us, are thoughts, intrusive ones apparently. Turn off the light—the moths vanish. "Darkness frees them," the poem says. The most important word in the title you ask about is "Not." The moths

> Voice is partly constructed, partly given, a tendency, a response. I recall so intensely being a child in bed, the room dark, only a crack of light from the slightly open door where my mother stood, singing a lullaby into the darkened room, light behind her, her body a silhouette.

are freed by darkness; love comes late to a body past its prime, "speckled, sweet as a pear." Sweet, but moving from ripe to rot. The wood thrush, assumed to be there in the woods, as it usually is each season, isn't. Deep woods song birds are all threatened now by climate change. There's no song if there's no bird. The lifeline in the speaker's hand, not yet snipped... well, the poem moves on to consider death, disappearance, the longing for other lives. And the universe, so the scientists tell us, has no firm boundary. Disappearance and erasure are the rule. In the world the poem sets up, disappearance governs. Do we fear that? Embrace that? In this poem, as in many of the others throughout the book, the self isn't set up as an authority of any permanence. The self in these poems has been described as a space to be moved through, a compelling absence.

This is always true, but particularly apparent the older you get. Older age is a Via Negativa, and disappearance and deliquescence become focal. And yet, there is metamorphosis, transformation, the continual appearing and disappearing of phenomena. The unheard cry of the wood thrush opens soundlessly into the piercing signal of absence at the heart of things. The closing images suggest that the absence is generative.

There's no good name for this source of generation. Emptiness, it's called. You call it silence. I often use the word stillness. "Dark female enigma" it's called in some Taoist texts.

Dougherty: It seems your poems seek a sense of direct experience, and that experience is of resonant communion. To get at this profound relation, in your earlier poems you've used words like "union" and "undivided." And one of my favorites of such synonyms occurs in "Poetry is the Spirit of the Dead, Watching:" "withed."

Gibson: One engages in the search for direct experience for its own sake, even if that experience turns out to be bitter. Even bitterness can be sweet if it's met and taken in or if one doesn't resist it or divide away from it. Loss, let's say, may also carry within it the blessing of "being with." Or, "resonant communion" as you put it.

Awareness of my own brokenness and my habits of separation lead to longing for union. "Resonant communion"—your words again—reminds me of the shimmer of language *and* of experience. Direct experience is a form of union.

Dougherty: It's one of the aspects of your work that is so rewarding to read and re-read. It seems to me that making oneself available for such direct encounter is a good way to live.

Gibson: It is a good way to live.

Dougherty: Is that resonance what you imagine Hui Neng's experience was in "Pounding the Rice," how in each moment there is "nothing left out?"

Gibson: Hui Neng showed up at the monastery to apply to be the Master's student and was promptly sent to the granary to pound rice. For eight long years, that's what he only did. Imagine how you'd feel! The story doesn't tell us what happened to him in those eight years, but we do know that when the Master decided to retire, he wrote a poem to test his students' quality of understanding. It's the famous poem about dusting the mirror. Hui Neng wrote the answering poem that catapulted him into being the next teacher. And guess what. He knew about dust because pounding the rice is, I would imagine, a dusty business. He'd had plenty of time to contemplate the universe of dust and to see into his own nature. In his poem, there's no mirror to wipe clear of dust, and no mirror-stand to hold the mirror. In true emptiness, there's no subject/object division. No dust, no mirror, no self, and nothing to hold up the self. What do you suppose he discovered in contemplating a single grain of rice? It seems the shimmer of that resonance radiates throughout space and time.

Dougherty: Do you feel your body of work has a core set of themes or questions you explore?

Gibson: There's variety in my work. The speakers vary—some whole books are spoken by a persona or personae. There's narrative and lyric. So: a superficial variety. I've been called a political poet, a nature poet, a religious poet. All of the above, useful in some ways, are just attempts to label. Within nearly every book there's a commitment to not just speak of the personal but also to allow the political and social world to enter—

nothing left out. I think I've always been asking, *What is love, exactly? How do we find union? Who am I anyway? What does it mean that there's loss and change? How do I live with the fact of suffering, whether it's my suffering or another's*? Those questions and others are what stitch the body of work together, whoever is speaking, whether the scene is southeastern Connecticut woods or the Japanese court or monastery, or Mexico in the 1920s, and whoever is the speaker: mayor of a small Spanish town, walker of the hills and woods, potter, political activist, photographer, care-giver, solitary, citizen, or sitter on the meditation cushion (or chair).

In earlier work, I'm concerned with things a young woman considers—having children, or not; broken relationships, unbroken relationships, finding work you can do, work expressive of who you are. Now the poems focus on concerns a woman of seventy-two years, who lives mostly alone, has. Autobiography comes into play as a way of documenting where my attention is. And where my attention is, there my life is. And it might be a grain of rice.

Dougherty: For what it's worth, my sense is that our practice is in embodying this moment, so of course, the details of our given life at that point enter the poems. As you say, that's where our attention is. But by entertaining those essential questions and the lyric concentration, the poem is not strictly about what happened to me or what I did or what this event was; instead all those rich autobiographical details illuminate the questions and open them up. Your poems are a contrast to those that present an event and then, almost as an add-on, sometimes literally in the last stanza, reflect on it, asking, "What does this mean?" Your poems work another way; you present or imply enduring and powerful questions as you look at them in nature, in the news, in your life, and in other peoples' lives. The questions are embodied in the images.

Gibson: Yes. Questions and encounters are traceable in the images, in the pattern those images make. I used to ask my students to "think in images," to follow the development of an idea within the embodiment of the images, and to discover their pattern, to experience intuitively where the images lead. It's a surrender to their "logic" and a letting go of one's own notions of where things ought to lead, how they ought to resolve.

Image must first be experienced, and then surrendered to. As in life, so in the poem. The kind of poem I value attempts to recreate or embody experience in such a way that the essential meaning speaks for itself.

Likewise, metaphor has its roots in experience. Let's say you encounter an enormous red-tailed hawk: the surprised mind empties of everything but hawk. Mind becomes hawk for a vibrant moment. Magnificent! Of course, the hawk may also suggest threat, so fear arises, and there's a return to a more cramped mind. But for a moment, you were a hawk.

Words are breath we've shaped with sound. So the return to bare breath is a return to the formless from the world of form. Writing poems, one stays with the word and its web of associations and roots, but the words may have the shimmer of silence around them.

Metaphor closes the distance, erases boundaries.

Each image is the result of an unforgotten momentary encounter. Remembered, one revisits and refines the moment over and over until in a painting or in a poem the often-revisited image becomes, as John Berger says, "absolutely momentary." Beautiful phrase. The absolute and the relative join.

Dougherty: Death and loss recur in your work. Your poems have examined also the social and environmental brokenness of our world. The new collections seems to take these on indirectly by addressing fear. How does meditation help you engage with that?

Gibson: The brokenness of our world—you ask that question now? I don't think that my new collection takes on that brokenness directly. It's a collection that focuses on the struggle of living alone after a devastating personal loss. And fear is definitely an intimate challenge. Your question, however, is so timely. Aleppo is in ruins. A young man has been sentenced to death for shooting men and women at prayer in a church in Charleston—because they were African American. The polar ice isn't forming as readily this winter after the warmest climate year on record. Species are disappearing, wealth is being concentrated in the pockets of a few, too many are suffering from poor education and job loss and perhaps loss of health care—on and on. We have a new President, and the ascendant mentality seems to embrace might-as-right, money-as-power, a grab-and-go which values force and success more than using language honestly. No resonant communion here—it appears to be a wrecking ball of a Cabinet. And there's the real fear of nuclear weapons once again. So much is threatened.

How does meditation help us with the stirrings of fear, facing such a world? Meditation helps us stay directly and clearly in the moment. If there is fear, we name it, claim it. If there is anger, we can witness it and make choices how to use that energy creatively. If there's a reinvigorated commitment to compassion in action, so much the better. Whatever is in us has to be seen and known for what it is. We become dangerous to ourselves and to others when we fall in love with our ideas, egos, powers, fears. Meditation helps us each find common ground—our humanity!

Dougherty: Let me give you a specific poem to comment on so you can go a little further with these ideas. Your poem "Radiation" appeared in John Bradley's anthology *Atomic Ghost* and now I think it brings together many things we've discussed. It's very social, and the form of it is the form of a ritual.

Gibson: Yes, "Radiation," although a poem with social/political content, uses the structure of a worship service: Call to Worship, Responses, Confession, An Ancient Text, Private Meditation, Common Prayer. Aside from the sermon, which thankfully gets left out, it's pieced together from those lyric moments in the service when poetry is allowed to emerge, prayer is enlivened, or confession made possible.

> Stand in the sun long enough to remember
> that nothing is made without light
> spoken so firmly
> our flesh is its imprint.

Dougherty: Those are the exact lines I was going to give you!

Gibson: They suggest a lot of what we've been talking about.

Dougherty: How so?

Gibson: There's the meditative standing, the necessity to remember—and we're not talking about historical remembering. We're talking about deep, deep, deep body or spiritual remembering that "nothing is made without light." And I love "spoken so firmly." It could have been "spoken so meditatively" but (laughs) that doesn't scan.

Spoken so firmly, "our flesh is its imprint..." trying, trying always to get back to the source, to accept what is impermanent, and to live in terms of that, but also with an awareness that there's something that moves through us that is absolute. Light becomes the image of... Quakers use Light as an image for God or the Holy. The Essential Energy.

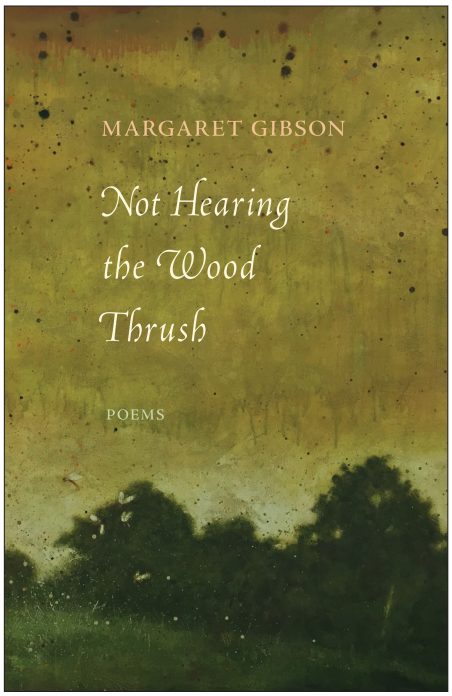
Dougherty: No one?

Gibson: No one. AWP

***Edward Dougherty**'s fourth collection of poems* Grace Street *is available from Cayuga Lake Books. In 2015, he published* Everyday Objects *(Plain View) and his fifth chapbook,* House of Green Water *(FootHills Publishing), and in May 2015, his emblems (small calligraphic artwork with a brief poem) were exhibited at the Word & Image Gallery at the Bright Hill Literary Center.*

excerpt

From Not Hearing the Wood Thrush: Poems



Not to Remain Altogether Silent

All the time I kept you out of my poems,
you found a way into my body instead.
Instead of your becoming another word
for dove or wrist bone, owl or stone,
you've become the impulse that has me
raise cairns to mark my way. You're
what all verbs traverse, a fuse for the urge
to look at what I can't see within what I can;
also the stillness inside me as wind-riven
leaves are driven over the roof shingles
into the night. Kindled by earth and sky,
you're the touch of a tongue on my skin,
contingent and mortal; and the shy,
reluctant love of faithfulness to what I feel
when at times I think *there are no gods*.
You are in me what is crucial and crucible
when the soul, in its root-fire, lasers and welds
each fissure and craze line of my loving elusive,
if pervasive, you. How stark it is to be alive—
and, although absence is the form you take
in what we call the world, how durable...

Not Hearing the Woodthrush

There are thoughts that come to the door screen summer nights,
lured by a light kept on by
some childhood fear. They bump up against it, or cling.

Darkness frees them.

There is love comes late, in darkness, and gives no reason.
Body speckled, sweet as a pear.
How nakedly
the heart bears its weight.

At dusk, deep in the summer woods, a silence.
Something that was here, expected
to continue being here,
isn't.

I see the line in my palm etched by fate and not yet
snipped. The afterlife,
what is it
if not a further body desire turns toward?

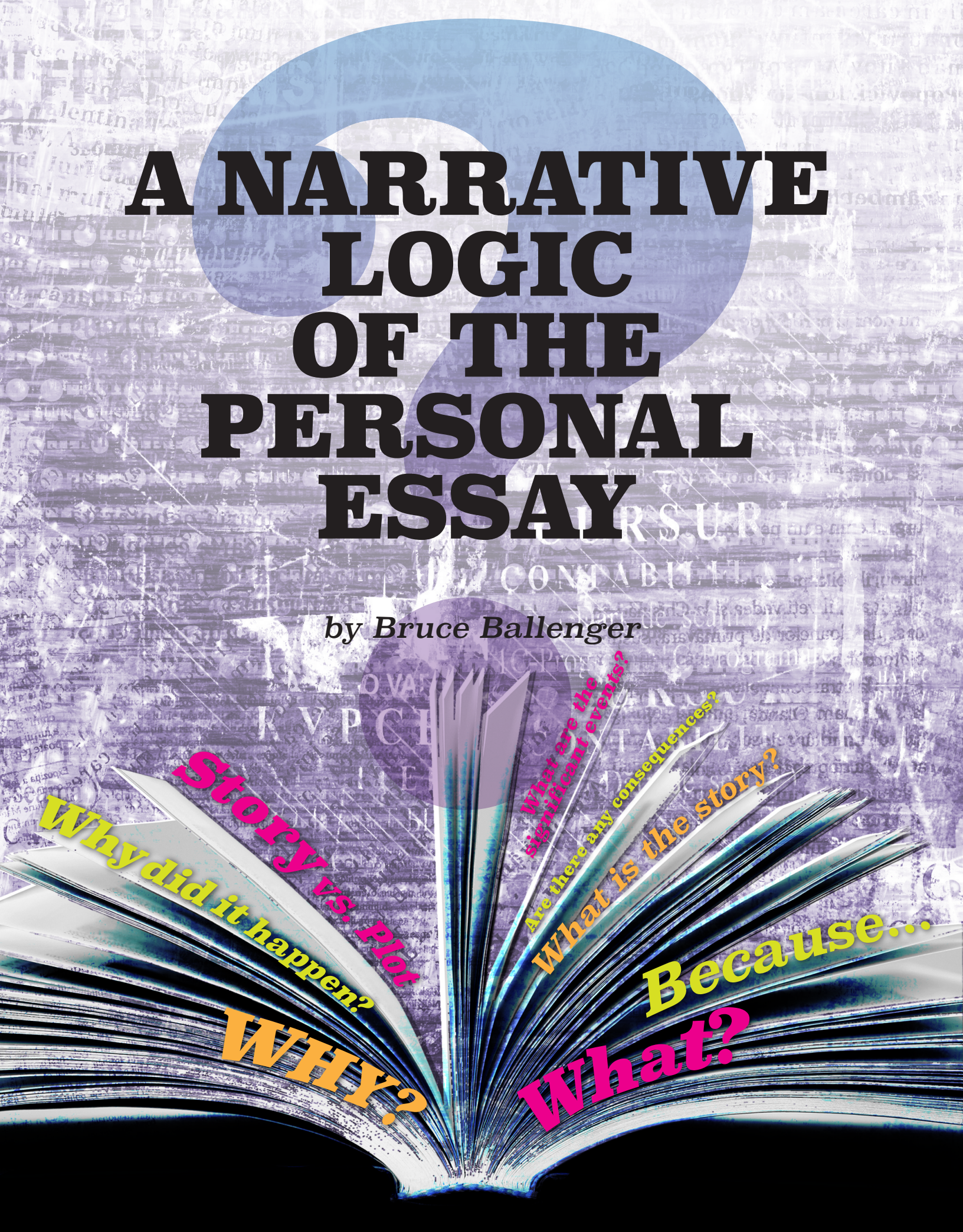
No clear edge to the universe, now the scientists tell us.

They describe an intense
fuzziness instead. World spins into other worlds as incandescent
as what arises from cocoons
ripening on the underskin of leaves and stars."

"*Not to Remain Altogether Silent*" *and* "*Not Hearing the Wood Thrush*" *were published in separate issues of* The Georgia Review *and will be published in* Not Hearing the Wood Thrush, *forthcoming from LSU Press in September 2018.*

A NARRATIVE LOGIC OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY

by Bruce Ballenger



In 2011, Dr. Michael Shannon, a California pediatrician, was driving his SUV on the Pacific Coast highway when he was "t-boned" by a semi. The SUV, pinned under the truck, burst into flames with Shannon trapped inside. Fortunately, firefighters from Paramedic Engine 29 were at the scene in minutes. They doused the burning car with fire retardant, and using the jaws of life the firefighters dramatically rescued the doctor as the flames were licking around his feet and legs. Among Shannon's rescuers was a paramedic, Chris Trokey, who, it turns out, was Dr. Shannon's patient thirty years earlier. Trokey was born prematurely, weighing a mere three pounds, and the prognosis was grim— a fifty percent chance of survival. Dr. Shannon spent days caring for the infant "round the clock," the very same child who later grew up to return the favor years later on a California highway, part of the team that saved the physician's life. "It's amazing to watch them all grow up," said Shannon, "but to have one come back in your life, on a day you really need it, that's incredible."[1]

If this was fiction would it be a good story? That was the question that my colleague, the novelist Brady Udall, asked his graduate workshop recently, and everyone agreed that this story would be terrible fiction. Why? Because causality—not coincidence—is at the heart of narrative logic: Something happens and a narrator feels some stake in examining why it happened or what the consequences might be.

Causal logic is fundamental to all storytelling in both true and imagined stories, and the absence of causal logic is often where the narratives of novice writers run aground. Brian, a student in my introductory creative nonfiction class, often wrote about raft trips. I've followed him down the churning South Fork of the Boise River and over a waterfall on the Lochsa. He wrote about the thunder of rapids in a narrow canyon and dodging "boat cutters," rocks in midstream that threaten to shred a rubber raft. Brian wrote about all of these things but I didn't really know why, and so in conference I gently prodded him: "What is it you're trying to understand about your river trips?" He seemed puzzled by the question. Brian, like many developing essayists, brought with him a simple faith in story: If the memory is rendered powerfully enough, then it will be affecting. Unfortunately, this is never quite enough.

For many years, I have used Vivian Gornick's famous distinction between a "situation and a story" to help writers like Brian understand the problem he needed to solve. "The situation is the context or circumstance, sometimes the plot," she writes. "The story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say."[2] Brian's rafting trips were situations, but what was his motive in sharing them? What did he hope to explore in the retelling?

Causal logic helps writers to see where these questions originate. It's never enough to simply have events to write about. It is in the examination of the *reasons for* and the *consequences of* the things that happen to us that give rise to stories. But so many things happen to us. How do we know what is the most fertile ground for us to explore as writers? Narrative logic always works in relationship to a *significant* event, something that happened that the writer senses has unsettled meaning. For example, in "Devil's Bait," one of the essays in Leslie Jameison's collection *The Empathy Exams*, the significant event is a small conference of Morgellon's sufferers the essayist attends at a small Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.[3] For E.B White in "Once More to the Lake," the occasion for story is when he revisits his boyhood summer haunt in Maine with his own.[4] The significant event in James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" is his father's funeral.[5] Of course, there are events in Brian's essays, too, but their meanings aren't called into question; they aren't significant events but simply things that happened that he thought were dramatic and interesting. Returning to Gornick's distinction, Brian wrote about *situations* on his river trips but struggled to find the story. Of course, this isn't just a struggle for novice writers. As we draft material, we are all on the scent of a significant event around which we might build a story. Narrative logic clarifies the problem: What we seek are the events with the most compelling causal complications.

It's never enough to simply have events to write about. It is in the examination of the reasons for and the consequences of the things that happen to us that give rise to stories.

One of the commonplaces I've always found particularly annoying is that "everything happens for a reason." The implication, I think, is that we need not interrogate the events of our lives because the universe operates on its own logic, and we'd best accept it. This is a logic that works nicely as an explanation for Dr. Shannon's rescue on the Pacific Coast Highway by the man he saved thirty years earlier. What caused this coincidence to happen? Fate? Divine Providence? Such explanations work badly as stories in contemporary literary fiction, Brady Udall argues, and I don't think they work in narrative nonfiction either, or at least they don't work if writers choose to explore the *reasons* the world acted on them in mysterious ways. Consequences are another matter entirely. For example, I could easily see a story arise from Dr. Shannon's experience after the accident as he examines its meaning in his life. The same might apply to his rescuer. The implication here is that while anything can be a significant event for writers, including inexplicable ones, the most promising is an event that involves human agency, one in which *both* causes and consequences are fair game for story.

The narrative logic I've described so far is focused on causality. But there's a key element missing: time. We always tell stories in relationship to time. Often, we think about a story's internal structure—it has a beginning, middle, and end—as its essential temporal feature, or we consider its setting: something happened at a particular time and place. But I think narrative logic provides a more precise way of thinking about this.

Story time is calibrated to when the significant event occurred. Writers move back and forth in time from the thing that happened in an effort to explore their questions of reasons or consequence. In "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin is largely interested in the consequences of his father's death, especially as they are set against the Harlem riots that coincided with it. "When his life had ended I began to wonder about that life," writes Baldwin, "and also, in a new way, to be apprehensive about my own."[6] E.B. White is also interested in consequences, prompting him to speculate what returning to the lake might feel like: "On the journey over to the lake I began to wonder what it would be like. I wondered how the time would have marred this unique, this holy spot."[7] Joan Didion's "Dreamers of the Golden Dream" is an examination of reasons—why would Lucille Miller, a woman who would seem to have the life that she wanted, burn her husband alive in the family Volkswagen?[8] More often, however, essays examine *both* causes and consequences. In "Devil's Bait," Jameison wonders what might explain what seems to some the shared delusion of Morgellons's sufferers that there are mysterious things—fibers, worms, particles—emerging from just under their skin? But she's most keenly interested in the effects of the disease, not just on its victims but on those of us who, like Jameison, feel empathetic towards Morgellons sufferers even if we may not believe in the "reality" of their disease.

One of the most basic decisions writers make about how to structure their stories is where to locate the significant event in the narrative. When we informally tell stories to people this often isn't even a question. The big reveal comes at the end. But when we craft stories with causal relationships in mind, then chronology may not be the best structure. E.B. White's much anthologized essay "Death of a Pig" follows its title with a lead paragraph that confirms the significant event around which he builds the essay: "I spent several days and nights in mid-September with an ailing pig and I feel driven to account for this stretch of time, more particularly since the pig died last night, and I lived, and things might easily have gone the other way round and one left to do the accounting."[9]

Narrative logic provides an explanation for why White began this way. He was primarily interested in exploring the consequences of this unfortunate event, and so it makes sense to foreground it so he could get on with the work of examining those meanings. Unfortunately, whether the question driving the essay is one of cause or consequence isn't always a good guide to structure (Didion's "Dreamers of the Golden Dream," for example, an essay that focuses largely on cause, places the burning Volkswagen incident in the first four pages of the narrative). But each question does direct the writer's gaze to certain parts of his experience and not others. As Annie Dillard once famously said, the key decision in crafting nonfiction is "what to put in and what to leave out."[10] Questions of consequence obviously place the emphasis on what happened after the significant event. Questions of cause make the events leading up to the significant event most important. Essays that take up both questions can go either way, or both ways. The key idea here is that the time structure of an essay is calibrated to the significant event, and guided by the question that is driving the essay, it moves forward from the

event, goes back to what led up to it, or zig-zags back and forth.

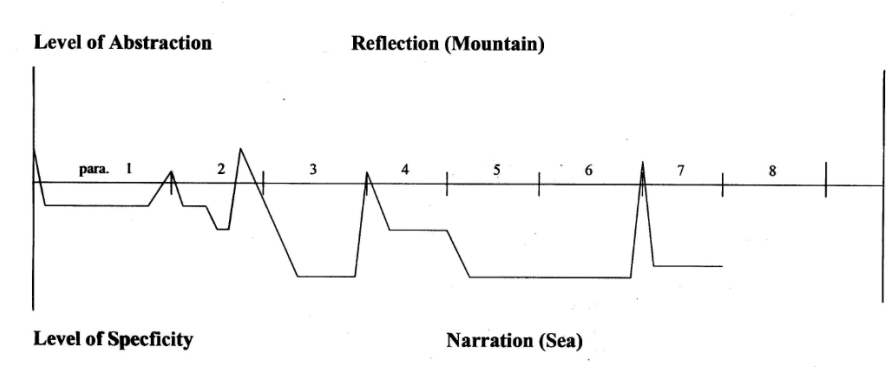
Essayists build thought structures along with story structures. Unlike many fiction writers who focus on creating stories that render experience, essayists want to both render experience *and* discover its possible meanings, and this requires a structure that also encourages reasoning. In general, the logic of the essay is inductive—writers examine the particulars of their experience looking for patterns of meaning—but what are the thought structures that actively encourage this? The first key element of such a structure is the causal question that motivates writers to explore their subject in the first place. Eileen Pollack writes that the "interplay between the central question that guides the writer's research and the form that helps that writer organize his or her findings is the living, breathing heart of creative nonfiction."[11] It is the collision, Pollack argues, between the writer's question and the relevant particulars of experience "that throws up meditative sparks." The question may be elusive, of course. But narrative logic suggests that, for memoirists, the hunt begins by deciding what is the significant event—the thing that happened that has the most urgently-felt unsettled meanings. In essays like Jameison and Didion's that involve reporting, the question arises from going into the world to seek it out.

The meaning-making machinery of the narrative essay not only helps writers generate insights but it can help refine and clarify the question at the heart of the work. It relies on inductive reasoning that is facilitated by a structure that works in several ways. One is a kind of dialogic thinking--the back and forth between the particular and the abstract, observations of and ideas about, what happened

Bruce Ballenger

and what *happens*. As a structure we see this movement in essays as the difference between showing and telling, which we recognize as either narration (scene, description, anecdote, detail) or exposition. In fact, it's possible to crudely visualize this structure by literally graphing the back and forth movement from the particular to the abstract in narrative nonfiction. For example, here's my graph of the first

seven paragraphs or so of Didion's "Dreamer of the Golden Dream."[12]



When I do this with much of Didion's work, what I often see are the very brief sparks of reflection, and then she quickly plunges back into narration. These reflections are often shatteringly powerful lines that resonate like a guitar string long after it's plucked. In "Dreamer's," for example, Didion writes about how the idea of California's possibilities intoxicated Lucille Miller like it did many of the migrants before her. In a sudden spike of insight, Didion writes that "the dream was teaching the dreamers how to live,"[13] a line that elegantly captures how Miller—and others like her—might have been led astray. Immediately after that passage the piece returns to narration. More polemical essays like Roxanne Gay's "How to Be Friends with Another Woman" may be largely expository with only break spikes of narration.[14] Personal essays can be located all over this continuum, and it provides a useful taxonomy for distinguishing between them.

As a diagnostic tool, a graph of the movement between narration and reflection can also reveal problems in a draft. Novice writers, for example, may focus all of their energies on telling a story, only to reflect briefly at the very end ("As I look back on this now, I realize that true friends are hard to find"), a situation that is obvious in a graph that spikes only in the last paragraph. It is this back and forth movement from showing to telling that is the drama of the personal essay, and its absence either prompts readers to ask the question every essayist fears—"so what?"—or prompts boredom, something that essays with long stretches of exposition often risk.

Causal logic is fundamental to all storytelling in both true and imagined stories, and the absence of causal logic is often where the narratives of novice writers run aground.

In fiction, writers are urged to show don't tell. Essays do both, and for all its risks, it is in exposition that writers think through the meanings of what happened. This is possible because exposition is the language of thought. The theorist Richard Ohmann once pondered the injunction in style manuals and writing textbooks that the best prose is always concrete and specific, and he wondered whether this doesn't "push the student writer always toward the language that most nearly reproduces the immediate experience and away from the language that might be used to understand it, transform it, and relate it to everything else."[15] Though creative writers typically view abstraction with suspicion, essayists recognize its power to name the categories of experience in which their narratives fall, locate the ideas that seem most relevant, and recognize the patterns of meaning that lead to insight.

In a general way, the move to abstract in the personal essay is triggered by the nagging sense that the "so what?" question remains unanswered: Why am I telling this story about myself? But there is something subtler at work. Phillip Lopate writes that essays incorporate a "double perspective."[16] One attempts to render experience as it happened and the other draws "on the sophisticated wisdom of one's current self" to interpret the meaning of that experience. The logic behind these two perspectives is linked to time and point of view. In an essay, there aren't just two perspectives but two narrators: the "now-narrator" and the "then-narrator," and it is the shifting back and forth between them that is an essential part of the dialectic that generates insight, that movement between what happened and what happens.

Over the years I tried to illustrate to my students how this method of reasoning about experience works by playing video clips of the 1980s television program *The Wonder Years*. The show follows Kevin (Fred Savage) as he grows up in a suburban California neighborhood in the late sixties. Against the political turmoil of the time, Kevin's life is utterly ordinary: He tries to sort out his feelings about the girl across the street, attempts to understand his father's disillusionment with work, and adjusts to his sister's feminist awakening. What was

significant about *The Wonder Years* as an example of storytelling was that it was the first television program to incorporate Lopate's dual perspectives, a structure that is now commonplace on TV shows. We have the narrative of Kevin's experience as a thirteen-year-old, recreated with the immediacy that makes viewers feel its power. But the script writers' innovation was the use of the voice of the adult Kevin, a narrator who introduces each story and then returns throughout the narrative to comment, interpret, and question what happened from the point of view of the present. In the absence of this adult narrator, *The Wonder Years* would have been a cute story but hardly memorable. With that narrator, it was often poignant.

It isn't hard to introduce writing students to these two perspectives in their own work, something I've done with an exercise that often follows our viewing of *The Wonder Years*. I explain that the exercise will involve two five-minute episodes of writing, each in response to a prompt. The first prompt is this: Imagine a room you spent a lot of time in as a child. Put yourself back into that room, and using *the present tense* draw on your senses to write about everything that you see, hear, smell, and so on. For example, I might begin this way: "I am sitting at the small kitchen table in the narrow kitchen at my grandmother's house in Wheeling, Illinois. It is August. She stands hunched over the hot stove in a flowered apron, stirring the pasta sauce, and its rich, earthy smell hangs in the air. Through the narrow window next to her I can see a pear tree, and it's blooming..." I urge students to fastwrite from this prompt, not compose, following the words rather than trying to muscle them into place. Typically, this writing generates a surprising amount of material. For the second prompt, I ask students to finish this sentence: "As I look back on this now, I realize that..." From there, I encourage them to *compose* a fat paragraph, this time thinking about what they say before they say it. We write again for about five minutes.

"How would you distinguish between each episode of writing?" I ask. This is a rich discussion that frequently helps clarify the difference between now- and then-narrators. Students often report that the initial prompt is richly detailed and emotionally charged while the second is more abstract, and often more difficult to write, though typically this where insights—if any—emerged. Obviously, the "Roomful of Details" artificially mimics the time shift—what happened and what happens—that is characteristic of the personal essay's dual perspective, and in doing so it also mimics the language of each as well: the sensory and expressive language of "showing" and the more reflective language of "telling." In other words, we have both Kevin's deployed to not just render experience but interpret it.

The narrative theorist Rick Altman argues that we know we're being told a story as soon as there is someone to follow, and in the personal essay we usually know who we are following immediately: the "I" who steps forward to speak about his or her experience.[17] Though this narrator may not register as a character until a few paragraphs into an essay, sometimes we sense it from the first line. George Orwell was a master at this. For example, "Shooting an Elephant" begins this way: "In Moulmein, in lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me."[18] But it isn't enough that an essay has an "I-character." The personal essay's narrative logic also demands that it is also guided by a reasoning subject, a narrator who is also expected to explicitly manage the meanings that give the work its purpose. This means, of course, that most essayists are ex-

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pected to say what they mean or show what they think (though lyric essays may lean more towards ambiguity). But personal essays make subtler demands on their narrators that may be more fundamental: an epistemological perspective that welcomes doubt, uncertainty, and skepticism.

I think this is the hardest thing to teach to novice essayists, most of whom are schooled in the academic essay, which is typically driven by a thesis. Doubt about its truthfulness—even if the writer is privately unsure—is masked by the force of argument. Obviously, the narrator of an academic essay is very different from the narrator of a personal essay—for one thing personal essays are more explicitly *personal*—but the difference is more profound than that. Unlike writers of arguments, essayists' hope, at best, for what Doug Hesse called "episodic knowledge"[19]: This is what I know *right now*. Who knows what I might think about this in a day, a week, or a year. Insight is always connected to a particular time and often particular place, and as a result becomes an event in the nonfiction narrative. The narrators of personal essays are receptive to these events, and even expect them, but they are at the same time always ready to interrogate whatever insights emerge, just as they would any other experience.

For example, a scene in "Devil's Bait" is set at the small Texas conference of Morgellon's sufferers, and Jameison writes about her conversation with Dawn, a nurse from Pittsburgh. When Dawn confesses that her greatest fear about the disease is that it will make it impossible for her to have relationships—"with scars and stuff that I have from this, what guy's gonna like me?"—Jameison writes that she strongly identifies with Dawn: "*I've felt that too*." Jameson writes, "Her condition seems like a crystallization of what I've always felt about myself—a wrongness in my being that I could never pin or name, so I found things to pin it to: my body, my thighs, my face. The resonance is part of what compels me about Morgellons: it offers a shape for what I've often felt, a container or christening for a certain species of unease. Dis-ease." But then Jameison suddenly disrupts this reading of herself: "My willingness to turn Morgellons into metaphor—as a corporeal manifestation of some abstract human tendency—is dangerous. It obscures the particular and unbidden nature of the suffering in front of me."[20]

Though Rick Altman wrote that "following" a character is the clearest signal to an audience that it is experiencing a story, what is unique about essayists is that they are always following themselves. They are keen spectators of the I-characters they create, hoping for the moments when they discover what they didn't know they knew. The great writing teacher Donald Murray, who celebrated surprise as "the writer's addiction," observed that a "writer sits down intending to say one thing and hears the writing say something more, or less, or completely different. The writing surprises, instructs, receives, questions, tells its own story, and the writer becomes the reader wondering what will happen next."[21] The receptivity to surprise is especially important in the personal essay, and this demands an openness to self-doubt and uncertainty that apprentice writers are unused to. But even more challenging, the essayist must be willing—as Jameison was—to look at her initial self-discoveries with skepticism.

As his student, Murray once told me that writers often keep telling the same story over and over, and essayists are particularly vulnerable to believing—and repeating—master narratives about themselves. For example, the theme of much of my early work was the story of the wronged son. I grew up with an alcoholic father who died when I was twenty-two, and for years much of what I wrote repeated that theme. Even a recent essay, which is ostensibly about my habit of collecting manual typewriters, somehow arced back in the early drafts to those familiar old hurts. Fortunately, I was reminded by several astute readers that the narrators of personal essayists must always be deeply suspicious of their master narratives. Is this typewriter essay really about my father? It wasn't. One of the great challenges of writing essays is to not only discover the causal questions that drive the work, but to test the truthfulness of the insights that emerge, and to do this sometimes in front of readers.

The narrative logic of the personal essay hinges on a narrator who hopes to harvest self-knowledge but who also sees it as episodic, uncertain, and even contradictory. There's nothing novel about this. Michel de Montaigne, the first essayist, wrote more than 500 years ago that "could my mind find a firm footing, I should not be making essays, but coming to

conclusions; it is however, always in its apprenticeship and on trial."[22] In the revisions of his *Essays*, published in subsequent editions, Montaigne rarely cut anything but instead simply added his latest thinking on a subject, even if it contradicted what was there. What we witness in reading the work, then, is a narrator whose perspectives aren't fixed to a particular place and time but that continuously evolve. Students often see this most clearly when they return to their essays in revision. Then time can work its magic, loosening the grip that earlier versions of themselves had on what they had to say in a draft. What we might teach them when they do return to the work is that this struggle towards self-understanding is part of the drama of the essay, too, and one of its greatest rewards. AWP

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Notes

1. Rick Chambers and Tracy Bloom, "OC Paramedic Helps Rescue Doctor Who Saved His Life as Baby; Pair Reunited," KTLA News, March 29, 2015, accessed August 2, 2016, KTLMarcktla.com/2015/03/29/oc-paramedic-helps-rescue-doctor-who-saved-his-life-as-baby-pair-reunited/.

2. Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), p. 13.

3. Leslie Jameison, "Devil's Bait" in *The Empathy Exams* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014), pp. 27–56.

4. E.B. White, "Once More to the Lake" in *Essays of E.B. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 197–202.

5. James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son" in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), pp. 127–145.

6. Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," p. 128.

7. White, "Once More to the Lake," p. 197.

8. Joan Didion, "Dreamers of the Golden Dream," in *We Tell Ourselves Stories to Live: Collected Nonfiction* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2006), pp. 13–29.

9. E.B. White, "Death of a Pig," p. 17.

10. Annie Dillard, "To Fashion a Text," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 141.

11. Eileen Pollack, "The Interplay of Form and Content in Creative Nonfiction," *The Writer's Chronicle* 39 (March–April 2007), p. 53.

12. One way I explain to students the movement between the specific and the abstract in the essay is to use a metaphor: the "sea of experience" and the "mountain of reflection." While in narration we swim in the sea of experience it's also necessary to seek the vantage point of the mountain where it's possible to see patterns. I warn students however, never to climb too high. Then the abstractions risk becoming clichés.

13. Didion, "Dreamers of the Golden Dream," p. 22.

14. Roxanne Gay, "How to be Friends with Another Woman," in *Bad Feminist* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), pp. 47–50.

15. Richard Ohmann, "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language," *College English 41* (Dec. 1979): p. 396.

16. Philip Lopate, "Reflection and Introspection: A Pedagogic Mystery Story," *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction 7* (Spring 2005): p. 145.

17. Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

18. George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant," in *A Collection of Essays* (San Diego: Harvest, 1946), p. 148.

19. Doug Hesse, "Essays and Experience, Time and Rhetoric," in *Writing Theory and Critical Theory* ed. John Clifford and John Schilb, (New York: Modern Language Assoc., 1994), p. 197.

20. Jameison, "Devil's Bait," pp. 32–33.

21. Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Boston: Thompson/Heinle, 2004), p. 7.

22. Michel de Montaigne, "On Repentance," in *Essays*, translated by J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 235.

SOUND-THINKING *in Lyric Poetry*

by Cynthia Hogue

I want to contemplate in this essay ways in which musical and verbal intelligences emerge in poetry and serve as a compositional strategy: to look at how a poet "thinks" through her music, as distinct from direct statements and use of imagery. What interests me is the way a poet puts sonorous "truths" in play. We usually consider visual images and narrative meaning in our inquiries into poetry, but overlook how the textual music interacts with the poem's substance and meaning. Music functions as an intellectual, even visionary aspect of poetry that we might call *sound*-thinking.

As a starting point, consider Ezra Pound's analogous re-conceptualization of the notion of Image in poetry at the turn of the last century. In conceiving Imagism, Pound complicated the relationship of perception to time in the lyric poem that the French Symbolists and Victorian Decadents theorized (in essence, the capacity of words to convey the sensations of a moment's glance). In his foundational essay, "A Retrospect," Pound redefined the Image as "an intellectual and emotional *complex* in an instant of time."[1] A "complex" is not a single strand of imagery or narrative but an interweaving of various and unrelated strands to make a composite or hybrid whole. Pound drew on Ernest Fenellosa's theory of how the Chinese ideogram functions to conceive of the idea of an Image combining two "depictables," which together produce "a concept" that is abstract and, therefore, "graphically undepictable."[2] It is the combination of the visual elements that creates the redefined Image. Spatial proximity and juxtaposition create the interaction of the two "depictables," during which a third entity that is conceptual is produced. The poem is rippling with thought through the play of its visual images. We might call this poetic aspect "thinking-seeing."

But, consider Pound's most famous example of an Imagist poem in terms not of the juxtaposition of images, which take us from an apparition in the underground to the glistening, natural world above ground after a rain shower, but of the shift in the musical patterns:

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in a crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.[3]

The implication of a visual resemblance between the two images—the white faces in the Parisian crowd waiting for the train and the petals on the wet branch—is created by both spatial proximity and the floating colon, but the association is undercut by the aural dissonance. The first line is mellifluous, languorous and Latinate, excepting the final word, "crowd," which with its hard "c," dipthonged "o," and plosive "d" signals a shift to the mainly monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon words of the second line. These harder sounds pave the way for the force of the last line. One would think of a Metro station not as languorous but as busy, fast-paced, *modern*, but it is the second line that has all the sonic power, intensified by the final spondaic foot, "Black bough": "petals," "wet," and the two alliterating "b's" separated by the hard "ck." Sounds in the poem are not acting in concert with the poem's statements but are disconcerting our impressions.

To use Pound's terms, the poem's language is charged phanopoetically (image) and melopoetically (music) but not logopoetically (intellect). Sound puts into play a counter-intuitive logic of image, but to approach how that logic works, we need to backtrack. As noted earlier, it is the second forceful line that ends on an open note, "bough," while the first languorous line ends on a hard, closed note, "crowd." Of course, "crowd" and "bough" are associated through assonance, but they also differ, in that they don't rhyme perfectly. The second line opens to the sound continuing beyond its pronunciation into the world, while the first line shuts us underground like a tomb. Tracking the play and clash of sounds, we might arrive at an otherwise inaccessible insight: *nothing humans make has the power or grandeur of Nature*.

Hank Lazer refers to the synergy of sound and thought in a poem as "thinking / singing," a phrase he coins to characterize that aspect of lyricism in which a poet is "sounding out of uncustomary thought."[4] Lazer argues that there is a cognitive element that song both activates and enacts, which we as readers only access by attending to the way music signifies in the poem. From my brief analysis of how sound is working in "In a Station of the Metro," we might extend both Lazer's argument and Pound's reading of Fenollosa to suggest that what I've termed active *sound*-thinking is produced by the combination of two or more *audibles*, which creates a *product* that has a value of *another register* (is even, at times, inaudible), and is *conceptual* in nature.

> MUSIC FUNCTIONS AS AN INTELLECTUAL, EVEN VISIONARY ASPECT OF POETRY THAT WE MIGHT CALL SOUND-THINKING.

Turning to H.D.'s most famous Imagist poem, "Oread," we see that this notion can be applied to harmony as well as dissonance and with sonic fusion as well as with aural contrast. "Oread" is structured by a striking superimposition of perception and object. The poem yokes the observed (the sea) and the observing eye (the dryad), who sees everything through that which she knows (the forest). Here's the poem in full:

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.[5]

The effect is not subtle—everything about the sea is described as a forest—but the fact that the poem's awareness is determined by *lived* experience is so muted as to escape notice. Although it looks to the external world, the poem is not about the landscape so much as about how embodied experience literally colors our world. There is a resonance in the poem that intensifies the effects of sound, creating reverberating associations of meaning and image that Meredith Stricker has termed "ghost rhymes" (the assonance of *sea* and *green*, for example, and the internal repeated rhyme of *whirl* and *hurl*). As Stricker remarks, "Every aural rhyme invokes the reader's consideration of semantic similarities as well."[6] Each rhyme creates associations of sound and meaning. The poem explores how perception is transformed, saturated by embodied experience. Think about the depth of that insight in such a short poem: so condensed, little more than an exhortation repeating itself, the echoing words tethering sensation, desire, perception, and will to world.

THE POWER OF POETRY'S AFFECT IS SONIC, WHICH CAN BE FREELY ACCESSED BY ALL, REGARDLESS OF LANGUAGE OR EDUCATION.

The power of poetry's affect is sonic, which can be freely accessed by all, regardless of language or education. Poetry's music is experienced at both subliminal and conscious levels, so that there are two or more "soundtracks" that we register when hearing a poem. Sometimes, as with H.D.'s poem, these tracks run parallel and coincide. Sometimes, these tracks are brought up to the surface of the poem and help to structure it, as in the poem, "Lent Prayer," by the elliptical poet, Brian Teare. The poem is only loosely tethered to the referential, although certainly the descriptions of a late spring snowfall in a small town along the Susquehanna are thematically and symbolically rich. The tone of dejection and dismay is consistent throughout the poem, yet it never seems sentimental, for it isn't grounded in personal detail but in sound. It is, in fact, the poem's soundtrack that drives the awakening at the heart of the poem, right out of dejection into discovery. The poem opens, "The way prayer is root to precarious."[7] Although "prayer" is in modern English no longer associated logically with its etymological root in L. "precarius" (s-t obtained by entreaty or prayer), it still has a clear aural connection. This association echoes throughout the poem, but it is also re-envisioned—its meaning uncovered and deepened.

Toward the middle we are told: "the root of error is wander."[8] The word "root" occurs in both lines, connecting them, and "error" and "prayer" further reinforce connection by near-rhyme. Etymologically, "error" means "wander": to stray, to turn away. Prayer would seem to correct, not connect, error, no? The repetition disrupts rather than clarifies meaning. But, the line that closes the poem, aurally the same as that which opens it, enables sound to discover meaning: "prayer is / route to precarious."[9] Teare opens with one statement and closes with what sounds like the same statement but isn't, because of the shift from r-o-o-t to r-o-u-t-e, which occasions insight. Prayer doesn't root but uproots us. We can address but not comprehend God. The Word is stable, but our words are not. Building strikingly on H.D.'s experiments, Teare tracks meaning's slippage as sounds shift associatively: "crows creep / the steeple"; cattails "shiver the river"[10]; cows crap in crabgrass; Amish girls press curd through cloth into dirty water. For Teare, sound suggests word choice, producing turns that, however sonorous the music, sketch scenes of jarring detail, giving body to the dissonant undertone that contrasts with a small town's bucolic surface. Teare discovers his meaning by, as Norman Dubie has put it, "Follow[ing] music into sense."[11] Sounding it out is a compositional strategy of deep inquiry.

Like H.D., Teare is a poet who explores the limits of language's capacity to signify sonically, but the same striking principle of discovery functions in a touching personal lyric by Tess Gallagher, "Comeback," in which we find similarly resonant moments of words chosen for the aural effect, with semantic intonations rippling afterward like the wake of a boat. What the reader is told is that—as the speaker remembers how her father "loved first light" and would sit, exactly as the speaker of the poem is sitting in early morning with her cup of coffee looking out over the "Strait"— the speaker may be dying, like her father and her husband, of cancer. The poem's title, "Comeback," fuses the ironic, idiomatic use of the word (as in "the comeback kid") with a more tragic invitation to all she has loved and lost to *Come back*, which, of course, they cannot. The poem refrains from spelling out determinant meaning. Such refrain is repeated at the end in the last

two lines, when the world "begins, and, in a stark silent calling, / won't tell anyone what it's for."[12] Any "certainty" in the poem comes not by direct statements, but in the music of the trope: "Light is sifting in / *like a gloam of certainty* / over the water." Claims to knowing have no explanation, but only a position: the father sitting at the window in memory "knows / something there in the half light / he can't know any other way." The daughter has gained the father's knowledge by occupying his place (literally, as she, too, battles cancer): "And now I know it with him," she says.[13] But what exactly does she know?

Or, to put that question another way, what can *we* know, reading this poem? I glom onto the word that draws our attention because of its antique music: "gloam" goes etymologically back to Old English, meaning twilight, not dawn, and darkness coming on, not the sun's light growing brighter as it rises. The use of "gloam" at that moment in the poem is paradoxical. We are not aware of the paradox consciously, but our access to its insight is through the poem's music. We register that insight subliminally, through the sound of the word, which is a vowel shift away from "gloom" and "glum" (as well as my playful reference above to the idiomatic "glom"). The word "gloam" suggests the other words, which are darker, moodier, and would spell out morosely the sense of feeling attached to life and contemplating losing it. But the speaker doesn't feel sorry for herself, and so she doesn't spell out self-pity but only sounds a tone of lament. The mournful music of long e's and o's punctuates the poem ("steeples" and "sweet," for example, or "gloam" and the repeated "knows"), where the poem also locates the speaker's fighting spirit (her NO to death), as well as her philosophical acceptance of the cycle of all life (her intuitive KNOWing, withheld semantically but articulated musically).

Cynthia Hogue

The poem counters the darker, tonal undercurrents with the lighter, quicker short e's and i's and high, long i's and plosive consonants in particular: the "jittery quail peck," "my father picks," and "we sit beside what rises," to give a few examples.[14] No more than the determinant meaning

> MAY SWENSON'S EXPERIMENTS SCRATCHED THE SMOOTH AND PERFECT SURFACE OF THE LYRIC POEM LIKE A NEEDLE CAREENING OVER VINYL.

can be resolved is grief resolved definitively in this poem, for no pat reassurances are brokered or offered. The poem's wisdom is neither vaunted nor refused. The poet faces the fact of death through her poem's acoustics, which work through an irresolvable loss (not only the two "loves" who have already died, but the other living "love" who is far away). It is the final grief, isn't it?—that we must lose what we love whether a beloved partner or life itself. There are no words adequate to the awful fact. At the same time, the poem celebrates that life, those loves, the crucial mystery of life, the knowledge of it drawn from the wordless into words, as if by osmosis, "in the half light" of partial visibility but distinctive audibility.[15]

Readers can surmise that Gallagher did not think of all this as she wrote the first draft or even pause to look up "gloam" in the *OED*, at least at first.[16] Given the poet's precision, however, we can assume that "gloam" was retained deliberatively during the process of revision. While writing the first draft, Gallagher followed initially the aural insight residing in language itself, allowing associative connections to arise, trusting the inner ear to choose the right word for the poetic moment. She looked up "gloam" later when revising the poem, and at that time, was reminded that it denotes the exact opposite of how she uses it (dusk not dawn). At that point, she may have articulated to herself the kind of paradoxical logic the moment holds, the spell of sound tugging against the march of meaning. In the end, she retained "gloam" because its presence was a door into that lyric phenomenon I've termed *sound*-thinking.

For a final example, I will turn to May Swenson, a poet who actually conducted myriad acoustic investigations, and thus, whose experiments in the poem's sonic elements are of keen interest. Although Swenson is often associated with her good friend Elizabeth Bishop as a high lyric and rather lesser light, she described *herself* as "experimental"—unschooled in prosody and technique, but perhaps therefore fundamentally intuitive and exploratory in her methods.[17] Swenson collected the electronic music of such composers as Edgar Varese, Otto Luening, and Vladimir Ussachevsky, but was most influenced by her friend, the experimental composer, Ruth Anderson, who was herself influenced by John Cage. As Marjorie Perloff explains, the reason Cage remains so important to postmodern poetics is because he understood, as early as 1950, "that from now on poetry would have to position itself ... in relation to the media."[18] Swenson's acoustic investigations in the 1960s suggest that she also understood this shift in the relation of art to technology, and explored ways to develop that relationship.

There are an extensive number of reel to reel recordings of sounds that Swenson made from 1966–1967, the year that she was poet-in-residence at Purdue University. She taped raw sounds—including rolling marbles in a pan, spinning coins on counter tops, a cat purring, eating, and in heat, swinging squeaking doors, blowing whistles she had collected, and pumping up her air mattress with a noisy pump. She would tape these sounds at various speeds, investigating the acoustical distortion changes in speed effected. She arranged the sounds into electronic "pieces" with titles like: "Squeaks and Doodles," "Harsh Assortment," "Strange Love," and "Mechanical Animals," sending some of these compositions to Anderson for comment. Swenson's reel titles suggest that she listened carefully for the relation of sound to space, near the thresholds of the visual and the auditory. In the title, "Squeaks and Doodles," for example, the nonsignifying auditory *sound* is yoked to the nonsignifying visual *script*, while "Harsh Assortment" juxtaposes sonic extremes and spatial grouping.[19]

Swenson's poem, "Electronic Sound," contemplates our perception of sound manipulated and produced by technology, asking implicitly, What do we hear when we listen? "A pebble swells to a boulder at low speed," the poem begins.[20] Through its descriptions, the poem approximates the transformation that technologically enhanced speed and scale has on sound. Thus, the sound of a rolling pebble sounds like the rumbling of a boulder when recorded at low speed, and the poem's plosives track the swelling sounds: the lighter softer p becoming the lower, harder b then d. Or, the riff of the spinning quarter—2/3s of the poem—ending with the small reverberations of the coin as rhyming trochees: a minor yammer "as when a triangle's nicked by the slimmest hammer." Adalaide Morris notes that the ambitious modernist epic coincided with the rise of "telephones, radios, loudspeakers, and tape recorders."[21] For Swenson, advances in technology and telecommunications—the possibilities of sound both recorded and artificially distorted—offered fascinating terrain for experiments in the lyric by transferring incidental, accidental sounds into the text.[22] Curious about the effect of tech-

nology on perception, Swenson recorded the quotidian sounds of a person's day. She extended that investigation into the terrain of the lyric, exploring the capacity a poem has to manipulate sound through artifice. Swenson's experiments scratched the smooth and perfect surface of the lyric poem like a needle careening over vinyl. We make and we live in and among sounds, which have body and create meaning, if we bring a poet's level of attention to them. As Charles Bernstein put it in his study of the acoustically ludic element in the languaged lyric, *Close Listening*, "sound [is] a material and materializing dimension of poetry."[23] For Swenson, sound becomes at times the material on which a poem is inventively poised.

I have been suggesting an approach to the meaning-making relationship of sound to poem, its role in the poet's creative process and product. We hear voices, and see things when we're writing that help to detach us from a too-schematic approach to meaning, separating us from the familiar, enabling us to cross into the unpredictable, unknown terrain. Words arise from our unconscious *knowing* (the same territory as our dreams and also as our somatic bodies) when we trust our aural intuition enough to suspend our uncertainties about what we might discover. If we put the "ear" in "fear," as James Longenbach remarks in his brilliant meditation on the poetic line, music will guide us.[24] Such *sound*-thinking is one way a poem makes of its knowledge *material*—a materiality which disrupts the orderly and customary, as Lazer might say, by touching us (sometimes moving us to tears) through sound: "Poet - ... Weaver of Spells, **EARER,"** as the Irish poet Maggie O'Sullivan puts it.[25] A poem is able not only to make something visible through language, to see through words, but also to make something audible cognitively, *sound*-thinking, as I've been calling it. The point I'm making inverts the notion that content determines form (*pace* Robert Creeley), and that is that content *follows* sound. AWP

Acknowledgments

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WE HEAR VOICES, AND SEE THINGS WHEN WE'RE WRITING THAT HELP TO DETACH US FROM A TOO-SCHEMATIC APPROACH TO MEANING, SEPARATING US FROM THE FAMILIAR, ENABLING US TO CROSS INTO THE UNPREDICTABLE, UNKNOWN TERRAIN.

Cynthia Hogue *has published thirteen books, including nine collections of poetry, most recently* Revenance, *listed as one of the 2014 "Standout" books by the Academy of American Poets, and* In June the Labyrinth *(Red Hen Press, 2017). Hogue is Emerita Professor of English and held the Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry at Arizona State University from 2003-2017.*

Notes

1. Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 4; emphasis added.

2. Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, edited by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights, 1968), p. 128.

3. Ezra Pound, *New Selected Poems and Translations*, edited by Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2010), p. 39. This version is the one originally published in *Poetry*, April 1913.

4. Hank Lazer, "Thinking / Singing and the Metaphysics of Sound," *Lyric & Spirit* (Richmond: Omnidawn Press, 2008), p. 188. As Lazer explains, meaning and musicality "are inseparable, coincidental, and simultaneous. It's not that a poet 'has something in mind' and 'tries to express it.' The poem *is* the thinking, is an embodiment, a highly specific incarnation and manifestation of an interval of consciousness" (p. 188). Although my discussion of "*sound*-thinking" as an important poetic method of composition differs from Lazer's sense of the poem "thinking" in the poet's act of "singing," I build on Lazer's thinking, which inspired my own.

5. H.D., *Collected Poems 1912–1944*, edited by Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983), p. 55.

6. Meredith Stricker, "new species," *HOW(ever)* 5.4 (October 1989): p. 19.

7. Brian Teare, *Sight Map* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 16.

8. Ibid., p. 18.

9. Ibid., p. 18.

10. Ibid., p. 16.

11. Personal communication with the author, April 26, 2006.

12. Tess Gallagher, *Midnight Lantern: New and Selected Poems* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 2011), p. 270.

13. Ibid., p. 269; emphasis added.

14. Ibid., pp. 269–270.

15. Ibid., p. 269.

16. The accuracy of the speculative account of composition in this section was confirmed by Gallagher herself, in personal communication to the author, November 10, 2011 and December 8, 2016.

17. May Swenson, *Made With Words*, edited by Gardner McFall (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 85.

18. Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. viii.

19. The English Department of Utah State University, in Logan, Utah, has an extensive collection of the reel to reels discussed in this section in its May Swenson holdings. I am indebted to the faculty director of this collection, Professor Paul Crumbley, who generously shared copies of some of the reels with me, and with whom I first discussed my ideas about Swenson's sound experiments.

20. May Swenson, *New & Selected: Things Taking Place* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978), p. 107.

21. Adalaide Morris, *How to Live / What To Do: H.D.'s Cultural Poetics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 61.

22. See also Perloff, who has more recently confirmed Swenson's prescient sense of technological impact on art: "There is today no landscape uncontaminated by sound bytes or computer blips, no mountain peak or lonely valley beyond the reach of the cellular phone and the [Blackberry]. Increasingly, then, the poet's arena is the electronic world" (p. xiii).

23. Charles Bernstein, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 4.

24. James Longenbach, *The Art of the Poetic Line* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 2008), p. 77.

25. Maggie O'Sullivan, *Waterfalls* (West Devonshire: Etruscan Books, 2009), p. 68.

Jack Soltysik

TALKING CHINA WITH MICHAEL MEYER

by John Coyne

Michael Meyer is a recipient of the Whiting Writers Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar award, and a two-time winner of a Lowell Thomas Award for travel writing. His stories have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Smithsonian*, *Slate*, the *Financial Times* and [on] *This American Life*. He has also had residencies at the New York Public Library's Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers and the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy. He is a current fellow of the National Committee on United States—China Relations' Public Intellectuals Program and affiliated faculty with Pitt's Asian Studies Center.

Michael is best known for his China trilogy *The Road to Sleeping Dragon*, *In Manchuria*, and *The Last Days of Old Beijing*. Of these books, Adam Hochschild, author of *King Leopold's Ghost*, has written, "I've been an admirer of Michael Meyer since his first book, and this, his third, only makes me more so. It's hard for me to think of anyone who can dive into another culture with such infectious zest and curiosity, and who gets in so deep, so fast."

When not traveling, or [teaching in London], Michael is an associate professor of creative nonfiction writing at the University of Pittsburgh.

John Coyne: Tell us about your foreign travel and living abroad and how these experiences benefited you as a person and as a writer.

Michael Meyer: The central advantage of a foreign experience, beyond just travel, is that it forces a person to look intensely at how other people live their lives, what they value, what they aspire to. My time in China also formed the subject matter of three books of nonfiction, and a tenured professorship back in the United States.

Coyne: So how did it all begin?

Meyer: My China time began when I was sent there as one of its first Peace Corps volunteers, in rural Sichuan province. Writing about the place for a wide audience started when I was teaching in a small Beijing international school, which, by the way, paid me $15,000 annually to teach eight subjects to four grades. This was back in the late nineties. One day, on a manual typewriter, I pecked out a travel story about a hiking trip in southwest China and stuffed the onionskin pages into an envelope, brushed stamps with fish glue and mailed it to *The Los Angeles Times*. Three weeks later, the reply came: the same onionskin pages, marked up by an editor. The paper ran the next draft with my photographs on two full pages of its travel section, paying $1,500. I felt like I had won the lottery."

Coyne: You were you living in Beijing then?

Meyer: Yes. At the time, I lived near Dazhalan, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Beijing. That neighborhood became the focus of my first book, *The Last Days of Old Beijing*.

Coyne: Let's go back to that first job. What was teaching in the international school like?

Meyer: It was a bilingual, bi-cultural international school that taught in Chinese and English. Classes were team-taught by a Chinese and Western teacher; I would, for example, teach a unit on Rome in English, and my co-teacher, a Beijing native, would teach it the Chinese take on it, in Chinese. The students parried back-and-forth between arguments that Rome was an engineering powerhouse or that it was an over-reaching empire built on the back of slaves. Class discussion was never boring! Nor was our Literature class, wherein we read English, American, and Chinese classic novels and poetry, and took the students on weekend field trips to places such as Confucius' hometown.
At the time, frankly, I thought it was all a bit much: I had majored in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison at the height of Political Correctness, then had served two years in the Peace Corps. At age twenty-five, the last thing I wanted was to be lecturing teenagers—again—on the Global Community. But the woman who founded the school—an American diplomat who wanted her teenaged kids to learn Chinese and Chinese perspectives—had the fortitude to realize her vision. And the students went on to graduate from universities such as Stanford, Princeton, Duke, Berkeley, Columbia, Michigan, and more. One of my sharpest high school freshmen visited me this weekend en route to beginning a PhD at Claremont—in International Relations, which is fitting.

Coyne: So, you got this appointment while you were finishing your two-year Peace Corps tour in China?

Meyer: That's right. I pecked out a resume on a manual typewriter after seeing the job posted in the Peace Corps newsletter, and mailed the onion-skin sheets in an envelope sealed, of course, with fish glue and actual stamps. I did not hear anything for months; I finished my Peace Corps tour, flew to Tibet, and three weeks later had to leave with food poisoning. When I was checking in to the hotel in the city of Chengdu—planning to next buy a one-way plane ticket back to the States—the clerk looked at my Chinese identification card and said, "Heroic Eastern Plumblossom?" (That's my terrible Chinese name.) "I have a message for you!" I thought someone had died; it turned out it was the Beijing school, who had tracked me down to offer me the job. I met my future wife my first week at the school. She went on to become a lawyer; we've been together twenty years now, and are parents of a five-year-old boy. I always urge my students to apply for any job that interests them; you never know where it might lead, and how it might change your life.

> I am constantly urging [my students] to think of a whole shelf of their books, not just the first one. Spend your class time learning and practicing skills—how to interview, how to use archives, how to write a scene and a set piece—that you can use during a lifetime of work.

Coyne: You've taught writing elsewhere in the world. Are there similarities in students who want to become writers? And can you recognize talent from just reading an assignment?

Meyer: I've taught at journalism schools and MFA programs in China, Hong Kong and the United States, and the students who seem to most enjoy their time in class share the understanding that instead of writing

I read fiction voraciously, and try to create suspense on the page they way great novelists do. But I recognize my limitations, and also my strengths. I'm good at talking to strangers and digging through archives. While I can still do those things, I'll stay in my lane.

what they know, they need to write about what they don't know. They have an interest in answering a question, researching to find the answers, and then transmitting their findings to an audience. Talent manifests itself as a distinctive voice with something interesting to say, and yes, I can see that immediately; it's not uncommon. My job is to help students channel that talent into pages—many, many pages.

Coyne: So, in your nonfiction class you have them research and write, not just write about what they know. That's you approach to the subject matter?

Meyer: Yes, but I don't assign a random topic, such as snails, and say, "Make it interesting." Although, to paraphrase Kingsley Amis, a good writer can do a sermon on a sheep-dip pamphlet. Students have a subject that interests them, and we go from there, digging deeper. Even topics about which students think they know—for example, their mother—gain a greater depth when researched. Often the subjects that students think they're writing about change course over their graduate studies, as does their audience. Incidentally, an example of this that really helps them is looking at the same material that forms Cheryl Strayed's essay "The Love of My Life," which appeared in *The Sun* in 2002, and the introduction to her memoir *Wild*, published a decade later.

Coyne: In the years you have been teaching, do you see any differences in the type of students coming into your classroom?

Meyer: I teach in the first nonfiction MFA program ever founded, by Lee Gutkind at the University of Pittsburgh. While our applications are at an all-time high, the numbers still pale to the fiction and poetry applicants, a trend that holds across the country. But what I do see is more fiction and poetry students taking nonfiction courses—researching and writing true essays and reporting—and more nonfiction students taking fiction and poetry courses—working on creating suspense to keep readers turning the page, and on word choice that compels a reader to pay attention, to feel. At Pitt, we encourage cross-genre study: you are admitted to the program, not your concentration. Nonfiction students get to work with not only the author of *Concussion* and intern at Longform.org and produce its podcasts, but also with fiction and poetry faculty that includes a MacArthur "Genius Grant" recipient who edits *The New York Times Magazine*'s poetry selection, and professors who founded the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics and who write for Marvel comics.

Coyne: What students have you had at the University of Pittsburgh who have gone onto becoming published writers?

Meyer: In the past year, three of my best undergraduates bypassed graduate school applications and went right into jobs as a daily reporter or editor at the *South China Morning Post*, *Esquire*, and *Architectural Digest*. One graduate student turned her thesis into a book proposal now under contract at Crown, and another—a fiction writer who became my best nonfiction student—publishes humor in *The New Yorker*.

Coyne: In giving advice to your graduate students about their careers, given the way that the publishing world has changed so dramatically within the last decade, what do you tell them?

Meyer: Never wait for permission to write. I see my students spending so much time querying, waiting for responses to queries, and telling themselves they need a "yes" to write a story on something that had already attracted their interest. Just write it!

Coyne: What do you tell your students about "life after college" and how to go about making a career as a writer/teacher, or make a living writing?

Meyer: Because I teach talented MFA students, I am constantly urging them to think of a whole shelf of their books, not just the first one. Spend your class time learning and practicing skills—how to interview, how to use archives, how to write a scene and a set piece—that you can use during a lifetime of work. Don't just say you're here to write a memoir about your mom. You can do that in addition to trying all of these other skills you've yet to hone.

Coyne: Well, you have had, yourself, extensive overseas experience, both through travel and work. Do you advise them to also take a similar path?

Meyer: Yes. Being overseas gives you distance from yourself. It sharpens

your awareness of your own culture and assumptions you hold and—at least for me—makes you write with your audience in mind, taking care to pay out facts and details like fishing line, leading them deeper into the story, to see what you see.

Coyne: I've always been impressed at how many journalists and nonfiction writers have come out of the experience of living in China. One writer of mine who was in Africa says that he should have gone to China because China was "new" to the western world. Do you think there is any truth to that?

Meyer: Absolutely—it was new, at least in its post-Tiananmen form. It's also why I pitch my students the new Peace Corps programs in Vietnam and Myanmar. If I were twenty years younger and eager to begin a writing career, I would sign up in a heartbeat.

Coyne: To sum up your teaching part of your career, Michael, do you have a sentence or paragraph of "words of wisdom" about writing, careers or life for students finishing their degree at Pittsburgh or for that matter, at any MFA program anywhere in the world?

Meyer: With professors and peers, talk about what you've been reading, other than your "likes" or contacts. We think nothing of it when we enter a museum and see someone seated on the floor, sketching or painting a copy of a master's work, or when we enter a club and see a musician doing a cover of a classic. Writing is no different; it's an art with literally millions of templates around us. Students often feel the tyranny of the blank page or screen, but if they raise their gaze to a bookshelf, they'll find a whole chorus of encouragement, of example, of false starts and mistakes. I read far, far more than I write—and I'm constantly picking up books in the library or at a bookshop and reading first pages, seeing how the writer has started the story, and what I can learn from it. You're not in this alone; you're continuing a conversation that has been going on since the invention of moveable type. Walk into a bookstore and just look at all those titles! If those schmucks can do it, why can't you? Get over yourself and get to work.

Coyne: Let's talk a little bit about finding that literature was your road in life. When did you decide that writing was your passion? As a teenager did you decide that you wanted to grow up and become a writer, or did you come to that decision later in life?

Meyer: I knew early on; as far back as I can remember, at least. My parents were nothing but supportive, even though they never attended college. My mom owns a construction company that makes doors and installs

Students often feel the tyranny of the blank page or screen, but if they raise their gaze to a bookshelf, they'll find a whole chorus of encouragement, of example, of false starts and mistakes.

lock sets; my dad worked in the music industry. I started writing for the local newspaper when I was sixteen, and wrote for the city and state newspapers through college, but majored in education. I met the sports writer/living legend Peter Gammons at a spring training baseball game, and he advised me not to get a degree in journalism, but to learn as much about something that interested me but that I didn't yet know. Both of my degrees are in education, and I'm a licensed K–12 language arts teacher and reading specialist.

Coyne: In writing you nonfiction books what's your process, given your teaching schedule? Do you write so many words a day? Do you work from an outline? How do you know you've finished with a page? How many drafts does it take, would you say?

Meyer: I create a tell—you know, those massive mounds of fish bones and household debris that archaeologists shift through? I am like a crow when it comes to fluffing my nest/desk with things I find or jot down during the course of a day: newspaper stories, photographs, snatches of dialogue, typed notes from a book I've finished reading. This reporting is always the fun part, and then comes the sorting through it all to find a storyline, and one that will keep readers turning the page.

At Berkeley, the writer Adam Hochschild—who wrote *King Leopold's Ghost* and cofounded *Mother Jones* magazine—taught me to think of the blank page as a stage. Now the curtain goes up: what does the audience see? Who does it see? What is the conflict? Think of the opening of any Shakespeare play, or even Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which begins just like a play (its first sentence is even a verb-less stage direction). I keep this stage in mind: who is on it, what's happening, is it enough to interest the audience? My rule of thumb is to have at least one new fact or emotion per page—but not much more, or readers get buried in an Information Dump, especially when reading about a place as foreign as China.

My three books each went through seven or eight drafts, and then the various page proof passes. *The Road to Sleeping Dragon* had four passes—essentially, four additional rounds of tightening sentences and eliminating repeated words.

Coyne: In writing nonfiction about your life and experiences have you found that there are particular incidents in your life or situations that were difficult to write about and have them reflect truthfully the reality of the situation?

Meyer: As a journalist, it's easy to write like a know-it-all; that's the default journalistic voice. It's much harder to show vulnerability and doubt on the page, not because these are foreign emotions, but because the reader paid money or spent time checking out your book, and you're supposed to be the expert. It says so right here on the hyberbolic flap jacket synopsis! But I'm writing from the perspective of an interested outsider—fluent in Chinese, but still new to these settings: a decrepit Beijing neighborhood, a Manchurian rice farm, a college campus in the rural southwest. My challenge is to bring the reader along with me as I learn and make mistakes and navigate this place. I do it sans soliloquies, but by turning the camera around to the people who live there, and how they react to me, but more importantly, how they see their community and their place in it as it undergoes indelible change. In the end, of course, the books aren't about me at all. They're about Chinese places and people**.**

Coyne: You mentioned earlier about having your students do research for their nonfiction assignments. What about your recent book. What was the percentage of time that you spent in research on China? And how long, for example, did it take you to write *The Road to Sleeping Dragon*?

Meyer: On average, each book has taken me at least three years of research, including two immersed on the ground, and one or more years in archives, ferreting out history, since the places I write about have all but lost—or destroyed—their chronicles. Once I have the research in place, the first drafts have come quickly. I wrote *The Last Days of Old Beijing* and *The Road to Sleeping Dragon* on separate stays in London—once in a hotel, once in an apartment a few blocks away—in eight weeks, and then spent another year getting feedback from readers and doing rewrites.

Coyne: You write and teach nonfiction. Have you ever written fiction or do you think that living the experiences that you have had in China and elsewhere are novelistic enough?

Meyer: I read fiction voraciously, and try to create suspense on the page they way great novelists do. But I recognize my limitations, and also my strengths. I'm good at talking to strangers and digging through archives. While I can still do those things, I'll stay in my lane.

Coyne: You've now written three wonderful books, all on China. Your first book *The Last Days of Old Beijing* (2008) is about the old neighborhood in Beijing. Did you move into the area that was facing destruction because of the upcoming Olympics so that would be the "subject matter" of what was disappearing?

Meyer: Yes, even though my graduate school writing teacher Maxine Hong Kingston at Berkeley impressed upon me to never "commit experience," or land into a place with the expressed ambition of writing about it. I hedged this a bit by choosing a neighborhood in a city where I had lived many years, and had always wanted to live in. I volunteered at the neighborhood elementary school as a daily English teacher and let the research unfold organically from there, following threads that appeared. As a journalist I often felt like a vampire, but on book research I feel more like a toothless vampire, waiting to be invited into to people's homes, and sort of gumming on them instead of drawing blood and flying away, never to return.

Coyne: In your second book, *In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China*, what was the driving narrative? I know that this was your wife's home—is that why your found it a source of interest?

Meyer: It's time to write a book when the book you want to read doesn't exist. I wrote a book about the transformation of urban China, and then wanted to write one about the changes in the countryside. I was also fascinated by the Northeast's history. Those two threads intertwined in Wasteland, the village where my wife was raised as a child. It turned out to be much more difficult to write about family than about strangers, however.

Coyne: Now your new book, *The Road to Sleeping Dragon* (2017), sums up in prose your history in-country?

Meyer: The new book looks back at these twenty years of immense change in China, and takes stock of what hasn't changed, in the end. It's also meant to encourage anyone who has never been to the country—or abroad, anywhere—to take the leap and set off. I landed in China knowing nothing about the place, let alone how to speak Chinese, or even use chopsticks.

Coyne: With your new book, *The Road to Sleeping Dragon*, I'm impressed after all these years in China that you have such total recall of your time in Beijing years ago at the International School. Did you keep a journal during those years?

Meyer: Not a journal, but long,

I like writing that take me places I would never think to go, such as hawking with Helen Macdonald, D.H. Lawrence-chasing with Geoff Dyer, into Ian Frazier's ancestral Ohio town, across Alaska with John McPhee, corresponding with V.S. Naipaul, via Paul Theroux, and deep into Egypt with my Peace Corps China friend Peter Hessler.

descriptive letters home, which my parents—to their great credit—saved entirely, including the stamped envelopes. My parents never visited China, and frankly, didn't have much interest in the place, but that changed once I landed. Their questions and my responses formed our exchanges. I also started writing articles and submitting them "over the transom" to American newspapers, so I saved all of the notebooks from which those came.

Coyne: What's interesting, early in the book, is the Chinese's use of "western" names in these cross-cultural situations. Do you know why? Are Chinese personal names too difficult for Westerners to comprehend?

Meyer: They're not; it's far easier for me to remember that a female student is named Wang Mei instead of, say, Dinger, or Bruce (as two of my students called themselves). But there's a role-playing aspect to learning a foreign language, and many of my Chinese students enjoyed taking on a new persona, if only in class. Outside of class, unfortunately, I carried my assigned Chinese name, which translated as Heroic Eastern Plumblossom.

Coyne: How would you explain your driving impulse to write these three books, all focused on China?

Meyer: The writer Ian Frazier once told me that my books "ruin the fantasy" that many people hold about China, that it's this place that exists at the poles of brutish repression or ancient enchantment. This is, after all, how journalism often covers it. I'm more interested in capturing how life is actually lived there, in the vast, diverse parts of the country that most foreign correspondents and tourists pass by. These books, to my great surprise, have become bestsellers in China, as well, since Chinese writers haven't covered these topics or places. I'm lucky to have worked in China when the window was open just enough to do this kind of research.

Coyne: What do you think you have given literature with your three books on China?

Meyer: Last year at Pittsburgh, I assigned the T.S. Eliot poem "The Dry Salvages" to my nonfiction MFA students, which contains a line about being afraid "we had the experience but missed the meaning." I felt that way about recent books about China—China books are very good at "explaining" China to us, but not so great at depicting what it felt like to actually live in the country during these boom years, when people's lives rapidly changed, but political reforms deteriorated. I think books are written with readers 100 years from now in mind, and I wanted to add something to the shelf that captures daily life behind the headlines.

Coyne: Are you also one of those writers who are in the middle of one book and already daydreams about the topic for the next one? Do you have a subject all ready to write about next?

Meyer: Yes! Frazier, in *Great Plains*, writes about the importance of holding a place or subject "in reserve." Because one day you will up and move to that place or begin researching that subject, and—poof—the dreaming is over, and now you've no place or idea about which you can fantasize. I'm working now on a book about Benjamin Franklin's last will and testament, and have been daydreaming about what comes next. Taiwan, Singapore, coastal China...

Coyne: You mentioned earlier that you read more than you wrote. What authors writing today draw your attention?

Meyer: I went on a Rachel Cusk binge this summer; her two most recent novels, *Outline* and *Transit* have such a clever voice and structure that I look forward to teaching them. I like writing that take me places I would never think to go, such as hawking with Helen Macdonald, D.H. Lawrence-chasing with Geoff Dyer, into Ian Frazier's ancestral Ohio town, across Alaska with John McPhee, corresponding with V.S. Naipaul, via Paul Theroux, and deep into Egypt with my Peace Corps China friend Peter Hessler.

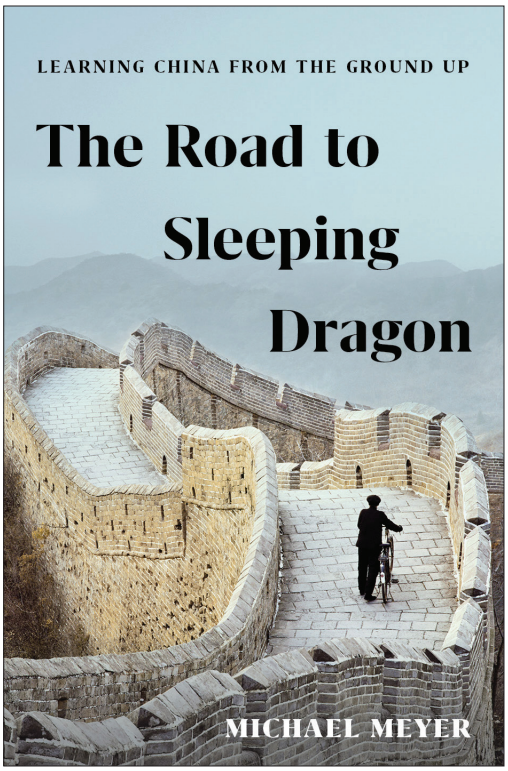
Coyne: Because of your China books and your expensive experience of living and teaching in China have you been asked to take your expertise beyond the classroom and talk about the political and social side of China in for conferences or seminars focused on Asia?

Meyer: Yes, and I'm happy to give these talks, whether at Oxford or Stanford or a local book club or a China adoption parent's group or a congressional delegation or elementary school classroom. I've done them all. Send me an email, I'll show up at your house with slides. AWP

John Coyne *is the author of twenty-six books of fiction and nonfiction. A collection of his short stories entitled,* A Game in the Sun and Other Stories*, will be published in May 2018.*

excerpt

From The Road to Sleeping Dragon:
Learning China From the Ground Up



I am an unlikely answer to the question, asked anxiously by a Chinese writer in 1935: "Who will be China's interpreters?" Sixty years later I arrived by accident, after rejecting six other countries from the Peace Corps. I was fluent in Spanish, and applied after a short stint volunteering at the Texas-Mexico border with the United Farm Workers, hoping to be sent to Latin America. The Peace Corps offered Turkmenistan, Vladivostok, Sri Lanka, and Kiribati. "It's not Club Med, it's the Peace Corps," the recruiter finally snapped, after I declined to spend two years in Mongolia or Malawi. "You don't get to choose."

Months passed, until one late-spring day the phone rang in the English classroom in Madison, Wisconsin, where I was student teaching. My turf-warring Comp Ed ninth graders had been ordered to attend an assembly optimistically titled "We're All in the Same Gang." I warily picked up the receiver and heard the voice of the all-but-forgotten recruiter, who pronounced a single word with great finality: *China*. It sounded like a sentence, although really it was a reprieve.

"I didn't know Peace Corps was in China," I said, twirling the phone cord, stalling for time. In fact, the program had just tenuously begun, after its planned 1989 start was shelved following the crackdown on the nationwide demonstrations centered at Tiananmen Square. I was 17 then, and when I heard of the bloodshed via my Beetle's radio, I pulled to the road's shoulder, and—completely out of character—burst into tears. I didn't know any Chinese people personally, had never read a book by a Chinese writer, and could not have found Beijing on a map. But suddenly a world event had punctured my bubble of enormous teenaged self-regard. Six years later I knew little about the country beyond the Great Wall, pandas, one billion people, fortune cookies, and the indelible image of a man standing in front of a tank.

I couldn't speak the language, either, of course. I didn't even know how it sounded. Not only was I wrong about fortune cookies—they're from California by way of Japan—I couldn't even use chopsticks. But this was it: Peace Corps' take-it-or-leave-it final offer—China.

Elizabeth Alexander Named President of the Mellon Foundation

Ocean Vuong Becomes Youngest Winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize

Trump's FY 2019 Budget Calls for NEA Elimination

Donald Trump's new proposal for the fiscal year 2019 annual budget includes slashes to many public arts and culture departments—including a proposed termination of funding for the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). If passed, the budget allots $109 million to be shared among the NEA, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The budget proposal would potentially cut a total of approximately $917 million, according to a report by *The Washington Post*.

According to *The Washington Post*, Congress refused a "nearly identical" budget proposal from the White House last year.

Among many critics of the FY 2019 proposal is Americans for the Arts president and CEO Robert Lynch. "These are old ideas, some more than a decade old," said Lynch in a recent interview. "We take it seriously, but there's a budget process and a lot of points of intersection."

US Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY) responded to the proposal: "Every dollar the NEA spends we get back $9 or $10 to the Treasury.... It's penny wise and pound foolish."

Trump's proposal is the first step in the federal budget process. Congress budget committees must now form budget resolutions, spending and tax revenue targets, and reconciliation policies before they are sent to the floor for a vote. Congressional appropriations will then draft spending bills and conduct hearings based on the budget committees' resolutions.

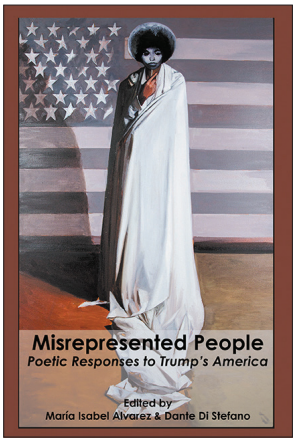
AWP is a national partner of Americans for the Arts Action Fund. Members of AWP automatically receive emailed action alerts to protect public funding for the arts and arts education. If you are a member of AWP and you are not receiving these crucial alerts, please go to "My AWP Account" for your profile on our website and choose the section for "More Benefits" from the "My AWP Account" menu. Then check the box under "Art Advocacy," and you will receive future alerts. #SAVEtheNEA

Anthology of "Poetic Responses to Trump's America" Released

On Friday, February 9, New York Quarterly Books released *Misrepresented People: Poetic Responses to Trump's America*, an anthology of poetry edited by María Isabel Alvarez and Dante Di Stefano.

"Through our craft, we can bear witness to—and offer resistance against—the criminals in the White House and the inequities underpinning daily American life and US foreign policy," said Di Stefano in a note published on LitHub. "The anthology's purpose is to bear witness to, rage against, and defy the misogyny, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and authoritarian impulses that have always surrounded us, but that are incarnated in the 45th president; proceeds will be donated to The National Immigration Law Center."

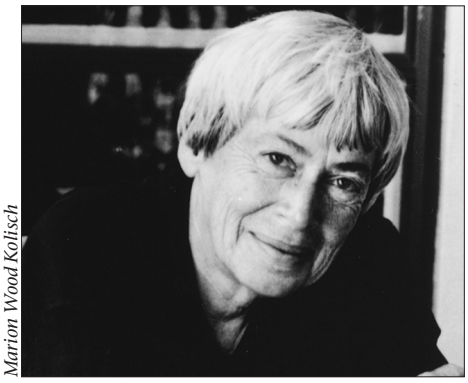
The anthology features a wide range of contemporary poets. Contributing authors include Hanif Abdurraqib, Kaveh Akbar, Fatimah Asghar, Matthew Olzmann, Kevin Prufer, Camille Rankine, Patricia Smith, and AWP's own Christian Teresi, among many others.



"The poets in this anthology bring a spirit of not just resistance and dissent, but of creating that new future," said poet Kazim Ali.

"So maybe a poem never changed anyone's vote. But I'm emboldened by these poets, as I believe poetry changes—it deepens, widens, enchants, enlivens, and empowers—every single reader's mind. Let's name the brutal, resist the greedy, condemn the unjust, and in Timothy Liu's words defend 'this scorned tract of earth called home.' And let's do it with song," declared David Baker.

Ursula K. Le Guin
1929–2018



Marion Wood Kolisch

Ursula K. Le Guin

Ursula K. Le Guin, author of over twenty novels, 100 short stories, and dozens more books of poetry, essays, and works for children, passed away on Monday, January 22. She was eighty-eight. The cause was not reported, but her son Theo Downes-Le Guin said she had been ill for several months.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* from 1969 won both the Hugo and the Nebula awards. The novel featured a genderless society on another planet, which she "referred to... as a 'thought experiment' designed to explore the nature of human societies."

Le Guin was lauded many times throughout her long career. She received the 2002 PEN/Malamud Award for excellence in short fiction, and in 2000 the Library of Congress named her a "Living Legend" for her contribution to culture. She was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for her 1996 collection *Unlocking the Air and Other Stories*. She received the 1973 National Book Award for Children's Literature for *The Farthest Shore*, the third novel of her beloved Earthsea trilogy.

Le Guin was a featured presenter at the AWP Conference & Bookfair in 2014, and she was interviewed twice in *The Writer's Chronicle* over the years, most recently in the March/April 2017 issue. This interview and one from 2003 are available to read online.

A literary venue worth checking out...

MOVEABLE TYPE

32 Poems

A conversation with George David Clark, Editor

How did *32 Poems* begin? What was the goal when starting the magazine? John Poch and Deborah Ager founded the magazine in 2003 because they knew great poems were being overlooked. It's awfully easy for a shorter lyric to get lost in a two hundred page quarterly, so they designed their journal as a place where individual poems would be honored as much as possible, a format that would encourage slow reading and the deliberate exploration of new voices. To that end, *32 Poems* has always been very short, never more than forty pages total, and we've shed as much of the clutter as possible. No ads, no reviews, no notes from the editors. Even our contributors' notes are brief. The hope has always been that this approach allows us to be extremely selective and to focus as much attention as possible on each poem. **Describe your decision-making process for selecting work to appear in the magazine.** Without a doubt, *32 Poems*' greatest resource is the talent, experience, and care of our associate editors. Frankly, I don't think there is journal out there with a more gifted team of first readers. We stay on top of our submissions, and I usually receive the associate editors' recommendations within a couple of weeks of the work's arrival. Sometimes I will know immediately that one of their picks is a poem we must have, but more often I spend anywhere from a few days to a couple months meditating on their "yes" votes and "maybes." Over that period we may talk through poems together at length via email or on the phone, and when we do, we frequently discuss potential revisions if we decide to accept. Throughout that period I am reading the poems daily, and ultimately I am convinced one way or the other. **If your magazine has an ethos, what is it?** We're looking for shorter poems, usually verse that will fit on a single page. Beyond that preference for concision though, we want work that appeals to the ear, the eye, and the ego—poems driven by interesting sonic effect, poems rich in imagery, poems that risk bold sentiment. **After*32 Poems*, what's your favorite writing venue?** I'm particularly excited about what Geoff Brock is doing with the new journal out of the University of Arkansas, *The Arkansas International*, but if you asked me tomorrow I might say *Ecotone*, or *Pleiades*, or *The Cincinnati Review*, or *The Gettysburg Review* and *The Southern Review* and *The Georgia Review* where I first fell in love with literary magazines—still fall in love. I have many favorites. **What is your plan for the future of the magazine?** I feel a pretty healthy sense of editorial competitiveness with my favorite journals. There are a limited number of excellent poems written each year and a limited number of excellent poetry readers. I want them all for our pages. With that in mind, our plans tend to focus on how we can attract the best verse to our submissions pool and how we can best champion the poems we love.

http://32poems.com

2018 International Dylan Thomas Prize Longlist

Ayobámi Adébáyo, *Stay With Me* (Canongate Books)
Kayo Chingonyi, *Kumukanda* (Vintage–Chatto & Windus)
Meena Kandasamy, *When I Hit You* (Atlantic Books)
Lisa McInerney, *The Blood Miracles* (John Murray)
Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties* (Graywolf Press)
Fiona Mozley, *Elmet* (JM Originals)
Gwendoline Riley, *First Love* (Granta)
Sally Rooney, *Conversations with Friends* (Faber & Faber)
Emily Ruskovich, *Idaho* (Vintage – Chatto & Windus)
Gabriel Tallent, *My Absolute Darling* (Riverhead Books)
Eley Williams, *Attrib. and Other Stories* (Influx Press)
James Womack, *On Trust: A Book of Lies* (Carcanet Press)

Elizabeth Alexander Named President of the Mellon Foundation

Elizabeth Alexander

Elizabeth Alexander, poet and nonfiction writer, has been appointed the next president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The Mellon Foundation is a major supporter of the humanities, and is active in five core areas: higher education and scholarship in the humanities, arts and cultural heritage, diversity, scholarly communications, and international higher education and strategic projects.

"Through her work as a professor and mentor, Elizabeth knows the academic system well, and as an architect of interdisciplinary programs, she has deep experience in cultivating partnerships that extend and amplify creative vision," said Danielle Allen, Chair of the Mellon Foundation Board. "A poet who brings an artist's forward-looking energy to institutional purpose, Elizabeth is the right person for our times as the Foundation seeks to widen the community of stakeholders committed to the arts and humanities and to increase the resources dedicated to this work."

Alexander has been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in both poetry and nonfiction: for her volume of poems *American Sublime* in 2006 and her memoir *The Light of the World* in 2016. Alexander has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the Anisfield-Wolf Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry, the inaugural Jackson Prize for poetry, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Alexander also served as the inaugural poet for President Obama's first presidential inauguration.

Alexander is currently Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Professor in the Humanities in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and prior to that served as Director of Creativity and Free Expression at the Ford Foundation. She taught at Yale University from 2000–2015. Alexander is also Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and serves on both the Pulitzer Prize Board and the Advisory Board to the African Poetry Book Foundation.

Alexander was a featured presenter at the 2016 AWP Conference & Bookfair in Los Angeles.

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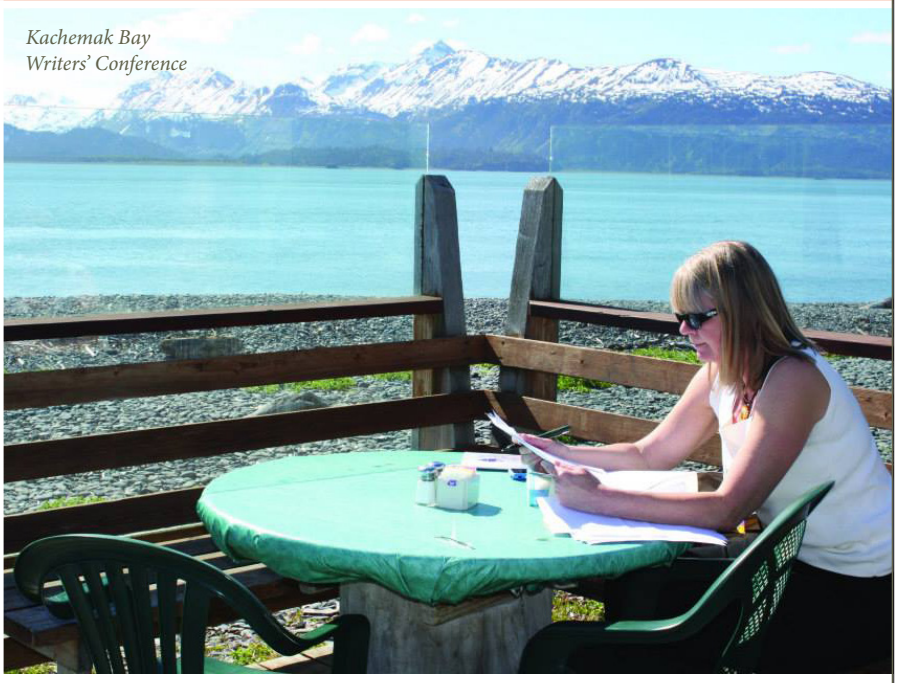

Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference

Eligibility and Guidlines

- Previous recipients of WC&C scholarships and former or current students of the judge are not eligible to submit.
- For fiction and creative nonfiction, up to 25 pages will be considered. Work must be double-spaced and presented in manuscript format with 12-pt font.
- For poetry, up to 10 pages will be considered. Each new poem must start on a new page.
- You may enter in more than one genre, and you may also enter multiple manuscripts in one genre. A $10 reading fee must accompany each submission.

Submissions

Submissions are accepted between December 1 and March 30 of each year. Submissions are only accepted online via Submittable at https://awp.submittable.com/submit.

All winners will be notified by email by May 15 and announced on AWP's website and in the AWP Annual Conference & Bookfair program. Three winners will receive a $555 scholarship each to attend one of our 150+ WC&C member conferences, centers, festivals, retreats, and residencies. View our entire Directory of Writers' Conferences & Centers at awpwriter.org/wcc.

Judges

Elizabeth Silver, Creative Nonfiction

Leslie Harrison, Poetry

Benjamin Ludwig, Fiction

AWP Association of Writers & Writing Programs

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The National Book Awards Goes Global with Addition of Award for Translation

National Book Foundation

This year, the National Book Foundation (NBF) has elected to add a category for works in translation, providing first-time access to the awards for international authors. The prize, open only to fiction and nonfiction works, will be awarded jointly to translators and original authors.

"This is an opportunity for us to influence how visible books in translation are," said NBF Executive Director Lisa Lucas.

The National Book Awards have expanded its range of eligibility before, but not for over two decades. A broad mix of categories were added between 1960 and 1970, such as history, biography, first novel, and others. In 1986, the NBA reduced the number of categories to just two: fiction and nonfiction. Poetry and YA Literature were added later.

"It goes to the mission of the organization, which is at its essence to increase the impact of great books on the culture," said NBF Chairman of the Board of Directors David Steinberger. "There were so many deserving books that we were never able to recognize."

The National Book Awards began in 1950 to "celebrate the best of American literature." The new category hopes to combat the "lingering perception" that works of translations do not sell in the US.

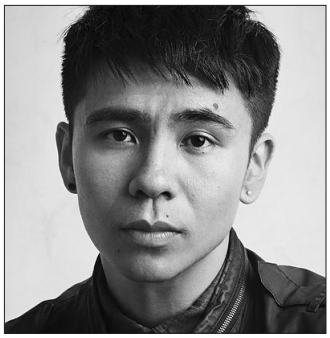
"The less we know about the rest of the world, the worse off we are," said Lucas.

Ocean Vuong Becomes Youngest Winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize

The T.S. Eliot Foundation awarded the 25th annual T.S. Eliot Prize to Ocean Vuong's debut collection *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (Copper Canyon). Selected from a shortlist of ten books, Vuong's achievement makes him the youngest author yet to receive the prize at twenty-nine years old.

"Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* deals with the aftermath of war and migration over three generations. It is a compellingly assured debut, the definitive arrival of a significant voice," said selection committee chair Bill Herbert.

Born in Saigon, Vietnam, Ocean Vuong now lives in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he is an Assistant Professor for the English department's MFA program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. His chapbooks are *No* (2013) and *Burnings* (2010). *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* has also won a Whiting Award, the Thom Gunn Award, the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and was a *New York Times* Top 10 Book of 2016.



Tom Hines

Ocean Vuong

The T.S. Eliot Prize has often been considered the most prestigious poetry award in the United Kingdom. This year, the winner received a prize of £25,000. Shortlisted poets received £1,500.

Kentucky Governor Calls for Close of University of Kentucky Press and Other Programs

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KENTUCKY

Governor Matt Bevin has asked the General Assembly of Kentucky to end all funding for the seventy-five-year-old University Press of Kentucky along with sixty-nine smaller programs that contribute to education, health, research, and economic development in Kentucky. The press's budget is $672,000 annually, which pays the salaries of 16 employees (the seventy programs in total cost the state $85 million). All other costs incurred by the press are paid for by the annual book sales of $1.8 million. The press will close without that state budget money, said press director Leila Salisbury.

The University Press of Kentucky is the primary publisher of academic and historical books in the state, and it publishes a variety of creative work under the Kentucky Voices Series and the University Press of Kentucky New Poetry and Prose Series. The press's writers include Crystal Wilkinson, Bobbie Ann Mason, Rion Amilcar Scott, bell hooks, and Frank X Walker, among others.

This attempt to sacrifice an important arts and educational institution follows the closure and reopening of the University of Missouri Press in 2012 and the failed bid to close the University of Akron Press in 2015.

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Lingering in the Mundane:

ADJECTIVES AND ENDINGS IN THE POETRY OF BARBARA RAS

by Eric Smith

The last few lines from "You Can't Have It All," the first poem in Barbara Ras's first book, the Walt Whitman Award–winning *Bite Every Sorrow*, offer a beautiful if maddening sentiment: "When adulthood fails you," the speaker says, "There is the voice you can still summon at will, like your mother's, / it will always whisper, you can't have it all, / but there is this."[1] What is "it" that we can't have "all" of? And what is "this"—if it's any different from the haziness that also obscures "it"? The voice may be "like your mother's," but whose is it, really? Despite their syntactic opposition, is there some correlation between "this" and "it all," out of which we might extrapolate some additional significance or clarity? The poem of course, doesn't answer (these are the poem's final lines, after all). But these lines are suggestive of a motive at the heart of many of Ras's poems—one that asks us to hesitate over such blurred indeterminacies not for what we might, with enough effort, extract from them, nor even for what they might reveal to us as a reward for dutiful attention. Instead, they ask us to attend to what is operating interstitially, between attention and determination—revealing what is certainly among the most unique manifestations of the lyric being practiced today.

In reading the poems for whatever it is that might be occurring in such swithering, one finds oneself picking at the particulars of her sentences, hoping to find, if not total illuminating clarity as to what they say or suggest, then at least a dollar store flashlight to lance the darkness between such utterances. One is curious as to how these poems are erected, phrase by phrase; how Ras's phrases are at once bound together and unraveled by their auxiliary machinery; and how their syntax and grammar seem almost excessively cared for in their construction, even if it is the case (and it's often the case) that the sentences are far less interested in any singular destination or conclusion, and far more likely to unravel and snarl, or to accelerate and snowball—or to do all that at once. For this reason, Ras's poems offer a study in the contradictory, generative impulses that inform the lyric poem. Her lines are thick with hesitations, but the poems themselves are never hesitant. Instead, they exert an almost pyrotechnic confidence, zooming and sparking the length (and often the breadth) of the page, but typically resist the wallop of one last explosive note. From where, then, does this poetics emerge: one that is at once assured and obfuscated, byzantine in its architecture even as it collapses?

Two aspects of Ras's work are most revealing: her use of the adjective, and her use of parataxis. Both are admittedly

among the least sexy components of the language. But each in its own way demonstrates the rich possibilities of poetic subordination and primacy—how we arrange both what we privilege and what we ignore—which seem at the very heart of what conventional poems (and poets) hope to do. But what, ultimately, is the function of this syntax and these arguably banal parts of speech, and what can we glean from attending to them? If at worst it reveals very little about the poems themselves, then such attention at least encourages us to hesitate over the peculiarities of a complicated poetic machinery: one that pores over the minutiae of the ordinary to reveal not necessarily some essential Truth, but perhaps some truth about how we approach such revelations.

In his citation for the Whitman award, C.K. Williams praises Barbara Ras's poems for being "informed by a metaphysically erudite and whimsical exuberance."[2] David Kirby suggests that the "long, beautiful sentences" of *One Hidden Stuff* "weave the miraculous and mundane into a single, luminous tapestry."[3] Donna Seaman describes the poems in *The Last Skin* as "witty and ardent," "compassionate and generous," and "sonorous and enrapturing."[4] But such praise tells us very little about the poems as such. To say a poet's work is "miraculous and mundane" or "sonorous and enrapturing" is the equivalent of saying America lies somewhere between Los Angeles and the District of Columbia; it may be an accurate statement, but it erases the particulars of a lot of real estate. Of these vague dispatches from just such an interior, Williams's is perhaps the most illuminating. His reference to a metaphysical intelligence is almost certainly offered with T.S. Eliot's essay on the metaphysicals in mind, in which Eliot describes the differences between types of poets:

> The difference is not a simple difference of degree... it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet.ww... When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.[5]

For Eliot, it isn't that this metaphysical sensibility is entirely ungoverned, though it may seem that way, given that he describes this activity as "constantly amalgamating disparate experience" in order to be "always forming new wholes." But such a sensibility is accompanied by an inherent danger: Eliot's ideal poet risks never finishing anything, especially if the poet fears not having yet satisfied the requirements of a "new whole." But Eliot seems to embrace this risk (if indeed he sees it as a risk in the first place). After all, it is not the things of the world that announce themselves as poems. Instead, it is the sensibility that makes poems—and worlds—by arranging such things. Whether the result is a coherent "new whole" or not can't be predicted beforehand. In fact, the "new whole" may be rather disparate, fragmented, and incongruent: imagistically, syntactically, or otherwise. What the poem demands of a poet is a degree of inquisitive, capacious recklessness regulated by a particular sensibility or restraint.

> One is curious as to how these poems are erected, phrase by phrase; how Ras's phrases are at once bound together and unraveled by their auxiliary machinery; and how their syntax and grammar seem almost excessively cared for in their construction.

This restrained recklessness permeates the whole of Ras's work. And it is through closely examining both her particular use of the adjective and her syntactic management of poetic closure that we discover in her work the very metaphysical and lyrical tendency which creates—or *is* creating—the sensibility that Eliot describes; it is that which Jonathan Culler says in his *Theory of the Lyric* is "a place where enchantment and disenchantment, opacity and lucidity are negotiated."[6] In doing so, we invite some of that disparate, amalgamating, reckless friction found at the heart of Ras's poems into an analysis of the creative processes that put those poems together in the first place.

"Bad Hair," appearing in Ras's first book, *Bite Every Sorrow*, is a clown car of a poem.[7] Crammed into twenty-seven margin-pummeling lines are enemy combatants, the DMZ, a carnival, a pop-up boutique, one metal detector, one girl group (or arguably Manfred Mann), a bouquet of conspiracy theories, a televangelist, and a South American goat-sucker, most of which appear in the final sentence:

> When it is bad, it gets away from you, first dashing out to a shop
> called Defined Ego and ordering monograms on everything in sight,
> later after the carnival has left town, it's out on the lot,
> scanning for lost coins in the dirt with an electronic pie at the end of
> a stick.

Eric Smith

Two aspects of Ras's work are most revealing: her use of the adjective, and her use of parataxis. Both are admittedly among the least sexy components of the language.

Sometimes, merely naughty, it taunts you,
humming endless rounds of doo wah diddy diddy dum diddy doo,
but when it's back at work, studiously bad, it mimics you, tuning into
AM radio, talk show hosts sweaty with power, drunk with misery,
today Ruby Ridge, the terms of engagement, tomorrow chupacabras,
alien abductions, at night pathetic slurrings that sound like Lord, oh
Lord, oh Lord, gimme money[8]

But for all of its pop culture clutter, the poem's central concern is a philosophical meditation on something so banal—bad hair—that it ordinarily captures our attention only long enough to disgust us as we fish it out of slow-gurgling drains. The poem opens in the perpetual lyric present—"There it is"[9]—where it always will be, every time the poem is reread, never at a fixed point other than the now. The poem also pauses almost exactly halfway, interrupting its initial antic accumulation at the poem's fulcrum, to meditate both on its named subject and what remains unknown, in this paratactic corrective:

> But hair—who knows if it's even living, or half and half, alive under the scalp but dead in the air, without feeling.[10]

The economy of equivocation here is staggering: bad hair is "half and half," "alive and dead." Even the prepositional phrases—"under the scalp" and "in the air" suspend the subject in a kind of imagistic and syntactic purgatory. This lack of assurance propels the poem's last half, which dwells on that selfsame equivocating insecurity: one looks for treasure or sustenance in the earth, or turns heavenward to unexplained phenomena. Finally, even as the last lines try to assert some granular control over the poem, it ends instead with an equivalent equivocation:

in the morning it shows up at the job, marking off the sights of a rifle,
measuring single-strandedly the breadth between righteousness and
force,
targeting the distance between worship and terror.[11]

Notice the doubling of "between," which is similar to what occurs in lines twelve and thirteen with the prepositional phrases. Like bad hair, "worship and terror" invite a similar, and similarly irresolvable, meditation. Both of these words contain a world—whole hosts, histories, ideologies. There is no fixity, no assurance in either. Even the words themselves oscillate grammatically between possibilities: noun or verb, idea or act. And they too are a part of us, even if we are disgusted by them, even after we throw them away.

The originating impulse of this poem is likely familiar to us. It's a simple object study, a Rilkean *Dinggedicht*, though one that has been doused by Dr. Banner's gamma radiation and fed by late-night TV. In *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler argues that lyric poems "hyperbolically risk animating the world, investing mundane objects or occurrence with meaning,"[12] and although the metaphysical breakthrough we might expect of such a poem is unresolved or elided, Ras's exaggerations participate in animating the mundane and focusing our attention (through a rifle scope, no less) on the quotidian. But the poem, and the subjectivity it evinces, do not themselves make these occurrences, or that meaning, fixed. This poem—and many like it elsewhere in her work—is inherently unstable, and yet, through the consistency of its exaggerations and the machinery of its syntax, it serves as evidence of Culler's hyperbolic risk.

But this bird's-eye approach to craft risks eliding what can be more clearly seen in the particular choices that a poet makes. Thus, let us focus our attention—echoing Culler, again—on the mundane, to examine that part of speech that, like bad hair, we tend to overlook: the adjective, which is one of the chief sources of instability in Ras's work. The adjective is not often celebrated for its functionality, as the noun and verb are. Nor is it loathed with the searing intensity many have for its cousin, the adverb. It's probably not possible to find a sentence that

needs one, though they're often present in some quiet capacity. It is that part of speech perhaps most likely to evade our attention, present only to make the noun look good and be otherwise ignored. In this way, the adjective might be aptly described as the wallflower of the sentence. In her essay "Rethinking Adjectives," Ellen Bryant Voigt reminds us of the etymological root of "adjective," which is indicative of why it occupies a nonplace in our imagination.[13] The adjective is, "a part of speech with little syntactical necessity, an 'adjective'—from the root meaning 'to annex'—is 'an addition or adjunct: that which is added to or dependent on a substantive as an attribute'."[14] Voigt goes on to describe the Modernist resistance to this grammatical accessory: "as Ernest Hemingway demonstrated to the point of parody, the noun is the strongest part of speech. Without nouns, there is no poem—perhaps, one might venture, there is no language: if language points to, or names, then the *nomen* is language at its most functional."[15]

We can test this functionality in poems no less than in prose. Here are two stanzas, with most of the adjectival machinery stripped from each:

Example A:

It will be autumn.
We will sit on the balcony
watching the leaves drift
like letters in houses.

Example B:

I waited in an orchard
until flowers fell and drifted.
While I watched, a petal stuck
to the dog. Then I moved on.

There is in each a functional economy, and both have a density attributable to imagistic concreteness and an avoidance of abstraction. We also see, of course, some imagistic overlap: autumn / orchard, leaves / flowers. One might argue that they also share a tonal register—a chilly melancholy—so much so that they could even be from the same poem. But here are the original lines, the first from Louise Glück's "The Letters," and the second from Barbara Ras's poem "Pursuit":

Example A:

Tomorrow it will be autumn.
We will sit together on the balcony
watching the dry leaves drift over the
village like the letters we will burn,
one by one, in our separate houses.[16]

Example B:

I waited there in an orchard until the flowers fell
and drifted from the branches like memories of
  waltzing with mama
under the arbor, and while I watched, a petal stuck to
  the black nose
of the farmer's sleeping dog and then I moved on.[17]

It would be difficult to imagine two more different stanzas. Here, by reinstituting the modifiers, we can also see the dangers inherent in over-privileging a simplified syntax dominated by nouns and verbs, as doing so risks eradicating a great deal of what is singular within a given poet's sensibility. As Voigt says later in that same essay:

> Adjectives not only annex precision and clarity, for more exact meaning, and add nuance and resonance, for evocation and emotion; in their amplifications of tone they acknowledge the poet's subjective presence in the poem. In fact, the adjective perhaps springs more directly than any other part of speech from the lyric source.[18]

It is this last idea—that adjectives spring more directly from the lyric source—

The originating impulse of this poem is likely familiar to us. It's a simple object study, a Rilkean *Dinggedicht*, though one that has been doused by Dr. Banner's gamma radiation and fed by late-night TV.

that rings most true in terms of Ras's poems. Indeed, the subjectivity that animates her work is most alive in her adjectives, where her poems' unstable and oscillating possibilities reside. It is in the adjectives, moreover, that we see most clearly one facet of her restrained recklessness. Notice how adroitly, in "Pursuit," Ras uses adjectives—in this case, prepositional phrases—to modify not only *what* is recollected (the memory of the mother), but the spatial and temporal zones—the *when* and the *where*—of this recollection. Our attention drifts down and back into a more distant past along with those flowers. We are then tugged into the near-past to which the poem returns us via the conjunction. There is, for a moment, a sense that the two pasts the poem recalls—the near-past of the poem itself, and the more distant past of the waltz—exist, if only for the length of a phrase, in the same instant, suspended within the image of those falling flowers provided by the paratactic time-travel the conjunction enables. We see again that lack of fixity, that same tenuousness that enveloped the closing lines of "Bad Hair," and some of that amalgamating friction that Eliot described as well.

But what about those adjectives that precede their nouns—those *attributive* adjectives that we often deploy in early drafts to prop up a noun? These are typically considered the most superfluous, the first to meet the workshop's cutting floor. These are, not surprisingly, the adjectives with which Eliot found the most fault. As Voigt says, "bad poets and good had found [the adjective] handy for padding out a metered line, for inflating the subject matter, for convincing the reader of the poet's earnestness or sensitivity."[19] But the superfluity of attributive adjectives is not only acknowledged in many of Ras's poems, but actively embraced. Yes, the adjective is by its nature subordinate, and those that precede nouns doubly so. They often act as placeholders for the imagination—when they act at all. However, in recalling Voigt's explanation of the root of "adjective"—"to annex"—we are also encouraged to consider another, less formal definition for that word—"to take for oneself; to appropriate." In doing so, we find an opportunity to reevaluate the adjective and its function; and we see the adjective as the lone part of speech capable of being at once subordinate to the noun that it modifies and equally able to gobble up.

In the final stanza of "The Last Skin," the title poem of Ras's third collection, we see, as we did in that stanza from "Pursuit," Ras's powerful control over prepositional phrases, and the wealth of modifying possibilities that reside in the adjective:

> My mother has been gone for years, and I
> begin to see, in the spots on the backs of my hands, in the shelf
> my cheekbones make for my cheeks, in the way I hold my
> mouth against gravity's pull, that I carry her
> with me, my skin, her skin,
> her last skin. [20]

Our attention is no doubt drawn to the prepositional phrases, three of which here are anchored by anaphora. That subordinated insistence is balanced in the last lines by the epistrophic repetition of "skin." Other echoes appear: "my mother" and "last" are on loan from the first two stanzas, and there is an imagistic rhyme between "sill," which appears in the first stanza, and "shelf" in the fifth.

In those last two lines, besides the speaker ("me") there is only one noun—"skin" ("her" in these last two instances is a possessive determiner). But that second noun is carefully modified (and one could argue, consumed) by a combination of adjectival/possessive determiners. "Skin" is at first "my skin," belonging to the speaker, before a shift to "her skin" (the mother's) immediately after, until the poem closes on a further modified repetition: "her last skin."[21] The suggestion, of course, is one of continuity: the speaker has inherited her mother's skin—"I begin to see ... that I carry her with me."[22] It is in moments such as this one that we see that quality of the lyric that Culler mentioned: the ordinary—in this case, human skin—made extraordinary by the way it connects, across inconceivable distances of time, and of the body, both the speaker and her mother. It is also here that we see some of that sensibility Eliot described, manifest on the grammatical level: the adjective reshapes the noun through appropriation and recurrence to form a new unit of meaning, with the denotative surety of "skin" still lingering alongside these new, amalgamated wholes. Finally, those qualities of her mother that she sees in herself, in "my skin," have manifested emotionally and psychologically the work these attributive adjectives do grammatically. For grief, too, is a form of annexation: it becomes an addition that we must carry, even as it remains entirely itself, and it rearranges who we were before picking up that burden.

The impressive work Ras performs through her use of adjectives is matched only by accomplishments in the matter of endings and poetic closure, though the mechanisms by which her poems arrive at one or both is most helpfully framed by way of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*.[23] In a manner befitting Ras's interest in the distances between ideas and things, Smith clarifies that an ending "suggests both dread and satisfaction."[24] Smith says:

> There is a distinction, however, between concluding and merely stopping or ceasing.... We tend to speak of conclusions when a sequence of events has a relatively high degree of structure, when, in other words, we can perceive these events as related to one another by some principle of organization or design that implies the existence of a definite termination point.[25]

Structure, organization, definite—these words are not likely to be among those we reach for when reflecting on what we've seen so far of Barbara Ras's poems, so often seeming to resist structural integrity and syntactic clarity. Some are built almost entirely out of introductory clauses that remain ungoverned by subject or verb. And good luck finding poems that overtly adhere to a traditional rhyme scheme or meter. It isn't even until her third book that one regularly finds stanzaic patterns emerging. But this list should not be taken as one of shortcomings; instead, it underscores once again the work's persistent incongruity. So how is it that, absent many of the controlling structures that we expect from poems, or even English syntax, Ras's poems could ever find resolution?

One could say that they don't, at least not in the typical sense. Ras's poems, after all, are invested in suspension more often than in resolution. They might account for their lengths and distances, but they won't read back to us the measurement on the tape. Even so, some of these destabilizing gestures—the long sentences, the shifts in diction and tone, the endless digressions, the incongruities (adjectival and otherwise)—occur regularly enough to create a pattern of a particular lyric sensibility, if not of a traditional lyric form.

One manifestation of this sensibility is an interconnected, even somatic quality that characterizes many of Ras's best poems. In that gesture towards embodiment, one might well hear Eliot again: "one must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, the digestive tracts."[26]

For it is often in such connections, nervy and gut-wrenching as they may be, that we see Ras's systems and signals most clearly, as we do in "Abundancia":

> On the train as it rolls in and out of stations, abundancia underground,
> abundancia above, the sequence constant,
> dark dark light, dark dark light,
> then the longest dark, abundancia under the bay, and abundancia
> in the mother combing her son's hair, pulling the ten-cent comb
> again and again through the already yielding strands,
> and in the bending of the boy's head abundancia as he holds still for the part,
> his hair obeying the invisible line she makes on his head.
> Abundancia inside children, though how so in the black kids
> in the aisle selling candy bars to commuters who ignore them?
> Has anyone asked if this is the way children
> are given to dreams?
> And then abundancia in the sudden accusation of light
> as we surface out of the tunnel, abundancia in the towering
> cranes over the Oakland docks, abundancia in the quick step

Ras's poems offer a study in the contradictory, generative impulses that inform the lyric poem.

of the hobo crossing the highway at dusk with his dog, and
  yes, there
when a friend joined me, a box of vegetables on her lap,
her recipe for leeks and mushrooms with polenta,
the fruits of darkness mixed with abundancia of the
  creamiest yellow grain,
and the way she assured me at the end of a day
in which I had felt my heart's many holes each fill with grief,
reminded me how steadily irises unfurl in the spring,
how brazenly a redwing blackbird drives away a hawk.
Light dark dark, light dark dark, the rhythm lulling,
memories rising on their own, the ones you cruise by often
  enough
like a teenager cruising the house of her abundancia,
sometimes you look out the window
to see if anything has changed, others you slink down in the
  back seat,
not wanting to be seen, there, back again, the foolish pilgrim
thinking maybe this time it'll be different, he'll say
  No te vayas,
and on a lake in another country, you'll stay, your children
  will have dark eyes,
and abundancia of abundancias, morning light will shine like
  faithfulness
on the papaya and lime at breakfast.
But here it's dinnertime, and I long to get back to Anna,
our occasional wild dancing in the kitchen and abundancia
in the way she loves to be dipped, her head thrown back
until her hair brushes the floor, home to Alfred,
who once in the dark of an island house unwrapped a small
  talisman
I hadn't seen hanging in the window to show me the pearly
  abundancia
of peeled garlic he held in his hand, and later
after he wrapped the buds back into their tiny cloth bundle,
  we slept
under the open window, his elbow on my arm, a sweet
  anchor
in the deep blue abundancia of the ocean
rushing around us.[27]

(Reprinted with permission from Louisiana State University Press.)

Some features should strike us as familiar: syntactically, this poem is consonant with "Bad Hair." And, like "The Last Skin," it is anchored by a handful of key repetitions. There is also a familiar unruliness in this poem, a hyperbolic snowballing, the poem accreting and increasing in intensity line by line through careful attention to the ordinary. But its ramshackle contraption is also governed by a number of structural restraints. The quantity of end-stopped lines matches almost exactly the number of those that are enjambed. There are imagistic restraints as well: the train on its track, the "sequence constant" of the light upon it, and the young boy's hair, much as does the poem, "obeying the invisible line." But other constants, repetition chief among them, are key to the poem's balance between chaos and control. The refrain of "Abundancia" is deployed in a variety of ways: as different parts of speech, as a shibboleth that allows the speaker to cross the thresholds of two cultures, and as an almost ritualistic lyric utterance. "Abundancia," as both a poem and as a word within the text, most often serves as a coupling, maintaining the connections—however tenuous—between is the poem's disparate parts; not only the concrete (people, vegetables, recipes, landscapes) but the abstract (grief, time, memory) and the personality of the poet-speaker. In short: "abundancia" is both the idiosyncratic ephemera of a life, and that which the poet deploys in order to assemble this amalgamation.

According to Herrnstein Smith, "when repetition is the fundamental principle of thematic generation, the resulting structure will tend to be *paratactic*; that is, the coherence of the poem will not be dependent on the sequential arrangement of its major thematic units."[28] Instead, what coheres in this poem is a sense of equivalence—the disparity of the poem's contents is held in complementary abeyance. Parataxis requires that the elements in phrases be syntactic equivalents, and that is the case here: coordinating conjunctions and parallel syntax abound, and the "abundancia" refrain also often yokes together that which seems incongruent in the poem. One could even go so far as to say the word itself, "abundancia," mimics the sound of the train as it clicks along its route, which is another way in which structure and song create paratactic equivalence and linkages in this poem.

Equivalence and congruence being borne out by the poem, as they are, how are we to account for the poem's conclusion? It shifts in two drastic ways: firstly, it moves away from the perpetual lyric present into the simple past tense, while narratively it takes two steps away—initially, to the speaker's home and the memory of her daughter, and then to another memory, presumably prior memory, of Alfred, "in the deeply blue abundancia of the ocean / rushing around us."[29] One might argue that we simply can't account for it. The poem actively resists traditional narrative completion: the train in this poem never arrives at a destination. For all of her longing, the speaker cannot "get back to Anna,"[30] nor to the intimacies of the final lines. And yet, despite these narrative frustrations, the poem feels complete. But how? The train, operating

as a figure for syntax, is perpetually moving, first forward—"dark dark light, dark dark light"—"as it rolls in and out" of its own present. However, the poem begins not only to reverse, both temporally and geographically, but also to *unravel* the poem's present. The light from line three is recast, or revised, in line twenty-four, as "light dark dark, light dark dark." When this occurs, the speaker's attention—and the poem's narrative—is derailed by memories, "rising on their own." Notice that from here on there's no train at all: the poem has abandoned entirely its initiating subject. And yet, the train lingers, as do the people and objects on which the speaker's attention once alighted, due to what we might call the abundancia of parataxis. As Smith suggests, the lack of hierarchical arrangement and narrative subordination, and the presence of syntactic coordination and repetition, insist that none of the events recalled in this poem will resolve, because they simply cannot: the poem is governed solely by thematic and sonic repetition, not narrative resolution or imagistic fixity. None of the poem's narrative strands—the present of the train, the four triggered memories—occupy a position of primacy over any other. What governs the poem is the insistence on an idea of abundance that is at once imagistic, syntactic, sonic and ritualistic, a pervasiveness that we find in the final two lines, in "the ocean / rushing around us."

The resistance to closure we read into the ocean's expanse "rushing around us" is reminiscent of a passage from the penultimate chapter of Álvaro Enrigue's novel *Sudden Death*, where the narrator offers the following observation: "Art and Dreams don't stick with us because they have the capacity to move things along, but because they stop the world: they function as a parenthesis, a dyke, a moment of rest."[31] If there is in Ras's work something singular and irreducible, it lies in her interest in such moments of hesitation, and in how such hesitations emerge from the seemingly arbitrary syntactical machinery of adjectives and conjunctions. The vast depths that accumulate from the manipulation of this machinery are a monument to the restless metaphysical intelligence so characteristic of her work. All the greater, perhaps, is her ability to fashion such moments from that which we often pay too little attention, the repetitive junk DNA of our language, our syntax, and our culture. AWP

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Notes

1. Barbara Ras, "You Can't Have It All," *Bite Every Sorrow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998), pp. 3–4.

2. C.K. Williams, "C.K. Williams on Barbara Ras's *Bite Every Sorrow*"

> Ras's poems, after all, are invested in suspension more often than in resolution.

(Judge's Citation) *Academy of American Poets*, last modified February 17, 2005, https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/c-k-williams-barbara-rass-bite-every-sorrow.

3. David Kirby, "National Poetry Month: The best let you see what they see, feel what they feel" *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), April 1, 2007.

4. Donna Seaman, "The Last Skin" *Booklist* 106, 15 (2010): p. 13.

5. T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets." *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 247.

6. Jonathan Culler. *Theory of the Lyric*. (Boston: Harvard UP, 2015), p. 352.

7. Barbara Ras, "Bad Hair," *Bite Every Sorrow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998), 10.

8. Ibid., p. 10.

9. Ibid., p. 10.

10. Ibid., p. 10.

11. Ibid., p. 10.

12. Jonathan Culler. *Theory of the Lyric*. (Boston: Harvard UP, 2015), p. 38.

13. Ellen Bryant Voigt, "Rethinking Adjectives." *The Flexible Lyric* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1999), p. 36.

14. Ibid., p. 36.

15. Ibid., p. 36.

18. Ibid. p. 51.

19. Ibid., p. 36.

20. Ras, "The Last Skin," *The Last Skin* (New York: Penguin, 2010), p. 21.

21. Ibid., p. 21.

22. Ibid., p. 21.

23. Barbara Herrnstein Smith. *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

24. Ibid., p. 1.

25. Ibid., pp. 1–2.

26. Eliot, p. 250.

27. Ras, "Abundancia," *Bite Every Sorrow*, pp. 15–16.

28. Smith, pp. 98–99.

29. Ras, "Abundancia," pp. 15–16.

30. Ibid., p. 15.

31. Álvaro Enrigue. *Sudden Death*. Translated by Natasha Wimmer (New York: Riverhead Books, 2016), p. 257.

CATCH AND RELEASE:

STRATEGIES OF OVERT AND COVERT NARRATORIAL CONTROL

by Sonya Larson

Introduction

After several years and many workshops, I noticed a pattern to the criticism I was getting on my stories. While readers called my fiction authoritative and confident, they complained that it could also feel "preordained," as if pulled along a roller coaster that was somehow over-willed. Worse, they said, my fiction seemed to inhibit and even suffocate its own possibilities. In the words of one observer, "It needs to let go. It feels too controlled."

I was puzzled. Just what was this business of control? Why was it sometimes a good thing and sometimes a bad thing? Why did readers struggle to specify what they meant, especially in terms of craft? And what could I make of this quandary when my writing process felt anything *but controlled*—just the messy, fumbling endeavor that I've always known?

I started noticing allusions to control in talk of fiction everywhere. As a source of praise ("Mr. Chabon... writes with astonishing poise and control")[1] and punishment ("it's an icy and overcontrolled exercise in coterie aestheticism").[2] I heard of stories with pleasurably little control ("Which came first, you have to wonder, the weird thoughts or the heedless, spilling words?")[3] and of stories going apeshit ("I love *Moby Dick*," said my friend, "but the whaling descriptions run off the rails"). I heard of stories getting lost ("Hilton meanders a bit, repeats himself, gets carried away and has to call himself to order")[4] and getting cornered ("it gives predictable rise to... the novel's forceful denouement").[5] And I heard of stories made timid, as E.L. Doctorow said of his own novel, *Big As Life*: "Norman Mailer once told me I didn't go far enough in that book, and I think he's right. I overcontrolled it."[6] Like an underground stream, references to control trickle through the very language we use to describe fiction. But I found no essay or scholar who had parsed just what this means.

We already know that readers implicitly describe control as a feature of fiction all the time. To explain what we see, we might imagine the author masterminding, improvising, forcing, bumbling, or calmly unspooling her story with the cunning ease of Zorro.

So, I set out to attempt exactly that. Two works in particular—*Jesus' Son* by Denis Johnson, and *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki—offer strategies for establishing and modulating their appearances of control.

Narratorial Control

First off, a simple question: What do we talk about when we talk about control?

We already know that readers implicitly describe control as a feature of fiction all the time. To explain what we see, we might imagine the author masterminding, improvising, forcing, bumbling, or calmly unspooling her story with the cunning ease of Zorro. In other words, we attribute the control we sense on the page to the author's efforts to control, in both proportion and style. So, when we see a less controlled story, we might surmise that the author rushed, slapped it together, or was writing in a fit of passion. Of a highly controlled story, we imagine that the author labored all night, placed each word with a pair of tweezers, or shot forth her intentions like arrows to a target.

But as writers we know that this is not necessarily the case. Control that readers sense in a given scene or passage does not necessarily equate to the control we experienced while writing it. An uncontrolled effect may in fact be highly controlled, and vice versa. Furthermore, most writers at work feel both in control and not, the entire process an exquisite minefield of certainties and mysteries, failed attempts and unexpected gems, hard-fought moments and unintended consequences.

More generally, we may imagine different stances of power toward and within our work, assigning relative degrees of agency to a story's characters, narrator, and even ourselves as the author. Writers have long debated what these dynamics could (or should) look like. At one extreme, we have ancient Greeks claiming to be mere vessels for the will of muses; at the other we have Nabokov, who famously called his characters his "galley slaves."[7]

Today, most authors of literary fiction prefer to imagine themselves at least partially led along by their characters' unexpected complexities, which neither the narrator nor even the author may fully understand. "To make something fully known," writes Robert Boswell in *The Half-Known World*, "is to make it unreal."[8]

In other words, this approach prioritizes character as the story's primary figure of control. If the author has particular aesthetic, philosophical, or political goals, they are secondary to the will of character, giving rise to the term "character-driven fiction." We are wary of stories that appear to reverse this order, using characters to serve the will of the author or narrative. Charles Baxter describes such authorial overcontrol in his essay, "On Defamiliarization":

Narratorial control behaves as a sense of consciousness directing the piece's progression. We perceive it as the story's guiding hand or guiding wisdom, and its fluctuations a source of assuredness, slyness, boldness, or wild abandon.

> But the story had begun to read itself too early, and before long it was always and only about one thing, with the result that all the details fit in perfectly. All the arrows pointed in the same direction... Its meaning is overdetermined and the characters overparented. When writers overparent their characters, they understand them too quickly. Such characters aren't contradictory or misfitted. The writer has decided what her story is about too early and has concentrated too fixedly on that one truth.[9]

Many writers—myself included—agree with this perspective, while others embrace alternative models of control as a political claim about the meaning and purpose of art. Regardless, these are matters of *authorial control*, or the author's experience of control in her process, approach, and means of making choices. Authorial control varies for every author, and likely varies for every piece by that author, and across different stages of composition and revision.

But readers of finished fiction cannot infer what journey of authorial control brought the final product into being. We can guess and form theories, but to know for sure we'd need the author herself to tell us. So, it's vital to separate authorial control from what I'll call *narratorial control*: control as a quality in the story's narration, regardless of how it arrived there. Though we often merge the two concepts, they do not necessarily align. For this essay, I'll look only at narratorial control.

Narratorial control behaves as a sense of consciousness directing the piece's progression. We perceive it as the story's guiding hand or guiding wisdom, and its fluctuations a source of assuredness, slyness, boldness, or wild abandon. Consider, for example, the following first lines of Amy Hempel's "Rapture of the Deep" against Clarice Lispector's *Near to the Wild Heart*. Both openings use psychic distance and situated time to establish characters and setting. But they evoke different styles of control *of the narration itself*.

Here's Hempel: "I was the one they sent when it was Halloween night and Miss Locey couldn't move. I am not a nurse. I am barely a typist. But she didn't need me to type, or to take the shorthand I don't have, either."[10] Hempel's clipped tone, straightforward syntax, and no-frills diction give these lines an aura of cool containment.

Contrast this with Lispector: "Her father's typewriter went clack-clack... clack-clack-clack...The clock awoke in dustless tin-dlen. The silence dragged out zzzzzz. What did the wardrobe say? clothes-clothes-clothes. No, no."[11] A disorienting point of view, rhythm, and unconventional diction and syntax make this narration seem wilder and more unhinged. Next to Hempel, it appears comparatively less controlled—or, perhaps, differently controlled. Each author uses craft to suggest a manner of control in her work, though between them that control differs greatly in style and degree.

I don't think we should imagine narratorial control as a discrete tool, deployable in the way we might deploy figurative language or free indirect style. Rather, it is a literary effect—like atmosphere or suspense—that emerges from several craft elements acting in concert with one another. If we can create atmosphere by modulating sensory detail, description, diction, and tone, we can also create *effects* of narratorial control by modulating multiple craft elements at once. It is a set of interactions; it is not the dancers but the dance.

Presumably there are infinite strategies by which authors can achieve desired styles and degrees of narratorial control, but I found two used by Johnson and Ozeki especially illuminating: the use of prose texture, and the use of structural direction.

Control Through Prose Texture

I've long admired Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son* for many reasons, chief of which is its interesting (and elusive) dynamic of control. It's one of those books that makes me ask not *How?* but *How come?* How come this works? The book defies so many standards of craft that I often feel it "shouldn't" work. So why do I trust my reading experience—and so deeply—when it gives me so many reasons not to?

The characters of *Jesus' Son* are wholly out of control. Homeless, addicted to drugs, and mired in rollercoaster relationships, they stumble through life so cognitively compromised that the narrator can barely keep track of what's happening. They don't know how they arrived in this house or that hospital; they don't know the guy who's sleeping in their car. They can't remember the names of their very best friends. The book's narration mirrors this anarchy, jettisoning all the usual cohesive elements of fiction—clear causality, chronology, motivation, etc. But throughout it all, effects of narratorial control permeate the book, giving cohesion to what could easily be a mess.

Fuckhead, the narrator and protagonist of "Work," is a drug-addled young man in the Pacific Northwest who joins his friend, Wayne, to steal copper wire from the walls of abandoned houses. The story opens as follows:

> I'd been staying at the Holiday Inn with my girlfriend, honestly the most beautiful woman I'd ever known, for three days under a phony name, shooting heroin. We made love in the bed, ate steaks at the restaurant, shot up in the john, puked, cried, accused one another, begged of one another, forgave, promised, and carried one another to heaven.[12]

Fuckhead goes through chaos at the Holiday Inn, but as a narrator he depicts the scene with a prose style of strong control. Quick and repetitive actions, summarized in a list, harness the bedlam into an ordered form. Though technically in past tense, the listed verbs—particularly the abstract "forgave" and "promised"[13]—suggest habituation, and the weary sense that Fuckhead has been in this situation many times before. He knows how this pattern goes, and he knows how to narrate it. He narrates with seasoned control amidst an out-of-control situation.

The tight texture of Johnson's prose underscores this effect. Parallel syntax gives each clause a repeated shape and sound, connecting verbs and prepositional phrases like drumbeats: "We made love *in the bed*, ate steaks *at the restaurant*, shot up *in the john*."[14] This rhythm then accelerates with abrupt, single-word clauses—"puked," "cried," "forgave," "promised."[15] The cacophony of "steaks," "puked," "shot up," "john," "accused," and "begged"[16] make hard, physical sounds that emphasize their own presence. The direct rhymes of "accused *one another*, begged of *one another*," and "carried *one another* to heaven"[17] finish this passage with such mirrored exactitude that they

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draw attention to their own symmetry. This prose style commands, and is uninterested in subtleties.

Thus, the story sets up a pattern of compressed action and pronounced prose texture. From them we get strong narratorial control, despite an atmosphere of total disorder. The passage continues:

> But there was a fight. I stood outside the motel hitchhiking,

…the presence of narratorial control—whether overt or covert, prominent or discreet—helps to form the promise that a story will travel forward in an interesting way, and to someplace worthwhile.

dressed up in a hurry, shirtless under my jacket, with the wind crying through my earring. A bus came. I climbed aboard and sat on the plastic seat while the things of our city turned in the windows like the images in a slot machine.

Once, as we stood arguing at a streetcorner, I punched her in the stomach. She doubled over and broke down crying. A car full of young college men stopped beside us.

"She's feeling sick," I told them.

"Bullshit," one of them said. "You elbowed her right in the *gut.*"

"He did, he did, he did," she said, weeping.

I don't remember what I said to them. I remember loneliness crushing first my lungs, then my heart, then my balls. They put her in the car with them and drove away.

But she came back.

This morning, after the fight, after sitting on the bus for several blocks with a thoughtless, red mind, I jumped down and walked into the Vine.[18]

Here, the narration opens up, away from compressed lists of action and into a scene. But the prose continues its pattern of short, declarative clauses and straightforward, subject-verb constructions: "I stood," "A bus came," "I climbed," "Once, as we stood," "She doubled over," "A car full," "She's feeling," "You elbowed," "He did," "I don't remember," "I remember," "They put," and "But she came."[19] Altogether they create a sense of driving certitude. Only one phrase depicts uncertainty, arriving at the emotional height of the passage: "I don't remember what I said to them."[20] But even Fuckhead's subsequent emotion is expressed with the syntax of ordering and indexing: "I remember loneliness crushing *first* my lungs, *then* my heart, *then* my balls."[21]

Control Through Structural Direction

Ruth Ozeki's novel, *A Tale for the Time Being*, is a very high custody book, to borrow Robert Boswell's term,[22] and I found the narration by turns assertive and bossy, as if confidently leading characters down paths that they didn't necessarily choose themselves. My wariness, however, wasn't just about the book. I had a hunch that this concern was exactly what readers had expressed about my own work—a joint feeling of enjoying the ride and straining under the seatbelt.

The novel concerns sixteen-year-old Nao Yasutani, a Japanese girl whose diary washes ashore on a remote island in the Pacific Northwest. A writer named Ruth finds the diary and begins to read it. Ruth becomes increasingly hungry to uncover the mystery of Nao's fate, which might stem from the recent 2011 tsunami or—from the diary's insinuations—may have ended in Nao's suicide, as her own father attempted many times.

While its prose is less clearly patterned than the opening of "Work," the book establishes strong control from its symmetrically alternating structure, as well as its almost singular focus on Nao's diary and all that it contains and suggests. At regular intervals the book toggles between Nao's first-person narration via her diary, and Ruth's third-person narration of her life and comprehension of the diary. The "point of telling" also alternates, implying that Nao's narrative was constructed in the past, relative to Ruth's reading of that narrative. Such firm structure and clear focus give the book a sense of directional certainty, especially as Ruth seeks answers to her questions with the help of her husband and friends.

While the novel begins in the genre of realist fiction, it's also interested in the implications of a book's existence, and in the relationship between a writer writing and a reader reading. Ruth interacts with Nao's diary both as a reading experience and as an object that alters the progression of her daily life. The novel directs that same inquiry to us as Ozeki's readers, in its opening lines that double as Nao's diary: "As for me, right now I am … listening to a sad chanson that is playing somewhere in your past, which is also my present, writing this and wondering about you, somewhere in my future. And if you're reading this, then maybe by now you're wondering about me, too."[23]

In authoring her diary, Nao's direct address of "you" includes both the novel's reader and the "you" of Ruth, as she becomes a character reading said diary. That the character of Ruth shares a name with the author Ruth Ozeki (and is also a writer) plays further with these ideas. Footnotes throughout Nao's diary, presumably written by Ruth the character in her attempt to clarify Japanese terms and concepts, lend an intratextual reading to the novel, positioning us as the *second* reader of Nao's diary—as if we are reading both the original diary and Ruth's annotated copy. The footnotes themselves emphasize structural control, as they track Ruth's attempts to make sense of Nao's text.

The novel's structure is so vital that it shapes the book's use of time, and

even its characters' relationships to one another. It implicitly establishes four periods of narrative time: the period of Nao's backstory, the period when she's recording that story in her diary, the period when Ruth reads the diary, and the period when we as readers are reading Ozeki's book. Relationships are similarly nested: Nao authors her diary, Ruth the character authors the diary's footnotes, and finally Ruth Ozeki authors the book we as readers hold in our hands. These nested eggs form yet another structural pattern, buttressing the novel's strongest source of narratorial control.

Overt vs. Covert Control

While both Johnson and Ozeki establish firm narratorial control, the effect is not constant. Rather, it fluctuates—at times seemingly tightly controlled and at other times more meandering or wild.

For example, Johnson doesn't use prominent prose texture throughout *Jesus' Son*. In fact, the book's first story, "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," begins with such a different style that it hardly seems written by the same author:

> A salesman who shared his liquor and steered while sleeping...A Cherokee filled with bourbon...A VW no more than a bubble of hashish fumes, captained by a college student...
>
> And a family from Marshalltown who headonned and killed forever a man driving west out of Bethany, Missouri...[24]

The language here is comparatively loose. Ellipses hazily connect incomplete clauses. Sonically, the fragments surface no clear or repeating rhythm. We don't know how these images relate to one another, or even where we are in space or time. We don't even know who is observing them. Unlike "Work," this story's narration mirrors, rather than contains, Fuckhead's confusion.

So, would we say that this opening exhibits "less" narratorial control than that of "Work"? I say no. Instead, I think we're noticing a difference of style: that of overt versus covert control.

Overt control draws attention to itself. We can easily discern its patterns; it makes its mechanisms clear. The prose style that begins "Work" does exactly this, drawing attention to its symmetry, distinct rhythm, physical sounds, and linear logic. Overt control offers a sense of assuredness and confidence, and even the reminder that we're reading an artificial construction—a fact that can be marveling to behold. Because of this, overt control may remind us of an authorial presence creating the story. We more easily (though perhaps mistakenly) attribute overt control to efforts of authorial control.

Covert control, by contrast, obscures its machinery. It is harder to notice and that is by design. It adheres more loosely—if at all—to discernible patterns of language, structure, or logic, and this conceals the source of the story's underlying cohesion. By hiding the author's hand, covert control can create an

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illusion that the story and its characters are operating of their own accord, an effect that Raymond Carver sought in his own work. "I was interested in having stories that worked invisibly," he once said. "They would work without the author obtruding ... I wanted things to operate on their own, so to speak."[25] While less perceptible than overt control, covert effects are no less valid or powerful.

Covert control can make way for a story's surprise, vulnerability, and sense of freedom. It sustains the factors that keep readers guessing, and can offer a sense of elusiveness and expansion. "Car Crashing While Hitchhiking" begins covertly and continues this style with its ongoing language of uncertainty. "I was standing out here in the night, with the baby, for some reason, in my arms,"[26] says Fuckhead after a car accident, adding, "It must have still been raining, but I remember nothing about the weather."[27] Time and again he tries to reorient his narration in time: "But before any of this, that afternoon,"[28] he says, "And later, as I've said . . . "[29] While the story calibrates its elements precisely, Fuckhead's confused language makes his narration seem anything but.

Rupturing Control: Johnson

Both Johnson and Ozeki establish overt narratorial control, modulating it in smaller ways as their stories go along. But Johnson's "Work" reaches its climax, I noticed that it does something far more dramatic: its overt control appears to loosen, as if suddenly releasing its grip.

Midway through the story, Johnson's pattern of prominent texture starts to wobble. Cacophonous language depicts Fuckhead and Wayne breaking into houses, using a crowbar to "pry points in the seams of the wall and [tear] away the Sheetrock."[30] Declarative phrasing explains how they "exposed some of the wiring in its white plastic jacket," then "ripped it free of its connection, pulled it out, and bunched it up."[31] But then the men glance out the window, and see a strange image on the river outside:

> This boat was pulling behind itself a tremendous triangle kite on a rope. From the kite, up in the air a hundred feet or so, a woman was suspended, belted in somehow, I would have guessed. She had long red hair. She was delicate and white, and naked except for her beautiful hair. I don't know what she was thinking as she floated past these ruins.[32]

New, looser language emerges in this moment. As they watch the woman—who turns out to be Wayne's ex-wife—the sentences ease their thumping rhythms and hard sounds. The cacophony of "pry points," "Sheetrock," "white plastic jacket," "ripped it free," "pulled it out," and "bunched it up"[33] shifts to the elongated sounds of "pulling," "tremendous," "suspended," "delicate," "beautiful," and "floated."[34] Fuckhead expresses new uncertainty in his diction, describing "a hundred feet or so," "belted in somehow," "I would have guessed," and "I don't know what she was thinking."[35] These shifts give the passage a more dreamlike and ephemeral register, all prompted by the sight of a woman whom Wayne once loved and lost.

These slight but important shifts in prose texture foreshadow the story's pivotal moment. After a narrowly avoided bar fight, Fuckhead suddenly recalls a memory of his own ex-wife:

> And then came one of those moments. I remember living through one when I was eighteen and spending the afternoon in bed with my first wife, before we were married. Our naked bodies started glowing, and the air turned such a strange color I thought my life must be leaving me, and with every young fiber and cell I wanted to hold on to it for another breath. A clattering sound was tearing up my head as I staggered upright and opened the door on a vision I will never see again: Where are my women now, with their sweet wet words and ways, and the miraculous balls of hail popping in a green translucence in the yards?
>
> We put on our clothes, she and I, and walked out into a town flooded ankle-deep with white, buoyant stones. Birth should have been like that.
>
> That moment in the bar, after the fight was narrowly averted, was like the green silence after the hailstorm.[36]

Here, language breaks from its tight patterns to express a moment of overwhelming emotion. Clauses elongate, and verbs and adjectives take on the swaying sound of gerunds: "living," "spending," "glowing," "leaving," "clattering," "tearing," and "popping."[37] Imagery becomes even more uncertain, describing the air's color only as "strange."[38] Tense shifts from past to future to present ("I stagger*ed* upright and open*ed* the door on a vision *I will* never see again: Where *are* my women now ... ?)[39] as if Fuckhead is struggling to orient himself in time even as he utters the sentence. The

rupture culminates with a startling question that intrudes on the paragraph's final sentence with an interrupting colon: "a vision I will never see *again: Where are my women now, with their sweet wet words and ways ... ?*"[40]

These perturbations deliver something remarkable: not the distraction of error, but the transcendence of extremity. The inconsistent tenses and nonsequitur question depict a moment so important that it appears to outpace its own narration. Fuckhead is losing control, in both his experience and his telling. His "errors" of grammar are like the threadbare edges that accompany the story's growth, as it shifts from gripping control to something more unmoored.

Nonsequiturs also disrupt the story's structural direction, throwing off-balance what was previously a straightforward scene. After the rupture moment, the story continues as such:

> Somebody was buying a round of drinks. The cards were scattered on the table, face up, face down, and they seemed to foretell that whatever we did to one another would be washed away by liquor or explained away by sad songs.
>
> Wayne was a part of all that.
>
> The Vine was like a railroad club car that had somehow run itself off the tracks into a swamp of time where it awaited the blows of the wrecking ball. And the blows were really coming. Because of Urban Renewal, they were tearing up and throwing away the whole downtown.[41]

Here, nonsequitur sentences shift our attention from idea to idea without warning. We travel abruptly from Fuckhead's memory to the cards on the table, to a mention of Wayne, to comments on Urban Renewal. The conceptual gaps between these ideas invite questions: what exactly is the "all that"[42] that Wayne was a part of? Why does Fuckhead think to say that, and at this moment in his storytelling? Though we're still in the same bar scene, the non-sequiturs disrupt the story's direction into something less patterned and predictable, like switchbacks up a mountain. We're still traveling forward, but the eventual destination is no longer clear.

From this point forward, the story's narratorial control is fundamentally altered. The pace slows dramatically to linger in the Vine, as Fuckhead and Wayne sip drinks after their long day's work. The language forgoes its staccato and declarative style, giving way to a series of emotive images that seem to stun the narrator, one by one: "And here we were, this afternoon, with nearly thirty dollars each, and our favorite, our very favorite person tending bar... We had money. We were grimy and tired. Usually we felt guilty and frightened, because

…when we speak of narratorial control, we speak—on some level—of a story's willingness to establish and operate by its own set of rules.

there was something wrong with us, and we didn't know what it was; but today we had the feeling of men who had worked."[43]

This passage doesn't depict dramatic events like shooting heroin or punching people. Instead Fuckhead is struck by the very mundanity of his situation, and by the simple, sane gesture of drinking after work. His taste of normalcy is poignant precisely because he can never seem to find it. The story that began with chaos ends with momentary respite, a tiny break from Fuckhead's lifelong fear that "there was something wrong with us, and we didn't know what it was."[44]

What forms this arch is not action and consequence, nor a character experiencing personal change. Instead, Fuckhead's narration itself appears to shake loose from its overt control, forging an unexpected shape and great emotional power. With this rupture Johnson casts off the overt texture of his prose, as if that confident style cannot contain the staggering emotions that Fuckhead struggles to express.

This seems difficult to pull off. Suddenly ditching overt control seems like a recipe for making a story appear to "lose its way" or "run off the rails." I racked my brain over how Johnson made this transition feel natural and not random, until I noticed that his connotation of language cleverly prepares us for this trajectory all along.

Since the beginning, metaphors embed this story with the connotation of mothering. The wind is "crying" as Fuckhead's girlfriend is "crying" and "weeping"[45] in the opening scene. Wayne "cradles" a sack of tools,[46] a river is "mothered" by "benevolent" clouds,[47] and the various women of the story are in turns "revered,"[48] "sweet,"[49] and "like an angel."[50] As the story progresses, these connotations of women become increasingly literal: as Fuckhead's thinks of his girlfriend, sees Wayne's ex-wife, remembers his own ex-wife, and encounters his favorite bartender. These figures of speech express what Fuckhead himself cannot—his desperate desire for the comfort of women he's lost. Such language culminates when Fuckhead asks "Where are my women now?"[51] at the story's pivotal moment, making literal the question that has haunted the story from the beginning.

This question continues to resonate to the very end, where time once again shifts rapidly in a single paragraph:

> The Vine had no jukebox, but a real stereo continually playing tunes of alcoholic self-pity and sentimental divorce. "Nurse," I sobbed. She poured doubles like an angel, right up to the lip of a cocktail glass, no measuring. "You have a lovely pitching arm." You had to go down to them like a hummingbird over a blossom. I saw her much later, not too many years ago, and when I smiled she seemed to believe I was making advances. But it was only that I remembered. I'll never forget you. Your husband will beat you with an extension cord and the bus will pull away leaving you standing there in tears, but you were my mother.[52]

Once again, the tense here shifts rapidly: from habitual, to past, to habitual, to past, to habitual, to remembering from a future position, to future, to future conditional, and finally back to past. This circuitous use of time acts like a camera lens twisting in and out of focus, trying to locate the exact memory it wants to preserve. It heightens the story's register, landing finally on the story's closing metaphor of the unnamed bartender as Fuckhead's "mother."[53] This comparison is shocking in its loneliness, and yet also wholly earned, because Johnson's language has been leading us there all along. While language forms and ruptures the story's narratorial control, it also prepares for and eases this transition.

Conclusion

Before writing this essay, my attempts to discuss the appearance of control in fiction got very murky very quickly. My fellow writers and I lacked a framework or set of terms to think more clearly about the concept. Studying the work of Johnson and Ozeki surfaced for me a more meaningful way to regard the control that I perceive on the page. I'd sum it up like this:

> Narratorial control is a literary effect, separate from authorial control, which behaves as a sense of consciousness directing the story's progression. It can range greatly in style and degree, and can operate overtly or covertly depending on the prominence and consistency of the story's aesthetic and narrative patterns.
>
> Narratorial control can be rendered through patterns of prose texture, structural direction, or other elements of craft. It's possible to modulate its effects by mixing overt and covert control across different arenas, or by suddenly changing the style of control.

As I stand back and look at this description, I notice something interesting. It seems that when we speak of narratorial control, we speak—on

In the Spotlight

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DAVID MURA

Minnesota
The Loft, VONA University
Featured: August 2017

David Mura has written two memoirs, *Turning Japanese* (Oakland PEN Book Award, NY Times Notable Book) and *Where the Body Meets Memory*; the novel *Famous Suicides of the Japanese Empire*; and four books of poetry, most recently *The Last Incantations*. His book on creative writing, *A Stranger's Journey: Race, Identity and Narrative Craft in Writing*, will be published spring 2018 by U. of Georgia Press. He has taught at the Loft, VONA, and the Stonecoast MFA.

HÉLÈNE CARDONA

California
Levure Littéraire
Featured: September 2017

Hélène Cardona—poet, editor, and literary translator—is the author of seven books, including the poetry collections *Life in Suspension* and *Dreaming My Animal Selves* and translations of Gabriel Arnou-Laujeac's *Beyond Elsewhere* (winner of a Hemingway Grant); Dorianne Laux' *Ce que nous portons*; Whitman Web's *Civil War Writings* by Walt Whitman; and *Birnam Wood* by her father, José Manuel Cardona. She has won fellowships from the Goethe-Institut and the Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, as well as the International Book Award in Poetry and the USA Best Book Award. Contributor to *The London Magazine* and co-editor of *Plume*, *Fulcrum*, and *Levure Littéraire*, Hélène has also served as a mentor for children in the schools in Los Angeles and for AWP's Writer to Writer Mentorship Program.

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

Hawai'i
University of Hawai'i, Manoa
Featured: October 2017

Dr. Craig Santos Perez is a native Chamorro from the Pacific Island of Guam. He is the co-founder of Ala Press, coeditor of two anthologies of Pacific literature, and the author of four collections of poetry, including *from unincorporated territory [hacha]* (Tinfish Press, 2008) and *from unincorporated territory [saina]* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2010). A finalist for the *LA Times* 2010 Book Prize for Poetry and the winner of the 2011 PEN Center USA Literary Award for Poetry, he teaches creative writing, Pacific literature, and ecopoetry at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa.

FLEDA BROWN

Michigan
University of Delaware
Featured: November 2017

Fleda Brown's tenth collection, *The Woods Are On Fire: New & Selected Poems*, was released by the University of Nebraska Press in March. Her work has appeared in *The Best American Poetry,* has twice been a finalist for the National Poetry Series, and has won the Pushcart Prize, the Felix Pollak Prize, the Philip Levine Prize, and the Great Lakes Colleges New Writer's Award. She is professor emerita at the University of Delaware, where she directed the Poets in the Schools program and was poet laureate of Delaware from 2001–07.

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some level—of a story's willingness to establish and operate by its own set of rules. By this I mean that whatever its unique qualities of character, setting, conflict, or voice, the accrual of its patterns helps to form a sense of control. Another way of saying this is that such a story has integrity. It derives control from fully "owning" its terms, no matter what they are.

Narratorial control is very different from plot or momentum, but as a reader I feel it impacts me in a similar fashion. That's because the presence of narratorial control—whether overt or covert, prominent or discreet—helps to form the promise that a story will travel forward in an interesting way, and to someplace worthwhile. Plot or momentum as we know it don't necessarily have to be part of this promise. This is especially true when a narrator like Fuckhead is too confused to carry the threads of his story, or when a book like *A Tale for the Time Being* throws us footnotes and appendices and then changes what those mean too. Consciously or unconsciously, we look as readers for effects of narratorial control, in order to derive trust from them. We seek cues that a story *knows what it's doing*—no matter what, in fact, it's doing.

This business of readerly trust is why narratorial control is so important. John Gardner famously described the experience of reading great fiction as a "vivid and continuous dream," absent of "anything that would distract an intelligent, sensitive reader"[54] from this dream. But I'd argue that feeling momentarily pulled out or made aware of a story's mechanics doesn't necessarily dampen our reading interest. It may even intrigue us further, so long as we continue to feel—somewhere and somehow—the cohesive effects of narratorial control. AWP

Sonya Larson's *short fiction and essays have appeared in many literary reviews. She has received honors and fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Vermont Studio Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the St. Botolph Club Foundation, and her MFA in fiction from the Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. She is Director of GrubStreet's Muse and the Marketplace writing conference.*

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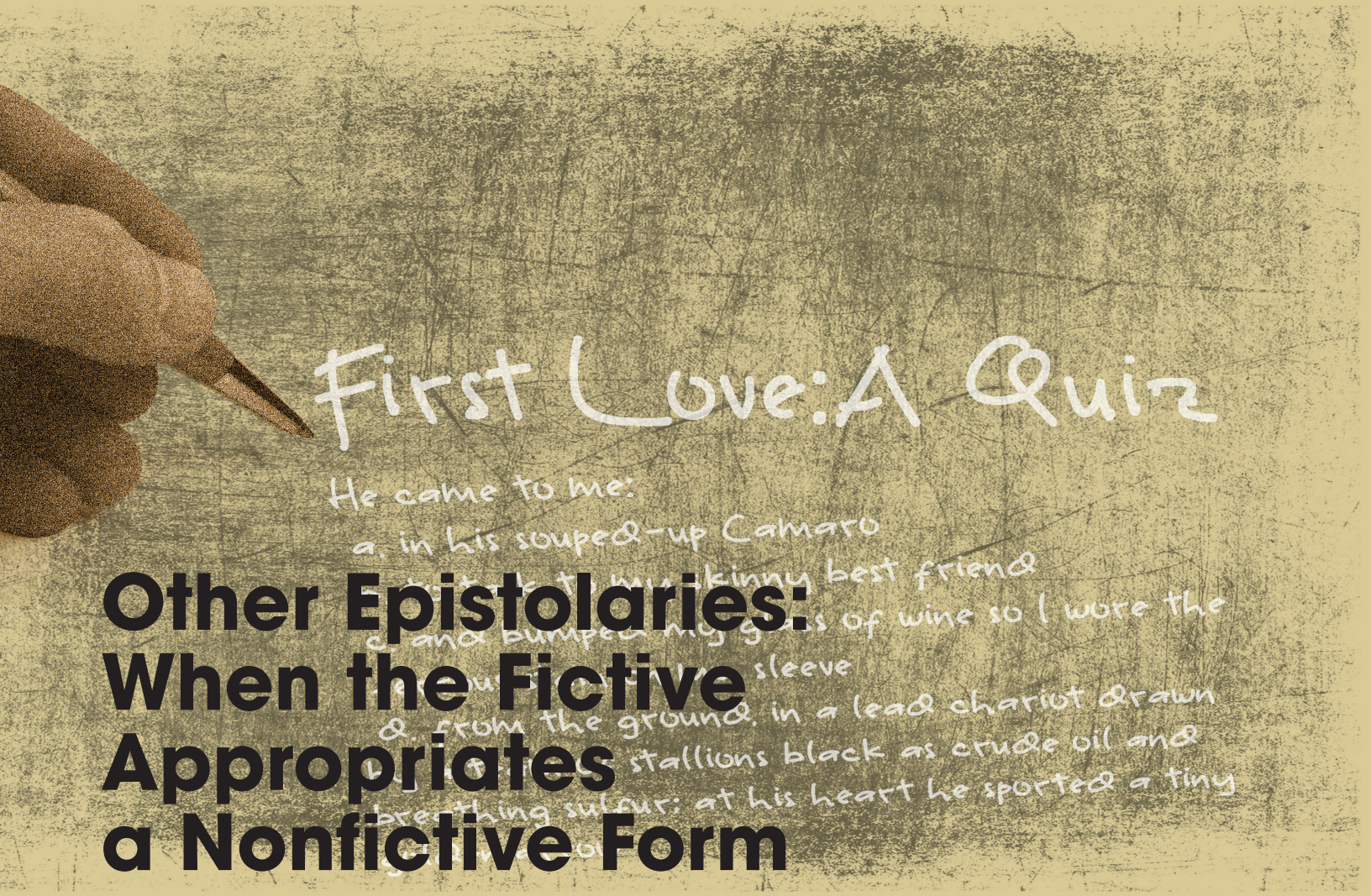

Other Epistolaries: When the Fictive Appropriates a Nonfictive Form

by Bayard Godsave

Before embarking on the exhaustive taxonomy of narrative perspective at the heart of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth tells us that, "[i]f we think through the many devices in the fiction we know, we soon come to a sense of the embarrassing inadequacy of our traditional classification of 'point of view' into three or four kinds."[1] With Booth in mind, when I introduce first person to beginning writers, I will typically divide it into three different types, and discuss them in order from the least self-conscious to most: literary first person, dramatic monologue[2], and epistolary.

Epistolary typically refers to something that is written in the form of a letter or letters. I like to extend the term's definition, however, to include anything presented in a written form. Other epistolary forms that readers are already fairly familiar with include diaries and personal journals, but fiction has been written borrowing any number of other forms as well: dictionary entries, memos, police blotters, artist's statements. Four that we will look at here include a quiz, an annotated bibliography, an amateur history of a North Carolina town, and an encyclopedia of fascist writers and poets. I consider epistolary first person the most self-conscious of the three because it tends to present itself *in* writing *as* writing—that is, it is still more self-conscious than the dramatic monologue, which is aware of itself as narrative, but which appears in writing despite all its gestures towards orality.

Some of the earliest novels in English, like Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, employed the epistolary mode, and in all the history of the novel since then it has had many practitioners. As Wallace Martin has noted, the epistolary style of narration presented its authors with a form that "claimed to be true, and thus attained credible representation of psychological detail, but did so by confining itself to the form of memoir or autobiogra-

phy."[3] Early practitioners of suspense, and writers of supernatural fiction like Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker, found the form useful since the materiality of the letter, or journal or diary, lent their outlandish tales a certain veracity—and there is a wonderful paradox here, that writers would go to the *unreliable* first person in an attempt to make something appear more believable—but also because of the way form's very limitations allow the author to withhold vital information, thus providing the engine of suspense. (Imagine *Dracula* as told in George Eliot's third person.) But even those early adopters of the epistolary were already including texts other than or outside the letter. Consider *Dracula*, which incorporates not only letters and journal entries, but newspaper clippings, telegrams and even a ship's log. Modern practitioners take the form further afield still. Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, to pick one of the more famous examples, is a novel that unfolds through the annotations appended to a 999-line poem; Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude*, which is written mostly from a limited third person perspective, has at its center a set of album liner notes written by the novel's central character. These are examples of what I call *other epistolaries*, what David Shields and Matthew Vollmer have called "fraudulent artifacts"[4] in their recent, and excellent, anthology *Fakes*. In what follows I want to look at how four different authors have made use of the epistolary mode, each of whom are adopting a different written form to different effect.

*

My focus in what follows will be primarily on fiction, but by way of example I want to begin with some poetry. A.E. Stallings's "First Love: A Quiz" announces the form it borrows in the title, and is probably worth reprinting in its entirety:

First Love: A Quiz

He came to me:

a. in his souped-up Camaro
b. to talk to my skinny best friend
c. and bumped my glass of wine so I wore the ferrous stain on my sleeve
d. from the ground, in a lead chariot drawn by a team of stallions black as crude oil and breathing sulfur; at his heart he sported a tiny golden arrow

He offered me:

a. a ride
b. dinner and a movie, with a wink at the cliché
c. an excuse not to go back to the apartment with its sink of dirty knives
d. a narcissus with a hundred dazzling petals that breathed a sweetness as cloying as decay

I went with him because:

a. even his friends told me to beware
b. I had nothing to lose except my virginity
c. he placed his hand in the small of my back and I felt the tread of honey-bees
d. he was my uncle, the one who lived in the half-finished basement, and he took me by the hair

The place he took me to:

a. was dark as my shut eyes
b. and where I ate bitter seed and became ripe
c. and from which my mother would never take me wholly back, though she wept and walked the earth and made the bearded ears of barley wither on their stalks and the blasted flowers drop from their sepals
d. is called by some men hell and others love
e. all of the above[5]

One of the first things to notice in Stallings's poem is the formal *estrangement* it enacts. The quiz is made strange by its being placed within the poem, while the poem as made strange by its taking on the form of the quiz. And, as with any good poem—or story, or novel—the form is not merely a gimmick, but an appropriate choice based on the poem's content: the myth, removed from its mythic setting and placed in a modern one, is itself made strange—or, perhaps a better way to say it would be to say that the strangeness (and brutality) already existent in the myth, the incest and sexual coercion, is made glaringly apparent when placed in this new context. Such estrangement is, according to Linda Kauffman in *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*, central to the epistolary mode.[6] Even traditional epistolary contains traces of this effect: the reader is reading a letter, but she also knows she is reading a story; fact estranges fiction and vice-versa.

There is a way as well that Stallings's poem invites readers to be creators of the text. My students tend to pick up on this pretty quickly when we discuss it in class, and one of the first responses to it is usually something along the lines of: "The poem changes depending on which answers I pick." By employing the epistolary mode, in using the quiz as a formal device in the poem, Stallings is opening the text up, creating a kind of collaborative, writerly text—that is, one that invites the *reader* to act as *writer*.[7] And I would submit that this effect is not simply an effect of this poem alone, and the choices that Stallings has made, but a marker of the epistolary point of view as well. Whether something is presented as a quiz or a dictionary entry, or, more traditionally, as letters or diary entries, that text must adhere to the conventions of that genre. As a result, it is not going to present information like scene, psychological motivation, and so on, according to the rules of traditional, mimetic representation—though some epistolarists, and Victor Frankenstein comes to mind (or, rather, Robert Walton transcribing the words of Victor Frankenstein), can get awfully detailed in their description—and so the reader of epistolary fiction often has to fill in various gaps and blank spaces in order to construct a narrative that always exists partially outside the form.

Simply writing a recovery narrative in the form of an annotated bibliography would be pretty interesting, but basically a gimmick—... form and content in "Primary Sources" are intimately connected, and so it is able to transcend mere gimmick.

David Shields and Matthew Vollmer point out that, when writing in the borrowed form, the epistolary, the fraudulent document, it is important to know and adhere to the conventions of the form, as we have been discussing above, but just as important, they say, is bending or even breaking the rules. "Breaking the rules involves risk," they tell us. "Risk produces tension. Tension produces energy."[8] In some ways Stallings's poem seems to be an exercise in breaking the rules, an experiment to see just how much the borrowed form can be bent before it breaks.

In its employment of spacing and paragraphing, the use of lettered "choices," stanzas presented as if they were the questions, "First Love: A Quiz" certainly wears the cloak of a quiz, but in many other respects the poem makes no attempt to pass itself off for what it pretends to be. It can't help being a poem, and the striking images throughout—the speaker not wanting to return to her apartment with its "sink of dirty knives," the "tread of honey-bees" on her back, the "hundred dazzling petals that breathed a sweetness as cloying as decay," all of this is beautiful but, from the perspective of good test-construction practices, pedagogically flawed—and the very fact that it is in first person, which a quiz would never be, all of this gives lie to the notion that this might be an actual quiz. The way that the "answers" in the fourth stanza (for lack of a better term) begin to bleed into one another (what in a traditional poem we would call enjambment), and thus direct the reader to the final choice: "e. all of the above" (with its rhyme on the line above it, which further emphasizes the poem's poemness over its quizness) is, again, poor quiz construction.

But that breaking of the form is what gives the poem its tension, its energy. By over-determining the choice "all of the above," I think the poem is asking us to reconsider our initial response to the poem, the idea that the reader can "choose" whichever answers she wants. Looking again at stanzas two and three, we notice that all of the choices in those stanzas could conceivably exist together. The "he" in the poem certainly could offer the speaker a ride, dinner, an excuse not to go home and a narcissus all at once, and of course though one *could* choose one option or another, when we read the poem we read all of them, and so all options exist together. The first stanza, however, might seem

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to problematize this reading, since, at first glance, it would appear impossible that someone could arrive in *both* a "souped-up Camaro" *and* a "lead chariot drawn by stallions black as crude oil," but herein lies the genius of the poem: the impossible exists with the possible, the mythic exists with the real, Hades exists side by side with the gross uncle in the basement, and there is always going to be an uneasiness, a tension when you put such things side-by-side.[9] Ultimately, this turning back on itself, this undercutting of our original response, is the point of the poem: that freedom of choice we first picked up on turns out to be an illusion. We are no more able to "choose" which answers to read than Persephone is able to choose anything but the fate that Hades and Zeus have decided for her; we are no more able to change the events of poem than the speaker, in her modern setting, is able to deviate from the original myth at the heart of the poem itself.[10]

*

From Rick Moody's work we could draw any number of examples of the fictive employing nonfictive forms, including the story "The Apocalypse Commentary of Bob Paisner" (presented as a term paper), the novel *The Four Fingers of Death* (a novelization of a B-movie), and his most recent novel, *Hotels of North America*, which unfolds through a series of hotel reviews written for a travel website by the novel's narrator. "Primary Sources," the story we will look at here, comes from his first collection, *The Ring of Brightest Angels Around Heaven*, and is presented as a bibliography, annotated with thirty footnotes, mostly revealing the writer's life in pieces. As the first footnote tells us: "So this sketchy and selected bibliography—this list of some of the books I have around the house now—is really an autobiography."[11]

Even traditional epistolary contains traces of this effect: the reader is reading a letter, but she also knows she is reading a story; fact estranges fiction and vice-versa..

There is a degree to which, like Stallings's poem, reading "Primary Sources" becomes a collaborative exercise; how and when one reads the footnotes throughout is going to be different from one reader to the next, from one reading to the next. The form, on its surface, disrupts traditional narrative,[12] but there is a story contained in the notes, a narrative arc, and just as a potter's hands will leave traces in the clay, we can see in the construction of "Primary Sources" the mark of Moody's craftsmanship.

The first entry in the bibliography is for a book called *A Diary of Sketches* by William Parker Abbé, an artist's notebook of sorts kept by one of the narrator's teachers at boarding school.[13] This note is one of the longest, and the most "in scene," as if it is meant not only to shed light on the bibliographical entry, but to acclimate the reader to this new reading experience as well. The details revealed about Abbé, and the narrator, are significant in that they introduce some themes that are central to the text as a whole, and I will return to those later on. The fourth footnote, attached to an entry for a song by Syd Barrett, describes a "pretty wrenching bad trip"[14] the narrator had on blotter acid back in school; note twenty-eight, attached to *Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions*, sounds a note of hope, a gesture towards the narrator's recovery; in the middle, there is a run of three footnotes, 16–18, that all deal with the narrator's heavy drinking. What we see, then, looking at these notes related to substance abuse, is a pretty familiar story arc: the recovery narrative. Now, what I'm about to embark on here, I recognize, will have me engaged in a bit of intentional fallacy, but when talking about craft that's sometimes unavoidable. I think when Moody was writing in this form, he *had* to have been aware of the alphabet. Choosing to include *Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions*, because it is written by Bill W., gives him an end point to write towards—that is, the addict in recovery. Syd Barrett, from a craft perspective, represents an interesting choice as well. Syd Barrett was, of course, the original front-man for Pink Floyd, who was pushed out of the band between their first and second albums because *he was too heavily into drugs for Pink Floyd*. A good choice, then, for the note about taking blotter acid, the note that, among other things, introduces us to the narrator's struggles with substances. Of course, there were any number of drug/acid casualties from the '60s that Moody could have included, this one however had a last name that begins with B, and so choosing to include one of his songs[15] *allows* Moody, as a writer, to get that vital information out there early, to set the trajectory of the story's arc. Moody can never change who wrote[16] which books, or where their names fall in the alphabet, but he can be thoughtful about which books he selects, with a consideration for where they will appear, and which notes to append to which ones so that that story arc is made apparent.

Simply writing a recovery narrative in the form of an annotated bibliography would be pretty interesting, but basically a gimmick—that is, there would be no reason for the form other than that it's interesting, cool, etc.—but, as was the case with Stallings's poem, form and content in "Primary Sources" are intimately connected, and so it is able to transcend mere gimmick. The final footnote to the text begins with the narrator saying, "There was a time when I was an adolescent when I didn't feel like I had a dad, even though he didn't live that far away and I saw him on Sundays."[17] The note then describes a strained drive with his father and siblings, and goes on to reveal that, whether his father was there or not "[d]idn't matter. I was looking elsewhere for the secrets of ethics and home."[18] If we go back to the second note, describing William Parker Abbé, we see the narrator taking a *Sgt. Pepper's* picture disc to show to the old teacher, almost seeking his approval. The old man's apartment is filled with "jukeboxes, dolls, and electrical toys."[19] The scene, again the first real scene we get, is establishing this search for authority, for a father figure. Through many of the other notes we meet the narrator's teachers, Angela Carter and John Hawkes, among others, and his literary heroes, like William Gaddis, all potential stand-ins for that missing father at the end. Further, we get two significant notes in the story that tell us that the narrator is drawn to S&M and fetish materials. And what is fetishizing but imbuing physical objects—like books and LPs—with power? These texts, these objects that make up the bibliography itself are the repositories of all that power, are the fruit of all that searching.

*

In the case of both "Primary Sources" and "First Love: A Quiz," we are presented with texts in the epistolary mode, but both are largely free of

pretense, or conceit. That is, neither suggests a reason for existing. "Primary Sources" is a memoirish essay in the form of an annotated bibliography[20], and, as I have tried to show above, the quiziness of "First Love: A Quiz" falls apart under the slightest scrutiny—this is not to diminish either one, as I hope my previous commentary has established, I think both are wonderful accomplishments. Often, traditional epistolary novels will provide some sort of framing device, a note at the beginning of the book, for example, perhaps explaining how some bundle of letters was found in the basement of a recently demolished church somewhere, or else the letters themselves will establish the context surrounding the discourse—*I am so far away from you, dear sister, exploring the Arctic Circle*—and though sometimes this might serve as mere justification for the letters' existence, many times that conceit is crucial to the text's fictional universe. Randall Kenan's novella "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead," our third example, is written as a history of the fictional North Carolina township Tims Creek. The history's author is the Right Reverend James Malachi Greene, and it is accompanied by an introduction and footnotes provided by Reginald Gregory Kain, a professor of Anthropology and Folklore at Sarah Lawrence University. The history contained within moves between the oral recollection of a husband and wife relaying the tale of the founding of Tims Creek (first called Snatchit and later Tearshirt), and the diaries of a slaveholder named Rebecca Cross. In his introduction, Kain tells us that Greene, when he died in a car accident, left behind a trove of historical documents, and that his "complete works are estimated to exceed 500,000 words."[21]

At the center of "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead" is a supernatural tale: it is the story of a runaway slave variously named Pharaoh, Menes and Caesar, who may have come from Mississippi originally, or South Carolina, or Virginia, and a preacher who may have had the power to raise the dead, or who may have been a charlatan. And so, the epistolary form here functions much as it does in *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*, as a means of giving legitimacy to an otherwise incredible tale. The irony here is that the academic voice is always at once legitimizing the story—in a sense preserving it as folklore—while undercutting it by offering textual evidence to explain away many of the strange details in the Pharaoh story, often contradicting the storyteller's account. The genius of Kenan's novella is that in the footnotes we often see the limits of the academic explanation, while also, in introducing the second academic, Kain, the "true" academic as opposed to the semi-professional Greene, the veracity of this discourse is undercut through their various disputes and counter-explanations, so that the tall-tale, the myth, the historical—the probable and the improbable—all exist

With the epistolary mode so much depends on what is outside, a world that is merely gestured at, and that we often must construct ourselves.

side-by side, and all become in a sense equally likely and unlikely.

As with the other examples we have looked at, the reader is here asked to work collaboratively with the text, and a close and careful reading of the text adds depth to it. The attentive reader will recall, for example, that in the introduction Kain told us that Greene's family line is populated by many Crosses, the black descendants of the white slave-holding family who once claimed ownership over Pharaoh, and this knowledge then sheds light on, in part at least, some of Greene's motivation for exploring the story's history that gets covered over—he is a first-person narrator after all, and therefore unreliable—by his academic approach. The storyteller, or more accurately, storytellers, at the center of this are Greene's "great-uncle, Ezekiel Thomas Cross [b. 1901], and great-aunt, Ruth Davis Cross [b. 1895]"[22] and their tale is presented as the transcription of a recorded interview:

> —Anyhow, boy. See, it all started one night. In a graveyard over where them Batts people is buried. There was a grave there, you know, of the man who founded Statchit. Old slave name Pharaoh.
>
> —No such man ever existed.
>
> —Let me *talk*, woman. They say that preacher-man sent them men to the graveyard. Four men. See, the old slave been buried with a book. The preacher said the book was dangerous. Said man wont ready for it yet, but with it *he* could bring prosperity. Said if the white man got his hands on it it'd be the end of time.
>
> —My Lord Jesus![23]

Contrasted against this are the voices of Greene in the footnotes ("Many accounts suggest the book may have been an Arabic version of the Koran; those versions favoring Pharaoh having been a Muslim captive...."[24]), and Kain, who employs a similar voice, though sometimes at cross-purposes to Greene, and Cross, the 19th century diarist.

The goal of traditional realism, many have claimed, is to make the reader forget they are reading. As the reader navigates between the different perspectives in "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead," she cannot help but be reminded at each turn that she is engaged in the act of reading. As Linda Kauffmann points out, epistolary texts "always lead us back to their writing."[25] Here, Kenan is playing with an effect, always at work in any epistolary mode, called focalization, which Manfred Jahn has defined as "the submission of [...] narrative information to a perspectival filter."[26] Each narrative perspective comes to be embodied in the textuality of the speaker or writer's voice. The effect is what is sometimes called polyvocality, or what M.M. Bakhtin calls dialogic opposition. "The dialogic contrast of *languages* [...] delineates the boundaries of languages, creates a feeling for these boundaries, compels one to sense physically the plastic forms of different languages."[27] According to Bakhtin, the process by which the reader is made aware of the materiality of language, is also the process by which the text makes known the ideological perspectives embodied in language. The degree to which one accepts this is dependent on the degree to which one embraces Marxism, structuralism, and critical theory in general, but I don't think it is difficult to recognize that Kenan is playing with the possibilities contained in such an idea[28], and allowing the ideologies of the slave-holder, her descendants and the academic all come together in a contested dialogue over certain truths, with the result that an emergent, larger truth is revealed to exist outside of any, and not contained by, one of the novella's voices.

*

Roberto Bolaño's *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is a novel-in-stories presented as an encyclopedia of writers, many of whose projects could be considered avant-garde, with right wing or fascist leanings. The entries in the book are all, with one exception, marked by an objective, distant tone common to the prose of reference materials. The primary technique that Bolaño employs throughout the book is what Chris Andrews, the book's translator, calls metarepresentation: "the representation of a text or artwork in another text."[29] Andrews makes a point of drawing a distinction between metareprsentation, or the *describing* of another text, and nesting, which *includes* or *incorporates* part or all of that other text. Indeed, the poems, plays, novels and performance pieces in *Nazi Literature in the Americas* are rarely excerpted, and when they are it is only the briefest of excerpts that are included. Instead we are given descriptions of them, sometimes detailed, sometimes only barely sketched out, and are asked to imagine what exactly each might look like. As with the other examples we have looked at, reading Bolaño's book is an act of collaboration, but there is

something devious here in that Bolaño is asking readers to collaborate in making art that they will most likely find repellent.

With the epistolary mode so much depends on what is outside, a world that is merely gestured at, and that we often must construct ourselves. But in Bolaño's book too, the context of this world, our world, is important as well. By way of example I want to look at the entries for two of the writers included in the section titled "Two Germans at the Ends of the Earth," Franz Zwickau and Willy Schürholz. Zwicau, a Venezuelan by birth, is described as, "The son of German immigrants, he was perfectly fluent in his parents' language as well as that of his native land. Contemporary reports portray him as a talented, iconoclastic boy who refused to grow up."[30] The other, Willy Schürholz, was born in Colonia Rencer, in Chile, a colony populated by, it is strongly suggested, Nazis who fled Germany at the end of the Second World War. One of his "texts," an installment piece in a classroom at a Catholic university, is described as a series of maps coupled with verse, seemingly senseless at first, but "According to a professor of Italian literature who was well-versed in the subject, they were maps of the concentration camps at Terezin, Mauthausen, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau."[31] Schürholz's mapping project progresses until we see him, later, "[c]ommanding a team of excavators, he dug the ideal concentration camp into the Atacama desert."[32]

The descriptions throughout of Willy Schürholz's work is chilling, and compared to them, those of Franz Zwickau, baroque and strange as they sometimes are, seem childish. Again, so much depends on context. In another setting, and done by another artist, Willy Schürholz's maps might be read as a critique of, rather than celebration of fascism—indeed, his avant-garde writer friends for a long time misinterpret his politics. Likewise, Zwickau's poems, even if they have names like "Concentration Camp," written as they are by a Venezuelan with "German parents" do not reverberate the same kind of terror as Willy Schürholz's work, which is constructed by the child of Nazis trying to preserve their way of life against the backdrop of Chile in the early 70s, and the (unmentioned but still very much present) atrocities that accompanied that time.

*

The epistolary mode is, as I said at the beginning, a first-person perspective, and in the three other examples we looked at, this is made readily apparent by the presence of the "I." Even in Kenan's novella, in which the academic discourse attempts to efface the narrators employing it, their presence is obvious. Their names are on the cover page, their lives, to a degree, are described in Kain's introduction. In *Nazi Literature in the Americas* the writer of the encyclopedia is all but effaced.[33]

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth makes a distinction be-

As a mode, the epistolary is always gesturing towards its margins, conjuring something from the air, and the results, when it is done well as in the case of the four examples above, as with any conjuring, can often be dazzling.

tween dramatized narrators (those who participate in the action) and undramatized narrators (those who remain above the fray). In the case of third person narration, the narrator is always undramatized, and often exists as an implied author, "who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, paring his fingernails."[34] The examples we have looked at we might think of as existing on a continuum from most-dramatized to least. In Stallings's poem the modern Persephone tells her story much as a traditional first-person narrator would, even if it is delivered in a way that is formally unexpected; in "Primary Sources," Rick Moody (or the fictional construct "Rick Moody") is telling the story of his life, but the form of the piece seems to put him at a remove from the events he is narrating—that is, he is contained only in the footnotes, not the primary text; in "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead" the "authors" do not participate in the story's action, nor do the oral storytellers for that matter, but act instead as commentators on it. The first-person narrator in *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, then, is so far removed that it almost becomes third person, something like an unreliable third person. Still, that narrator is never really gone, for the text keeps telling us *this is an encyclopedia*, and encyclopedias are not 19th century British novels, written by some all-seeing eye, but texts written and compiled by women and men, real human beings, and we can't help but sense the writer there, lurking like a ghost, always just beyond the page. As a mode, the epistolary is always gesturing towards its margins, conjuring something from the air, and the results, when it is done well as in the case of the four examples above, as with any conjuring, can often be dazzling. AWP

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Notes

1. Wayne C. Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 149.

2. This essay will focus on the epistolary, and I want to avoid a lengthy description of the other two, but in brief: literary first person is a generic term to describe something like 98% of first person narratives; while dramatic monologue is a story that is clearly supposed to be spoken by the narrator—two famous examples would be Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" and John Updike's "A&P."

3. Wallace Martin. *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 132.

4. Though I think this term is a good one, and eliminates the confusion created by misusing "epistolary," I am reluctant to use it here because, I think, the choice of "fraudulent" seems to evoke the deliberate, and often ironic, pushing back against form that can be seen in many of the texts they selected for their anthology, and which does seem appropriate for some of the texts I have chosen to examine, like Rick Moody's "Primary Sources," which was included in *Fakes*, but doesn't quite seem to fit with all of them.

5. A.E. Stallings. "First Love: A Quiz." *Hapax*. (Evanston: TriQuarterly/Northwestern University Press, 2006), pp. 28–29.

6. See the Introduction and first chapter in Kauffman. *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

7. Roland Barthes uses the terms "writerly" and "readerly" in *S/Z*, but he explores this idea in several places. See, for example, "Death of the Author," and "From Work to Text," both translated by Stephen Heath in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Final Proofion. Eds. William Cain et al. (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2001), pp. 1466–1476.

8. David Shields and Matthew Vollmer. "Learning How to Fake It: A Brief (and Therefore Woefully Incomplete) Guide to the Manufacture and Distribution of Fraudulent Artifacts." *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, "Found" Texts, and Other Fraudulent Artifacts*, Eds. David Shields and Matthew Vollmer (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012), p. 17.

9. And for readers uncomfortable with such contradictions: You can also read the "lead chariot" driven by horses the color of "crude oil" as a metaphorical rendering of the smoke burping, gas-guzzling American classic automobile from earlier in the poem.

10. I am indebted to the graduate students at the Red Earth MFA program, at Oklahoma City University, where I spoke about the epistolary form as a guest lecturer, for their wonderful insights into this poem and the ways the epistolary form functions to produce meaning in it.

11. Rick Moody. "Primary Sources," *The Ring of the Brightest Angels Around Heaven* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), p. 231, n. 1.

12. And in it we can see Moody really having fun with the form. Note 7, for example, which is attached to the entry for Borges's *Labyrinths*, directs us to an Umberto Eco entry (there isn't one), and also to note 9, which directs us to note 20, which directs us back to note 7.

13. The narrator in "Primary Sources," by the way, has a lot in common with Rick Moody. Both, for example, studied under Angela Carter and John Hawkes, both have struggled with substance abuse, both have in their

genealogies a New England minister who was the model for a Hawthorne story, and both wrote first novels called *Garden State*.

14. Ibid., p. 232, n. 4.

15. The song, by the way, is "Golden Hair," which is a James Joyce poem that Barrett set to music.

16. For the most part. Abbé represents an interesting case, though, since he's one of the few authors in the list who the reader can't go and find in the library. Maybe there was a person with that name, maybe there was a person whose name began with a different letter that Moody changed to Abbé so that his name could lead off the list, and maybe he is entirely fictional.

17. Ibid., p. 241, n. 30.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. p. 231, n. 2.

20. The fact that Moody chose to include something that on its surface seems so autobiographical in a collection of short fiction does raise some interesting questions about truth and fictionality, but those are probably best saved for a different essay.

21. Randall Kenan. "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead." *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* (Orlando: Harvest Books, 1992), p. 279.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 287

24. Ibid., n. 6

25. Linda Kauffmann, p. 11. In this quote, Kauffmann is actually paraphrasing something Fredric Jameson wrote about Viktor Shklovsky's writing, but read in context with the rest of the paragraph, and the chapter as a whole, I think she is making a larger point about how the epistolary mode functions.

26. Manfred Jahn. "Focalization." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, David Herman ed. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 94.

27. M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 364.

28. And the fact that "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead" opens with an epigram from the very book by Bakhtin that I have quoted hints at an interesting awareness on Kenan's part, or on the part of one of his characters anyway.

29. Chris Andrews. *Roberto Bolaño's Fiction: An Expanding Universe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 48.

30. Roberto Bolaño. *Nazi Literatures in the Americas*, Chris Andrews, trans. (New York: New Directions, 2008), p. 89.

31. Ibid., p. 95.

32. Ibid., p. 96.

33. As I mentioned earlier, the final story represents an exception. In it the writer is revealed to be Bolaño himself, or someone who shares his name, and participates in the action like a traditional first-person narrator. Something interesting is going on in that regard, but going into it would add too much to an already lengthy essay, though it is worth looking at what Andrews's book has to say about Nazi Literature in the Americas and the ways it relates to Bolaño's other work.

34. Booth, p. 151.

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Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction Sarabande Books
Prize: $2,000 and publication
Description: Aimee Bender is judging our 2018 Mary McCarthy Prize. The prize includes a $2000 cash award, publication of a collection of short stories, novellas, or a short novel, and a standard royalty contract.
Judge: Aimee Bender
Entry Fee: $29
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://www.sarabandebooks.org/mccarthy

***The Masters Review* Anthology Prize**
Prize: $500
Description: Every year The Masters Review opens submissions to produce our anthology, a collection of ten stories or essays written by the best emerging authors. Our aim is to showcase ten writers who we believe will continue to produce great work. The ten winners are nationally distributed in a printed book with their stories and essays exposed to top agents, editors, and authors across the country.
Entry Fee: $20
Deadline: March 31, 2018
Website: https://mastersreview.com/anthology/

Mayborn Literary Contests
Prize: Varies by placing
Description: The Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference invites submissions to its annual book manuscript contest. Conference registration is required to enter the contest.
Entry Fee: $60
Deadline: May 1, 2018
Website: http://www.themayborn.com/writing-competition

13th Gival Press Novel Award for best original previously unpublished literary novel in English, approximately 30,000 to 100,000 words. Prize $3,000, copies; book publication in 2019. Reading fee $50 per novel submitted. Deadline May 30, 2018. Details visit website: www.givalpress.com or givalpress.submittable.com. Gival Press, P.O. Box 3812, Arlington, VA 22203.

***North American Review* Torch Prize**
Prize: $500
Description**:** You may submit only one piece of creative nonfiction, no longer than 30 pages. Our judge is Michael Martone. Our former nonfiction editor, Kim Groninga developed this prize as something she feels very committed to.
Entry Fee: $23
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: https://northamericanreview.org/torch-contest-info

Orison Prizes in Poetry & Fiction
Prize: $1,000 and publication
Description: Orison Books is a 501(c)(3) non-profit literary press focused on the life of the spirit from a broad and inclusive range of perspectives. We seek to publish spiritually-engaged poetry, fiction, and nonfiction of exceptional literary merit. Each year from December 1 – April 1 we accept submissions of full-length poetry (50–100 pp.) and fiction (minimum 30,000 words) manuscripts for consideration for The Orison Prizes in Poetry & Fiction.
Judges: Carl Phillips and David Haynes
Entry Fee: $30
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: http://orisonbooks.com/submission-guidelines/

The 20th Annual Blue Lynx Prize. $2,000 plus publication, is awarded for an unpublished, full-length volume of poems. Submit manuscripts and $28 reading fee to P.O. Box 96, Spokane, WA 99210 or lynxhousepress.submittable.com. The 2017 winner was Marc Harshman for *Woman in Red Anorak*. Judges have included Yusef Komunyakaa, Melissa Kwasny, Dorianne Laux, and Robert Wrigley. Deadline: May 15, 2018.

Red Hen Press Nonfiction Award
Prize: $1,000 and publication
Description: A prize of $1,000 and publication by Red Hen Press is given annually for an essay collection, memoir, or book of narrative nonfiction.
Judge: Florencia Ramirez
Entry Fee: $25
Deadline: April 30, 2018
Website: http://redhen.org/

Sarabande Books Morton and McCarthy Prizes
Prize: $2,000; publication with royalties contract
Description: An award from Sarabande Books honoring excellence in short fiction and poetry writing.
Judge: Aimee Bender and Ocean Vuong
Entry Fee: $29
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://www.sarabandebooks.org/submissions/

Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize & Editors' Prize
Prize: $1,500/$500

Description: A prize of $1,500 and publication by Saturnalia Books is given annually in the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize for a manuscript written in English.
Judge: Natalie Diaz
Entry Fee: $30
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: https://saturnaliabooks.com/poetry-prize/

***Creative Nonfiction* magazine** is seeking new work for an upcoming issue dedicated to "Sex." 4,000 words max. Deadline: July 16, 2018. $1,000 for best essay; $500 for runner-up. Guidelines at www.creativenonfiction.org/submissions.

2018 Cathy Smith Bowers Chapbook Contest. Deadline: June 15, 2018. Length: 24–40 pages of poetry. Reading fee: $15. Prize: $1,000. Blind judging. Final judge: Cathy Smith Bowers. ALL entries considered for publication. Guidelines and online entry: www.MainStreetRag.com. Mailing address: Main Street Rag, PO BOX 690100, Charlotte, NC 28227-7001.

Slope Editions 17th Annual Book Prize
Prize: $1000, and publication
Description: Slope Editions is accepting full-length poetry manuscripts for its 17th Annual Book Prize.
Judge: Ocean Vuong
Entry Fee: $25
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: slopeeditions.org
Tomaz Salamun Prize
PRIZE: 500, chapbook publication, 1-month residency in Ljubljana, Slovenia
Description: Submissions for the Tomaž Šalamun Prize are being accepted until 3/15/18. The winner receives $500, chapbook publication, and a 1-month residency in Ljubljana, Slovenia.
Judge: Anais Duplan
Entry Fee: $15 ($10 for students)
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: https://verse.submittable.com/

Tor House Prize for Poetry
Prize: $1,000; $200 for Honorable Mentions
Description: A prize awarding $1,000 to an single, unpublished poem. The prize is a living memorial to American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962).
Judge: Richard Blanco
Entry Fee: $10 for first three poems, $15 for up to six poems
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://www.torhouse.org/prize/

University of Nebraska Press Prairie Schooner Book Prizes
Prize: $3,000 and publication
Description: Two prizes awarded to an author of a poetry collection and an author of a short story collection.
Entry Fee: $25
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://prairieschooner.unl.edu/book-prize

***Winning Writers* Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest**
Prize: $1,000 and publication
Description: Now in its 17th year, this contest seeks today's best humor poems.
Entry Fee: $0
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: https://winningwriters.com/our-contests/wergle-flomp-humor-poetry-contest-free

Tom Howard /John H. Reid Fiction & Essay Contest
26th year. Prize for best short story: $2,000. Prize for best essay: $2,000. Total prizes: $5,000. Winning entries published online. Fee: $20. Limit: 6,000 words. Both published and unpublished work accepted. Submit by April 30. Final judge: Dennis Norris II. Enter at winningwriters.com/tomstory.

Real Good Poem Contest–*Rabbit Catastrophe Review*'s Single Poem Contest. $1,000 + 25 original broadsides + publication. Judged by Kaveh Akbar. $25 includes a limited-edition broadside. If you are queer, of color, trans, differently abled, or otherwise commonly excluded, we encourage you to submit. Open 03/01–04/08. More details http://rabbitcatastrophepress.com/submit/.

Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices, recipient of a Best of the Net Award, three citations in The Best American Essays, and a Pushcart Finalist in poetry, will accept submissions to our Annual Literary Contest March 1–April 30. $2,000 in prizes. Judges: Terrance Hayes, the Stephen Dunn Prize in poetry; Phillip Lopate, nonfiction; Ann Hood, fiction. More info: solsticelitmag.org/contest.

***Bellevue Literary Review*'s Annual Prizes** recognize exceptional writing about health, healing, illness, the body, and the mind. $1,000 Poetry Prize (Judge: Jennifer Bartlett), $1,000 Nonfiction Prize (Judge: Elisabeth Rosenthal), $1,000 Fiction Prize (Judge: Maud Casey). Submit from March 1–July 1, 2018. Entry fee $20 ($30 includes subscription). www.blreview.org.

Pleiades Press Editors Prize for Poetry. The winner will receive $2,000 prize + $1,000 for book tour expenses. All entrants to the contest will receive a book of poetry published by Pleiades Press. The contest is judged by members of the Pleiades Press advisory board. Entry fee is $25. Complete guidelines are at pleiadespress.org.

AWP

OPPORTUNITIES
SUBMIT

Creative Nonfiction magazine is seeking new work for an upcoming issue dedicated to "Home." We welcome personal stories as well as profiles, and we're open to a very wide range of experiences and circumstances. 4,000 words or fewer. Deadline: May 21, 2018. Guidelines at www.creativenonfiction.org/submissions.

Adanna
Description: This literary journal is titled *Adanna* because women over the centuries have been defined by men in politics, through marriage, and, most importantly, by the men who fathered them. Submissions to Adanna must reflect women's issues or topics, celebrate womanhood, and shout out in passion.
Deadline: May 1, 2018
Website: http://adannajournal.blogspot.com/p/submission-guidelines.html

Call for Submissions from College-Aged Writers & Artists, *ANGLES*
Description: *ANGLES* is seeking poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, visual art, and photography from college-aged writers and artists with distinct perspectives on ourselves and our world.
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: angles.sjfc.edu

Capulet
Description: Capulet mag is open to submissions of poetry, creative nonfiction, fiction, and art from women between the ages of 15-29. All levels of experience are encouraged to apply.
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: http://capuletmag.com/Submit/

Poet's Billow. We are currently accepting submissions for two poetry prizes: Bermuda Triangle, poems on the theme of Nature—human nature, the natural world, or anti-nature—we are open to interpretations; and The Pangaea Prize for a series of up to seven poems. We nominate Pushcart and other awards. thepoetsbillow.org

Cumberland River Review
Description: We publish text & image from varied strains. Send us your reverse villanelles, some jazz haibun, good old Ginsbergian bop kabbalah, asemic cryptolectics, semiotic pictographs, or really, something new. Not weird, though weird is good. But old school remixes for the digital age will not go unspun. GIFpoetics and codetomes welcome, too.
Deadline: April 30, 2018
Website: http://crr.trevecca.edu/submissions

Driftwood Press
Description: Driftwood Press is devoted to finding fiction, poetry, graphic narrative, photography, craft essays, interviews, and other cross-genre work of the highest caliber.
Deadline: April 3, 2018
Website: https://www.driftwoodpress.net/

Exoplanet
Description: We are a new speculative fiction magazine with a focus on promoting voices from outside the normative orbit.
Deadline: April 30, 2018
Website: www.exoplanetmagazine.com/submissions

Flash Fiction Magazine
Description: *Flash Fiction Magazine* is accepting submissions for its daily flash fiction publication.
Deadline: May 1, 2018
Website: https://flashfictionmagazine.com/submissions/

ENTER *Midway Journal*'s "-1000 BELOW: Flash Prose and Poetry Contest." The contest runs from March 1–May 31. Lesley Nneka Arimah will judge: $500 grand prize, $250 second prize, $10 entry fee. Unlimited entries. For more details, go tomidwayjournal.com/contest/.

Call for Chapbook Submissions, Green Linden Press
Description: Green Linden Press is delighted to welcome submissions of chapbook manuscripts to be considered for publication in its Chapbook Series. Our mission is simple: to foster excellent poetry. Poets are encouraged to read from our online journal, Under a Warm Green Linden, to become familiar with work that excites us.
Deadline: March 20, 2018
Website: http://www.greenlindenpress.com/submit/

Hamilton Stone Review
Description: *The Hamilton Stone Review*, an online literary magazine, publishes two issues a year, in April and October. Submissions guidelines vary with genre and season.
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://www.hamiltonstone.org/hsr.html#submissions

Manzano Mountain Review
Description: *Manzano Mountain Review* is an online literary journal based in central New Mexico. Submissions are open to all writers, from all places.In addition to publishing emerging and established writers and artists, each issue will feature poetry, prose, or art from New Mexicans.
Deadline: April 1, 2018
Website: http://manzanomountainreview.com/submissions

Petrichor
Description: We publish text & image from varied strains. Send us your reverse villanelles, some jazz haibun, good old Ginsbergian bop kabbalah, asemic cryptolectics, semiotic pictographs, or really, something new. Not weird, though weird is good. But old school remixes for the digital age will not go unspun. GIFpoetics and codetomes welcome, too.
Deadline: March 15, 2018
Website: http://www.jazzcig.com/submit.html

KAKALAK 2018 Sponsored by Main Street Rag. Reading Period: March 1–May 15 2018. Individual poem and photography contest. Entry fee: $10–12. Prizes: $20–300. We're looking for entries that evoke the spirit of the Carolinas from the Outer Banks and Low Country to the Piedmont and Appalachia. Guideline details: www.MainStreetRag.com.

Phantom Drift
Description: Phantom Drift is a tax-exempt, non-profit journal dedicated to publishing fabulist writers and artists by producing a perfect-bound print edition and paying contributors for their work.
Deadline: April 30, 2018
Website: http://www.phantomdrift.org/

Rockvale Review
Description: *Rockvale Review* believes language is power, and poetry is one conduit for unleashing that power. We believe poets have a unique way of seeing the world and sharing experiences, emotions, dreams and passions. Their voices raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, create beauty, pose questions, speak personal truths, and spark imagination. We wanted to create a poetry journal that celebrates the poetic voice and supports the journey of poets. All voices are welcome here. Come, show us the power of your words.
Deadline: March 31, 2018
Website: http://rockvalereview.com/

OPPORTUNITIES
SERVICES

Online Writing Classes from *Creative Nonfiction* magazine, the voice of the genre. Our 10- and 5-week classes in memoir, personal essay, magazine writing, book proposals, and more provide professional guidance, motivating deadlines, and a supportive community of writers. Flexible schedule to suit your needs. Learn more at www.creativenonfiction.org/online-classes.

AWP

South 85
Description: *South 85* is a semi-annual online literary journal run by the Converse College Low-Residency MFA Program. We publish fiction, non-fiction, poetry, reviews, and art by new, emerging, and well-established writers and artists. While we consider all quality work that follow the submission guidelines, we are especially interested in pieces that demonstrate a strong voice and/or a sense of place. South 85 Journal accepts submissions for its Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry categories during its formal reading periods.
Deadline: May 1, 2018
Website: http://south85journal.com/

Wilt
Description: *Wilt* is a new literary journal that aims to provide a platform for queer and trans* people to discuss and explore their experiences in relation to the wealth of queer literature that currently exists and the literature that they themselves produce.
Deadline: March 31, 2018
Website: https://www.wiltjournal.com/about

AWP

OPPORTUNITIES
CONFERENCES, COLONIES, AND CENTERS

2018 Creative Nonfiction Writers' Conference. Join us in Pittsburgh May 24-26 (Memorial Day weekend) for 3 days dedicated to the art of memoir, personal essays, narrative journalism. and more. Craft talks, breakout sessions, publishing advice, and master classes with writers, editors, and agents. Learn more at www.creativenonfiction.org/conference.

Aegean Arts Circle Writing Workshops Andros Greece
Andros, Greece
June 27–July 7, 2018
Intensive writing workshops for published and aspiring writers, held on a quiet Greek island. Small groups. Aegean Arts Circle Writing Workshops June 27–July 7, 2018 with Kathryn "Kitsi" Watterson. For published & aspiring writers. Small, intensive writing workshops have been meeting for fifteen years on Andros. Participants come from all over the world and groups are kept small. Each workshop is led by an award-winning writer. Inspiring location in the Aegean, quiet Cycladic island. Private time to write. Workshop meets daily. Private meetings with instructor included. Open to aspiring and published writers of creative non-fiction, fiction, poetry. Each writer gets single room. Ability to extend your writing time and spend extra days in Andros possible. Website: aegeanartscircle.blogspot.gr

Artsmith Artist Residency
Eastsound, WA
Each winter Artsmith grants Artist Residency fellowships of time and

space in Washington State's San Juan Islands. Up to five fellows at a time stay in individual rooms with private baths as guests of Artsmith and Kangaroo House Bed and Breakfast. The week-long, interdisciplinary artist residency takes place in the winter and includes a welcome reception and four dinners, plus $50 travel honorarium. Applications are due by May 31 of each year. Website: orcasartsmith.org

Boldface Conference for Emerging Writers
Houston, TX
May 21–25, 2018
A 5-day conference for emerging writers, featuring workshops, manuscript consultations, and a day of professionalism panels. This low-cost conference is specifically designed for new writers. The Boldface Conference includes featured writers (who also offer individual manuscript consultations), a 4-day intensive workshop structure (small group meetings in fiction, nonfiction, poetry and genre writing), events (evening readings and an afternoon out and about in Houston), and craft talks. Breakfast and Lunch is included (we contract with local/regional eateries) and housing is available. The conference runs each May, the week before Memorial Day. Website: http://boldfaceconference.com

Bread Loaf Writers' Conference
Ripton, VT
August 14–25, 2018
The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, founded in 1926 and boasting a rich literary and intellectual tradition, gathers together emerging writers to work closely with a diverse and talented faculty. For 10 days in August, conference attendees experience the intensity—and challenge—of working under the guidance of notable writers, including MacArthur Fellows, U.S. poets laureate, and recipients of the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. The conference's rural and scenic setting amid the Green Mountains on the Middlebury College Bread Loaf campus provides an ideal environment for discussing manuscripts, sharing insights, getting to know agents and editors, and becoming acquainted with the next generation of significant writers. Website: www.middlebury.edu/bread-loaf-conferences/bl_writers

Chesapeake Writers' Conference at St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's City, MD
June 24–30, 2018
Intensive workshops in three genres for serious writers at all levels of experience, as well as a multi-genre workshop for high schoolers. Join us on Maryland's Western Shore—five minutes from the Chesapeake, ten from the Potomac—for a week of craft talks, lectures, panel discussions, and readings, as well as daily workshops in fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction. It is possible to receive college course credit for the work you do at the conference. Enrollment is limited; applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Website: go.smcm.edu/chesapeake

Community of Writers at Squaw Valley
Olympic Valley
Writers Workshops in Fiction, Nonfiction & Memoir: July 8–15, 2018
Poetry Workshop: June 23–30, 2018
For 47 summers, the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley has brought together poets, prose writers, and screenwriters for separate weeks of workshops, individual conferences, lectures, panels, readings, and discussions of the craft and the business of writing. Our aim is to assist writers to improve their craft and thus, in an atmosphere of camaraderie and mutual support, move them closer to achieving their goals. The Community of Writers holds its summer writing workshops in Squaw Valley in the ski lodge at the foot of the ski slopes. Panels, talks, staff readings and workshops take place in these venues with the spectacular view up the mountain. Website: www.communityofwriters.org

David R. Collins Writers' Conference
Davenport, IA
June 28–29, 2018
The David R. Collins Writers' Conference is in its 13th year on the campus of St. Ambrose University in Davenport, IA. Lodging is available in the dorms on campus. Each workshop is 4.5 hours over three days, 1.5 hours per day. We will be offering five workshops in 2018, including: poetry; nonfiction/memoir; short fiction; the novel; and more TBA. We also have a faculty reading and an open mic for participants; pitch sessions for writers to present manuscripts to our own MWC Press; one-on-one manuscript critiques with Conference faculty; luncheons; and a featured event at the Figge Art Museum on June 28. Website: www.mwcqc.org/events-opportunities/david-r-collins-writers-conference/

Elephant Rock Retreats for Writing & Yoga—Summer Solstice Retreat
Birchwood, WI
June 17–22, 2018
Email: elephantrockretreats@gmail.com
Join us at beautiful Stout's Island for Elephant Rock's Summer Solstice Retreat! Leap over the edge of doubt, where new things come from, and crack open a space for the unexpected. You will be challenged and inspired ... and laugh—a lot!—while becoming a vessel for creativity. This unconventional retreat always sells out because so many alum return for the unique offerings of yoga, meditation, and highly unconventional writing exercises based on the French surrealists and the Oulipo Compendium. The combination produces startling results and points you toward what's most alive on the page. The generative workshops,

supportive yet challenging for all levels and genres, are designed to catalyze breakthroughs in your writing, whether by unleashing new work or unlocking the stuck places in existing projects. Website: www.elephantrockretreats.com

The Frost Place
Franconia, NH
The Frost Place is poet Robert Frost's farm homestead, now a center for poetry and the arts. Each summer and fall, The Frost Place welcomes visitors to a museum honoring Frost's life and work, grants a summer residency to a promising poet, and offers a series of literary programs. Please check our website for 2018 programming, including: The Frost Place Poetry Seminar (July 29–August 4), The Frost Place Conference on Poetry (July 8–14), The Frost Place Conference on Poetry and Teaching (June 23–26), and The Frost Place Writing Intensive (June 27–28). Scholarships available. Website: www.frostplace.org

Furious Flower Collegiate Summit: Poetry Without Boundaries
Harrisonburg, VA
March 22–24, 2018
The Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University hosts its fourth national collegiate summit this spring, March 22–24, for undergraduate and graduate students. This year's theme, "Poetry Without Boundaries," reaches across geographical borders and beyond conventional literary and ideological boundaries as three outstanding poets explore this topic in workshops and readings that take place over three days. The program includes in-depth workshops facilitated by distinguished poets Brenda Marie Osbey and Anastacia Reneè, a reading and presentation by the 2017 Pulitzer Prize winner Tyehimba Jess, roundtable discussions, a day-trip to Charlottesville for the Virginia Festival of the Book, and a closing open mic session for participating student poets. Registration is open until full. Website: www.jmu.edu/furiousflower/

Gemini Ink
San Antonio, TX
Gemini Ink's mission is "to help people create and share the human story." We provide creative writing workshops led by published writers at our offices and in diverse community settings. We also host free public readings by nationally and internationally recognized authors, great books seminars, open-mic nights and our annual city-wide spoken word contest La Voz de San Antonio. Gemini Ink Summer Writers Conference will be held July 20–22, 2018. Our work honors and springs from the human story and is dedicated to building language skills, self-esteem and a strong sense of human connectedness in citizens of all ages. Website: geminiink.org

Writer's summer residency: *Ezra*, the translation journal, offers a retreat (solitary) in NH. Beautiful quiet stand-alone house with land. Visit at www.ezratranslation.com (click on Residencies).

The Glen Workshop
Santa Fe, NM
July 29–August 5, 2018
The Glen Workshop combines the best elements of a writing workshop, an arts festival, and a conference. This annual gathering is located at St. John's College in the stunning foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Taught by nationally acclaimed authors, the daily morning workshops offer close attention to attendees of all skill levels in a diversity of genres. Afternoons and evenings feature a smorgasbord of readings, lectures, concerts, and ecumenical Christian worship services incorporating the arts. Amid it all, there are opportunities to share your work at open mics, converse and laugh over good food and drink, seek contemplation and hike the beautiful wilderness, and explore the rich culture of the American Southwest. The Glen Workshop is grounded in a Christian perspective, but its tone is informal and hospitable to all spiritual wayfarers. Website: http://imagejournal.org/glenworkshop/

Iowa Summer Writing Festival
Iowa City, IA
The University of Iowa Summer Writing Festival offers 140 weeklong, two-week, and weekend workshops across the genres in June and July. Writers at all levels are welcome. Since 1987, the Iowa Summer Writing Festival has welcomed to the campus of The University of Iowa writers from 18 to 94 years of age, from all 50 states and from every continent. Most of us come to the workshop table from other areas of expertise, other lives. These include law, journalism, parenthood, medicine, education, performance, diplomacy, social work, pastoral care, farming, and lollygagging. We come together across the genres and at every level of literary practice with a common purpose and in a common enterprise. We come as writers. See website for 2018 dates and information. Website: www.iowasummerwritingfestival.org

Juniper Summer Writing Institute
Amherst, MA
June 17–24, 2018
Every summer, the Juniper Institute gathers a community of writers to explore the creative process and develop new approaches to the craft of writing. Hosted by the MFA Program for Poets & Writers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Juniper is a weeklong immersion in the writer's life; it is time out for you and your writing, time for wild invention, and time to become part of a diverse community of acclaimed and emerging writers from all walks of life. Now in our 15th year, the Juniper Summer Writing Institute offers a week of intensive writing workshops, craft sessions, Q&As, readings, and manuscript consultation in the beautiful Pioneer Valley. General admission applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Scholarship applications must be postmarked by March 11. Workshops fill quickly; early application is recommended. Website: www.umass.edu/juniperinstitute

Kachemak Bay Writers' Conference
Homer, AK

June 8–12, 2018
Annual conference in scenic Homer, Alaska, where "The Land Meets The Sea". Features novelists, essayists, poets, agent, editors. Offers creative writing workshops, readings, open mic, panel discussions, consultations and time for writing. Optional post-conference workshop at wilderness lodge. For all levels. Annual conference to strengthen a sense of community among writers and provide writers, students, teachers and literary enthusiasts with opportunities to learn, reflect and improve the craft of writing. Award-winning contemporary writers of nonfiction, fiction and poetry conduct workshops, individual consultations, manuscript reviews, readings, craft talks and panel presentations. Includes literary agent and editor presenters. Website: http://writersconference.homer.alaska.edu

Kauai Writers Conference
Kalapaki Bay, Lihue, Kauai, HI
November 5–11, 2018
The 2018 Kauai Writers Conference offers keynote talks by distinguished authors, one-on-one workshops led by literary agents, editors and other publishing experts, and intensive master classes to inspire writers of fiction, narrative nonfiction, memoir, screenplays and poetry, and help all conference participants find their path to publication. Our world class faculty includes bestselling authors Jane Smiley, Alice Hoffman, Scott Turow, Kristin Hannah, Sara Gruen, Kaui Hart Hemmings, and Garth Stein, among many others. Set on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, Kalapaki Beach, the combination of the sublime tropical location with the exceptional quality of our faculty makes the Kauai Writers Conference a life-changing experience for aspiring, and already published, writers. Please check our website for more information: www.kauaiwritersconference.com

Key West Literary Seminar and Writers' Workshop Program
Key West, FL
January 10–13, 2019
Key West has one of the most intriguing literary heritages of any place in America. With an annual readers' seminar and an array of writers' workshops, plus scholarship opportunities for teachers and librarians, the Key West Literary Seminar ensures that the island city's life of letters remains an active and vital tradition. Established in 1983, the annual Seminar explores a different literary theme each January. The best writers of our time join readers from all over the world for four days of readings, conversations, lectures, panel discussions, and parties that add up to one of today's smartest and most high-spirited literary gatherings. Our Writers' Workshop Program also takes place in January but is distinct from the Seminar; here, writers of all levels meet in small groups with esteemed faculty to share their work and explore the craft of writing in a focused and nurturing environment. Website: www.kwls.org

Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts
Nebraska City, NE
The Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts in Nebraska City, NE offers 2 to 8 week residencies year-round for writers, visual artists and music composers. Housing, studio space, $100/week stipend are provided. Approximately 55 residencies are awarded each year. Please check our website for complete information, guidelines and the online application portal. Application deadlines: March 1 for July–December residencies and September 1 for January–June residencies annually. Website: www.khncenterforthearts.org

Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing
Vineyard Haven, MA
June 10–23, 2018
The Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing was founded in order to give writers the opportunity to develop their craft among established authors. The Institute offers a comprehensive week-long focus on writing, providing writers with the necessary time to devote to their art, in the idyllic setting of Martha's Vineyard. The 2018 MVICW Summer Seminar will be held from June 10–23 on the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. The conference offers two week-long seminars with daily workshops in poetry and fiction, one-on-one manuscript consultations, panel discussions, readings, and a celebratory dinner with faculty. The faculty includes Rebecca Gayle Howell, Phong Nguyen, Amelia Martens, Britton Shurley, Kea Wilson, Sequoia Nagamatsu, Randi Beck, Samantha Tetangco, and Alexander Weinstein. Website: http://mvicw.com/

Minnesota Northwoods Writers Conference
Bemidji, MN
June 18–24, 2018
Every summer in late June, writers at every stage of development gather on the beautiful shores of Lake Bemidji for an enlivening week of literary activity with award-wining faculty—including Pulitzer-prize winners and National Book Award winners—who are also known for their success in teaching. An intensive weeklong workshop in an intimate lakeside environment is at the core of the Minnesota Northwoods Writers Conference. MNWC participants sign up for a workshop led by one faculty member for the span of the conference so that they can inhabit an intimate writing community that fosters a special learning opportunity. Website: http://northwoodswriters.org/

Napa Valley Writers' Conference
St. Helena, CA
July 29–August 3, 2018
The Napa Valley Writers' Conference is heading into its 38th year as one of the nation's most prestigious summer writing programs. Since its beginning as an informal summer gathering of writers, the conference has remained a place to convene for fellowship, serious work with a focus on craft, and a week spent beside the hills and vineyards that have made the Napa Valley famous. At a time when more attention is being paid to commercialism and marketing in the field of literature, the NVWC has maintained its emphases on process and craft, featuring a faculty as renowned

for the quality of their teaching as their work. It has also remained small and personal, fostering an unusual rapport between faculty writers and conference participants, who find the Napa Valley experience both nurturing and challenging. This conference is suited to writers who have already some training, but we also encourage beginners to apply. Website: www.napawritersconference.org

New York State Summer Writers Institute
Saratoga Springs, NY
July 2–27, 2018
Under the joint auspices of Skidmore College and the New York State Writers Institute at the University at Albany, the summer program is held on the campus of Skidmore College and will feature creative writing workshops in fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Students may enroll for two weeks (July 2–13 or July 16–27) or for the entire four-week session (July 2–27). The Institute offers courses for undergraduate credit, as well as non-credit. Each workshop is primarily built around discussion of student works. Poetry instructors also offer prompts for writing during the program. The program is supplemented by Q & A sessions with visiting writers on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Weekend programs include publishing symposia, panel discussions, and student readings. The Institute sponsors public readings on Monday through Friday evenings by visiting and faculty writers followed by meet and greet receptions. Website: www.skidmore.edu/summerwriters

North Words Writers Symposium
Skagway, AK
May 30–June 2, 2018
"Exploring the Frontiers of Language," the North Words Writers Symposium welcomes all to an intimate setting with just 40 participants engaging with authors in a spectacular Alaska setting. Join 2018 keynote author Susan Orlean and our faculty of Alaska-NW authors for three days of panel discussions, writing workshops, readings, and adventure in Skagway, Alaska. Symposium events include a ride on the White Pass & Yukon Railroad to the Laughton Glacier Trailhead for a day of exploring and writing at the Laughton cabin, and a barbecue with live music at Alderworks Writers & Artists Retreat in Dyea. The opening reception, closing banquet with our keynote speaker, and a few other meals are also included. Get tips from working writers during one-on-one faculty consultations. Sign up for a half hour session with our amazing Alaskan authors at registration. No extra charge! College credit is available through the University of Alaska Southeast. See details on website. Website: http://nwwriterss.com

Luxury Mexican Creative Writing Retreat and horse riding at Rancho las Cascadas, with Melvin Burgess (Smack) and Lucy Christopher (Stolen).
1-1 tutorials, riding, yoga, hot tub, pool, excursions, time to write. 6th - 14th October 2018, $2175 all inclusive, including all activities, accommodation, food and drinks. Details at http://www.lucychristopher.com/creative-writing-retreat-2018.

Poetry at Round Top
Round Top, TX
April 20–22, 2018
Poetry at Round Top is an annual festival presenting the nation's most exciting and prominent poets over three days of readings, workshops, and conversations on craft. The festival takes place on the beautiful grounds of Festival Hill in Round Top, TX, located in the rolling hills between Austin and Houston. The 2018 P@RT Festival will feature Naomi Shihab Nye, Coleman Barks, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Javier Zamora, Emmy Pérez, Carrie Fountain, Liz Garton Scanlon, Kurt Heinzelman, and Roger Reeves. Website: www.poetryatroundtop.org

Poetry Barn
West Hurley, NY
Poetry Barn sits in the heart of the Hudson Valley, just 20 minutes from Woodstock, and two hours from New York City. Surrounded by the Ashokan Reservoir and the Catskill and Shawungunk mountains, we take nature as our inspiration and act as a pollinator habitat for art. Designed from the ground up for wonder, inquiry, and contemplation, the barn is stocked with a comprehensive independent poetry collection, as well as offering onsite and online workshops, craft talks, readings, and book arts for all ages. Website: www.poetrybarn.co/

Postgraduate Writers' Conference
Montpelier, VT
August 13–19, 2018
The 23rd annual Conference at Vermont College of Fine Arts, home of the acclaimed low-residency MFA in Writing Program, is designed for experienced writers, with graduate degrees or equivalent preparation. We emphasize craft and process through small-group workshops limited to 5 or 6 participants, and pride ourselves on creating a supportive, non-hierarchical writers' community. At the heart of the Conference is our small-workshop structure. Daily critique groups led by an award-winning faculty and limited to 5 or 6 participants encourage a degree of intimacy and intensive focus on each member's work that year after year leads attendees to rate this their all-time best workshop. Every participant has an individual consultation with faculty. The full schedule also features readings by faculty and participants, craft talks, generative writing sessions, shared meals and a variety of social events that help galvanize our vibrant, inclusive community. Website: www.vcfa.edu/pwc

Roads to Write 2018
Nevada, Arizona, and Utah
June 2–10, 2018
Good Roads is offering 12 spaces to an all-inclusive small group adventure tour of 8 days through some of our favorite destinations and journeys across the southwest. Designed and led by creatives, for creatives. Reconnect with nature, collaborate with community, build friendship, and create. Our creative writing mentor, Nicole

Robinson will be aboard to assist and inspire you to create new work in the genre of your choice. Each participant will receive a book selected by Nicole to focus and improve craft. Optional creative writing exercises and small group workshops will be provided on a daily basis. Additionally, one driver and logistics guide will be there to care for your needs as we travel. Application deadline: May 1. Website: www.good-roads.com

San Antonio Book Festival
San Antonio, TX
April 7, 2018
The San Antonio Book Festival is a FREE, annual, daylong event that unites readers and writers in a celebration of ideas, books, libraries, and literary culture. Featuring more than 90 authors, the Festival offers programming for all ages. Past authors have included Sandra Cisneros, Ann Patchett, Jack Gantos, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Amor Towles, Juan Felipe Herrera, Luis Alberto Urrea, Nathan Hale, Kendare Blake, and Isabel Quintero. Entering its 6th year, the San Antonio Book Festival is the signature program of the San Antonio Public Library Foundation. Website: www.saplf.org/festival

Santa Fe Writers Lab
Santa Fe, NM
In the Santa Fe Writers Lab education programs, we hold values of community, craft, and the creative process in the highest regard. With our collaborative and affirming environments, a passion for writing and storytelling—and a hunger for shared experience—are the most important ingredients. Our private campus in Santa Fe has long been a sanctuary for learning and study. We share this enchanted place with a neighboring Carmelite Monastery. Dramatic views of the surrounding Jemez and Sangre de Cristo mountain ranges, warm sunshine, cool mountain air, beautiful courtyards, access to hiking trails, convenient on-campus lodging—and a private caterer to provide fresh, healthy meals—are the elements that converge to make this the perfect place in Santa Fe to find inspiration and hone your craft. Website: santafeworkshops.com

Sewanee Writers' Conference
Sewanee, TN
July 17–29, 2018
The Sewanee Writers' Conference gathers distinguished faculty to provide instruction and criticism through workshops and craft lectures in fiction, poetry, and playwriting. This July, over 150 writers will gather on Sewanee's mountaintop campus. During a twelve-day period, participants will read and critique each other's manuscripts under the leadership of distinguished fiction writers, poets, and playwrights. All faculty members and fellows give scheduled readings; some faculty members offer craft lectures. Editors and agents offer panels discussing writing from the view point of editing or publishing. Workshops form the backbone of the Conference experience. In one-on-one meetings with distinguished faculty members, participants hone their manuscripts, benefiting from the experience of established writers who identify strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions for revisions. Website: www.sewaneewriters.org

Story Catcher Summer Writing Workshop and Festival
Chadron, NE
June 5–7, 2018
Set in the beautiful Pine Ridge Region of Northwest Nebraska, we will gather to explore the untamed terrains of our lives: in nature and the outdoors, in our relationships with one another, in our place and purpose in the world. The Story Catcher Summer Writing Workshop and Festival will gather in the historic buildings and scenic spots around Fort Robinson State Park and will lodge in the 1890 Brick Officer Quarters. Renowned writers will lead morning sessions focused on crafting and improving our writing, followed by afternoon sessions designed to give participants a chance to create new work and receive personalized feedback during the retreat. This inspirational setting fosters a wonderful writing community focused on exploring the wild terrains of our lives. Website: https://outsideyourself.wordpress.com/

Story is a State of Mind
Online
Story Is a State of Mind is an online creative writing school that approaches writing as an art, and also as a contemplative practice. We believe that skill comes from study, that inspiration comes from love, and that both are necessary. We train writers in all the elements of craft, as well as teach them to elevate their awareness, so they can deal with anxiety, resistance, and other unnecessary suffering to get out of their own way. We call this unique hybrid of craft and process a "holistically intelligent" approach. It's not soulful journaling, and it's not pointy criticism. It's extremely thorough writing study—including deep reading—that's laced with kindness and consciousness. And it happens within a peer-based community that's built on shared intellect, a spirit of generosity, and mutual respect. Website: www.storyisastateofmind.com

2018 Summer Creative Writing Institute at the American University of Paris
Paris, France
July 2–19, 2018
This program is an intensive three-week program designed for students seeking to join a cohesive group of young writers in lively workshops while experiencing Paris life with its great literary legacy. The workshops include Writing Fiction, Creative Nonfiction: Crafting Personal Narrative, and The Poetic Experience. These workshops can be taken for 4 undergraduate credits or audited at a lower cost. Students enjoy guest readers and speakers in special combined classes and share in field writing exercises. The Institute ends with a student readings and celebration. The hosting university summer program organizes fun and enriching weekend cultural excursions. Housing is available. Website: www.aup.edu/academics/summer/three-week-summer-session/literature-creative-writing

Tinker Mountain Writers
Roanoke, VA
June 10–15, 2018
Fuel your passion and transform your writing during your one-week experience in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the beautiful campus of Hollins University. Join us this year in one of our intimate and inspiring workshops in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and young adult fiction. Our workshops allow you to share work with colleagues and your faculty mentor in advance, and receive supportive and critical feedback. If you don't have a manuscript, or you're looking to start new work, one of our new multi-genre generative retreats is the perfect choice. Our retreats allow you to write each day and join fellow writers for both in-class writing exercises and sharing of work written right here at Tinker Mountain. Website: www.hollins.edu/tmww

Wesleyan Writers Conference
Middletown, CT
June 13–17, 2018
In Wesleyan's four-day program, we can help you start a new project, complete current work, or explore new genres. Our faculty are distinguished writers who love to teach. They offer you a close, attentive reading of your writing, as well as daily seminars and workshops that will introduce new techniques, improve your eye as an editor, and suggest a rich array of literature to explore after the conference. The reading lists alone are invaluable. The program includes a choice of daily seminars and workshops focused on the novel, short story, poetry, and nonfiction (memoir, short- and long-form nonfiction, and journalism). Faculty include New Yorker journalist William Finnegan, Nicholson Baker, Tiphanie Yanique, Elissa Schappell, Steve Almond, Rivka Galchen, Honor Moore, Lis Harris, Salvatore Scibona, Lisa Weinert, and Rob Spillman. Panels topics include trends in new fiction, travel writing, biography, writing for radio and new media, writing about science and medicine, and writing about social issues. Editors and agents offer advice about preparing your work for publication. A special session on "The New Business of Publishing" is featured this year. Website: www.wesleyan.edu/writing/conference

Women Reading Aloud Writers' Retreat in Greece
Alonnisos, Greece
September 4–13, 2018
Write on the Aegean Sea in exquisite private accommodations. Enjoy numerous opportunities to renew and recharge your writing life in a supportive environment balanced with solitude and community. Limited to 12 writers. The WRA 10 Day Writers' Retreat in Greece returns for its eighth year in September 2018. Designated as one of Europe's top eco-friendly islands, Alonnisos offers the perfect setting for writing without distraction. Enjoy a sumptuous "Welcome Dinner," participate in 8 workshops—following the Amherst Writers and Artists Method—and 2 "Nite Writes," sail on a "Sunset Dinner Cruise," hike a donkey trail, write each morning in a private multi-tiered taverna surrounded by the island's flora, take a mountaintop yoga class, swim in crystal clear water, nap, dream, and write from the privacy of your own balcony. Website: www.womenreadingaloud.org

2018 Woodstock Mayapple Writers' Retreat (formerly Rustbelt Roethke)
Woodstock, NY
Provisional dates for 2018 Retreat: July 31 to August 6th
A one-week summer peer retreat/workshop for writers with significant publications. Run by Mayapple Press. Includes peer workshops (3–5 people) for poetry, poetry manuscripts, fiction, creative nonfiction. The retreat takes place in the beautiful Woodstock Arts Colony in the Hudson Valley. Resident and non-resident rates available. Website: www.mayapplepress.com/woodstock-mayapple-writers-retreat/

The Write Stuff Writer's Conference
Bethlehem, PA
March 22–24, 2018
Bob Mayer will be the Keynote speaker at the 2018 Write Stuff Writer's Conference. This annual conference, presented by the Greater Lehigh Valley Writers Group, offers valuable opportunities to network with and learn from published authors, agents, editors, and other writers. Conference seminars are offered for writers wanting a deeper level of guidance in craft or marketing. This year, Bob Mayer will conduct an all-day workshop covering various topics. Lunch provided. We also have two half-day workshops on Friday, which includes Bob and Jane Cleland. Lunch is also provided. Friday night includes the very popular Page Cuts (first-page critique sessions with the pros), a session on using Pinterest, and a Welcome Reception where agents, presenters and conferees mingle over Hors d'oeuvres and beverage. Website: www.glvwg.org

Writers at Work 2018 Writing Retreat
Alta, UT
June 6–10, 2018
Writers at Work presents its 34th annual conference. W@W returns to Alta Lodge (altalodge.com) in Little Cottonwood Canyon in the spectacular Wasatch Mountains east of Salt Lake City. Alta Lodge features fine dining, a spa, hiking trails from the door, and a ski lift. Our group will be the only guests, so we will have the run of the lodge for workshops, panels, meals and informal gatherings. Workshops, manuscript consultations, readings by faculty and students, and various panels and discussions will be offered to all students in an ideal setting, the historic and intimate Alta Lodge in the scenic Wasatch Mountains. Website: www.writersatwork.org

Writing About Art in Barcelona
Barcelona, Spain
May 24–June 4, 2018
This intensive workshop provides a small group of writers the opportunity to explore and write poems and short prose in response to the rich cultural heritage of Barcelona. Held at Jiwar: Barcelona International Residence for Artists, Writing About Art in Barcelona is a 12-day writing workshop led by the award-winning poet Sharon Dolin. Each day will include a morning workshop at Jiwar, a heritage house on a pedestrian

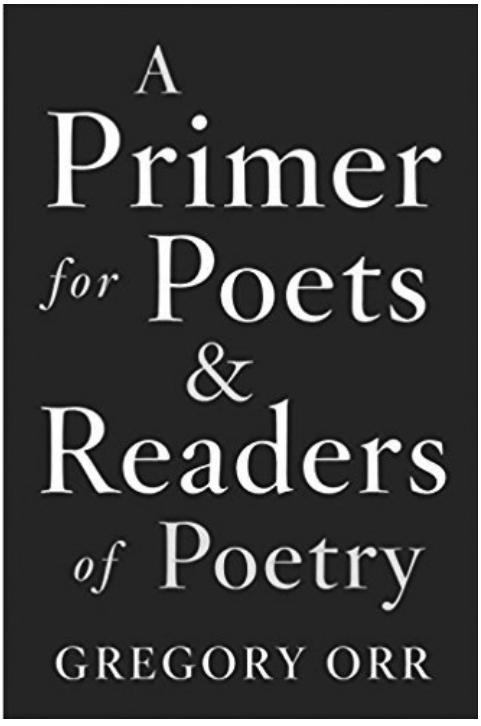
street in the Gracia district, and an afternoon outing to a site or museum of artistic or cultural interest, time to explore a very walkable city, as well as time to write. The goal is to write new poetry/nonfiction in response to and in dialogue with the Catalan culture you will be encountering. Workshop limited to 8 people. 2018 Visiting Local Poet: Anna Gual. Website: www.sharondolin.com/barcelona-workshops

Yale Writers' Conference
New Haven, CT
June 2–12, 2018
An intensive program for the committed writer. Comprised of workshops, one-to-one conferences, master classes, led by nationally known writers with a talent for teaching.
A writers' conference that includes workshops, individual manuscript conferences, master classes, craft talks, student & faculty readings. The Yale Writers' Conference is an intensive program for the committed writer. Our faculty are nationally known writers who are also inspiring and accessible teachers. Our facilities are the Yale campus. Each year over a hundred and forty writers from around the world have come to New Haven for each of two sessions. They have gone on to publish their first books or stories, produce plays, and organize a writing workshop for veterans. Website: http://summer.yale.edu/ywc AWP

BOOKSHELF

The Arab's Ox: Stories of Morocco, stories by Tony Ardizzone. Bordighera Press: $18.00 paper.

Appendices Pulled from a Study on Light, poems, photographs, and essays by Geoffrey Babbit. Spuyten Duyvil: $25.00 paper.



Doing Time, Writing Lives: Refiguring Literacy and Higher Education in Prison, by Patrick W. Berry. Southern Illinois University Press: $40.00 paper.

Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Pasts and Futures, by Jean Bessette. Southern Illinois University Press: $40.00 paper.

The Thorn Necklace: Healing through Writing and the Creative Process, by Francesca Lia Block. Seal Press: $26.00 paper.

The Lake Michigan Mermaid, a tale in poems by Linda Nemec Foster and Anne-Marie Oomen. Wayne State University Press: $16.99 cloth.

The Business of Being a Writer, by Jane Friedman. The University of Chicago Press: $25.00 paper.

My Old Faithful, stories by Yang Huang. University of Massachusetts Press: $19.95 paper.

Poetry: A Writers' Guide and Anthology, by Amorak Huey and W. Todd Kaneko. Bloomsbury Academic: $29.95 paper.

Behind the Book, craft and publishing stories by Chris Mackenzie Jones. The University of Chicago Press: $20.00 paper.

The Surprising Place, stories by Malinda McCollum. University of Massachusetts Press: $19.95 paper.

It's the Soul That's Erotic: An Essay on Adélia Prado, by Ilya Kaminsky. Orison Books: $10.00 paper.

A Primer For Poets & Readers Of Poetry, a guide by Gregory Orr. W.W. Norton & Company: $15.95 paper.

Air Traffic: A Memoir of Ambition and Manhood in America, by Gregory Pardlo. Knopf: $26.95 paper.

Saying Your Name Three Times Underwater, poems by Sam Roxas-Chua 姚. Lithic Press: $17.00 paper.

Luxury, poems by Philip Schultz. W.W. Norton & Company: $26.95 paper.

Black Bone, a collection of Affrilachian poetry edited by Bianca Lynne Spriggs & Jeremy Paden. University Press of Kentucky: $24.95 paper.

Gatherest, poems by Sasha Steensen. Ahsahta Press: $18.00 paper.

My Father's Wake, a memoir by Kevin Tools. De Capo Press: $26.00 paper.

The Geek's Guide to the Writing Life: An Instructional Memoir for Prose Writers, by Stephanie Vanderslice. Bloomsbury Academic: $20.95 paper. AWP