GULF COAST

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

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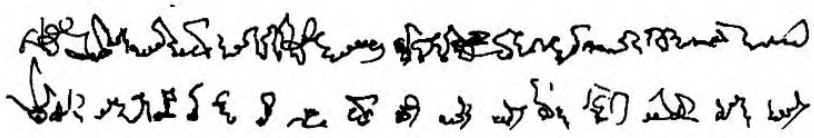
The deadline for the upcoming contest is **March 15, 2015**. Each contest winner receives $1,500 and publication in *Gulf Coast*. Each Honorable Mention receives $250. Submit one previously unpublished story or essay (7,000 words max) or up to 5 poems (10 pages max). Your name and address should be included *on your cover letter only*. Your $23 reading fee will include a one-year subscription. For more information about this year's contest, including judges, stay tuned at **www.gulfcoastmag.org.**

Editors' Note

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words.

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*



—Henri Michaux, *Narration*

Dear Readers,

Language is an ancient technology. All human advancement, from the ability to hunt as organized units to the invention of our Great Democracy, has come about through our manipulation of (and potential to be manipulated by) language. Molecular biologists speak of DNA as a biological language comprised of four letters; it is the combinations of those letters into words, as well as the syntax and semantics of the resulting compounds that are responsible for the diversity of life on earth. This is an oversimplification of course—we're a journal of literature and fine arts, not *DNA Monthly*—but this simplification is useful in that it allows us to recognize that the technology of language may have existed before (and certainly exists beyond) the confines of human speech. This point is not lost on Noam Dorr, whose contest-winning piece "Love Drones" beautifully complicates the relationship between machines, humans, and the space that separates and connects us all. If this issue has a theme, it is that language *is* the space between us, that it operates as breath, as intention, as sound. Look around you, and you will find yourself suspended in a kind of word soup.

Then again, perhaps this is all backwards; perhaps we've become so entangled by our own ability to create that we can't help but to describe the machinations of living (and nonliving) things through the metaphor of language. Regardless, our consciousness cannot be disentangled from language: it binds us together and in the same breath it moves us to perceive ourselves as separate from one another, and from the world around us. "Language is a skin," as Barthes so eloquently puts

it. To talk about language, we're faced with the problem of the prisoner describing the walls of her prison: she knows them better than any other living being—she defines her existence by them—and yet she cannot know how they appear, in the present, from outside.

The writers, artists, and art-critics in this issue take the intersecting frontiers of language, empathy, and otherness as their medium and subject. As you read through the issue you'll find it punctuated with digitally composed asemic writings, in the tradition of Henri Michaux's *Narration,* by the poet David Jalajel. Of his own work, Jalajel writes that it "explores the form-content relationship through visual equivalents of elements like verse structure, meter, rhythm, and consonance and seeks through these elements to create mood, tone, and meaning." Beautiful, evocative, and penetrable once we loosen our expectations of language, Jalajel's work reminds us, in the words of our featured artist collaborative Antena, that "the so-called language barrier is permeable."

We want our readers, particularly those of us whose first language is English, to be confronted with texts that are unknowable, unfamiliar, *unfavored.* We hope you will take time with them, and with all foreign texts, not simply for the sake of empathy, but for the sake of discovery and delight. Tracing Natalia Toledo's poem from Zapotec, to Spanish, to Clare Sullivan's English translation, the reader is invited into the conspicuous pleasure of reading a poem through multiple iterations and languages.

We're so pleased and grateful to have inherited the content of this issue, and to have had a chance to work with and learn from our predecessors, Zachary Martin and Karyna McGlynn, who've passed the editorial torch to us with grace and intelligence. Looking back through the issue, it is clear that every piece here is primarily concerned with language, in that it is concerned with humanity. Our great loves and loss of love, our wars waged on front porches and across oceans, our ability and disability to experience empathy: all of these things point back to our relationship to language, our mother tongues, our fricatives, our sibilance, our breath.

Martin Rock, *Managing Editor* | Adrienne Perry, *Editor* | Carlos Hernandez, *Digital Editor*

Raena Shirali

Engagement Party, Georgia

I left Lover when I found dirt roads—party for another
couple, soirée complete with deer heads lining a fixed-up barn's walls,

absinthe, strung lights. In pairs, we played pissing games—
collect the most Monopoly money, hurry

to tie the knot most gracefully, without a hitch in the line.
Fever trees in the distance waved their unadorned leaflets. Everyone abuzz

with talk of the rural setting. *Oh, quaint wedding. Oh, quiet ceremony.* Lover
called me over to admire the heads on the taupe walls: deer pelt,

pliant skin. We spoke of pre-party waxes, manicures, facials.
Judged by fur, or its lack, we girls—alert

to being overheard—looked down, giggled into plastic cups of chardonnay.
Are we always measured in such terms of smoothness? Pink balloons deflated

at leisure. Lover studied the tanned, mounted hide.
Out in the backwoods, I thought stars would flare

like an angiogram, that the vast pasture would daunt
at two a.m., that something like fear

would crawl out from the black between trees & force me
to stay, but the acres swaddled me in moonlight:

placental, ancient. I wasn't a fragrant bouquet of anything
but a thing without roots to put down in this field

Noam Dorr

Love Drones

We are star struck on the edge. A drone operator walks out of a trailer in a desert and smokes a cigarette. The Predator drone looks like a blind whale—the front of the aircraft has a hump, so it is a whale, and my mind attempts to turn everything into a face, and this face has no eyes, so it is blind, but nonetheless its sensors are better than my eyes, or at least, can see what I can never see, delve into other spectra. The drone operator does not see the Predator itself, the predator himself, the Predator is in Afghanistan, the operator in Nevada. We are stars struck on the edge. The difference between my sight and the drone's is even worse than most, because I am colorblind, and so the camera feed from the drone would never even translate into the right sight. While the rifle's sight is on the target, a cardboard cutout of a man with a yellow bullseye where his throat would be, the sergeant at the firing range says look for that yellow halo, then pull the trigger of your M16; aim too low and the halo becomes a dot, aim too high and it disappears altogether—and all day at the firing range it is my search for that yellow halo. Perhaps love is only a hindrance for pulling the trigger on a joystick and launching a Hellfire missile from the wing of a Predator drone, but certainly hate is also not a necessity, nor soon will be touch: they are working on vocal launch commands now, and after that brain waves. The star's edge strikes us. The drone operator drives to his house in the outskirts of Las Vegas, and through the vantage point of his windshield he sees the casino replicas of the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, the Great Pyramids of Giza. The star's edge strokes us. What of desire? The operator is not a lover but like a lover reaches for the target, searches on the screen under other spectra for his object. It is easy to place trailers with humans in one desert to connect via satellite to drones in another desert, there is plenty of room in deserts and plenty of room in the sky. Stars suspended strike. In the crook of the drone operator's finger there was a drop of sweat, right before he pulled the trigger; it is labor after all. Is there no desire in the striking of stars, do they extend out of their own internal reactions? It is easy to fake monuments in the desert emptiness, to, as it were, create a text with no context. In the desert the operator's fatigues

blend with the sand and in the suburbs his polo shirt blends with the lawn and he disappears for us. Unmanned, we seem to desert our desire. If I had a drone I would point it to the moon to see how far it would go, not too far before the air becomes too thin, I know.

The drone of a sustained musical note creating a harmonic effect throughout a musical piece; bagpipes drone, and sitars too—put your cheek against the instrument and it will hum in your teeth, but I prefer the synth loops of Suicide's "Dream Baby Dream," that mechanical haunting from the year of my birth. A crossroads is just a place where our decisions are based on preexisting infrastructure; instead of taking one road or another we could just choose to walk off into the unpaved dirt. Mostly though, we don't. Futurists like Ray Kurzweil think we are on the cusp of a technological singularity—the arrival in the near future of a technological shift so drastic we cannot possibly comprehend the resulting new reality. He is considered to be an optimist. We stroke the star's edge. After the firing range we take the bus back to the base, to intelligence headquarters, and the rifle remains a heavy burden as I lean against the glass; I do not want the bus to pause at a crossroads' red light, I want the humming of the struggling engine to drown the rest and for the pistons to never stop. A singularity may prove to be a crisis, a crisis from Greek *krisis*, a decision, a crisis as in a crossroads. The drones have their own avian beauty; in the same way baby birds are hideous to me, yet their translucent skin compels their parents to care. We edge along the star's stroke. Suicide sings "Dream baby dream / Keep those dreams burning forever / Forever and ever," and I want to close my eyes and disappear into the imagined pauses in the hum. Kurzweil says technological growth is exponential, that human technological capacity has been doubling itself every ten years or so throughout human existence, which for a medieval peasant isn't so dramatic, perhaps a new development once or twice in

a lifetime, the introduction of the horse collar, to better break the surface of the earth, or the chimney, to slip smoke out of our eyes, but for us in the twenty-first century means experiencing the equivalent of the previous twenty thousand years of human development in just the span of our short lives. The striking edge stars us. The human weeping sound can be a drone, but not laughter—which is in its essence the cutting of sound in and out, in and out. We are on edge for striking stars. Experts say the next technological revolution, especially in war, will be in robotics; science fiction has been saying so for quite some time, but we are now seeing it become reality—drones patrol the skies and robotic vehicles with machine guns for arms accompany marines on their tours of duty. Stand still on the star's edge. One projected outcome of the combination of the robotic and artificial intelligence revolutions is the development of an embodied intelligence we cannot understand, for whom the safety of humans will not be a primary concern, again not a new concept for science fiction, but perhaps a reality which will shock us when we realize it is upon us. The drone of heavy machinery immediately puts me at ease—as an asthmatic child exertion turned into breathlessness, excitement into paralysis, so I sit there slowly sucking on the vapors from the nebulizer, my ears are filled with vibration rumblings, and finally my airway expands.

Weeping, machine buzz, the ramblings of the person sitting across from us whom we have no desire to listen to—what is droning but the repetition over and over of that which we wish our understanding to cut through? Stricken by stars or awe struck, or are we awaiting the strike, the blow to cut through the droning, on the edge? The Predator drones are employed in an asymmetrical struggle, the most refined technology of war in opposition to the crudest, though the rusty nails and scrap metal explosions of IEDs and suicide bombers do contain a symmetry—the extension of all motion from a central point, like the combustion of a star. Perhaps

the noise can drain into a hiding place for violence, a mask we can't see under, or, more likely, are too bored to care to look for. The marine stationed in Afghanistan says he loves the buzzing sound of a Predator drone, that it means he is safe. Turning off the nebulizer should be a relief, a signal that the treatment is over and the airways open again, but there is always a loneliness in the absolute absence of that sound and vibration. There are skeptics of the singularity, so-called pessimists, those who see the present and say vehicles are not moving faster, dishwashers and refrigerators and ovens are not making household work easier, and lifespans are not drastically growing longer than they were forty years ago. Or does the edge strain into a drop, a star's strength drain into a drone? And the Predator itself is not as refined as it may seem—its four-cylinder engine is not dissimilar to that of a snowmobile. Even the Hellfire is thirty years old; and so the newness of Predators is not in their bodies but in the ideas that govern their use. For stars striking so distant from one another, are light and touch the same? Back at the base the M16s return to the weapons shed, a burden lifts that is heavier than the rifle's weight, and I return to review the computer screen, my sight set elsewhere, to translate the information for our next target. Weeping for the striking of stars. While for Afghans in the same geography the droning of Predators means it is time to run. We stars striking at the edges waiting for them to meet. After running, breathlessness was as painful as my monthly allergy shots, and when the pain became too great I cried, and tears spliced light, which became stars in my eyes.

Sometimes we close our windows to discover a bee battling against the panes. Trapped inside the silence of our houses the drone alarms. We open the windows wide for the insect to slip out and we do not understand why it keeps crashing into the glass. We think there is a human mind in there. Or when we peacefully reach for the flowers we want to smell and trigger a hum, a sound, but not a call, not

what we call communication. This drone is only a sign of movement, of machine parts, or the air flowing off the wings of an ascending drone who, in the blue and blue, sees the world in other spectra. My lover cooks orange peels in a pot of honey and water and all sorts of intoxicated insects keep rushing through the windows. We have to shut the openings and stay isolated in the sweetness. We shudder when ordering our fears: shining alone or for our light fragments to touch, the strike to stroke. The drones are dying too, defeated by insecticide or some say cell phone signals. We no longer strain to strike each other, stars expanding, our boundaries clashing; drones, dying engines of amorous flowerings. Do you remember? For an edge to be an edge it must be sharp. In the act of translation there is so much text on the screen that I can no longer find the context; I am told the intelligence work saves lives but I no longer know; in any case the rifle isn't here, and I am light. The Predators produce so many signals now that the technicians analyzing them can no longer keep up, so they are working on having them make automatic decisions, for them to think for themselves. We will be reminded to turn slightly back to see how far behind we left our exhaled fragments, our striking stars. What does this have to do with love, love that fragments, or love under drones, that drowns in a sound? The edge is only the furthest the fragments have reached, as far as stars can strike, so wipe the stars from our eyes, from the edge of slight sight.

Edward McPherson

Kansas, America, 1899

Approach without fear, all those who know Beauty and Truth! Behold the Deathless Wonders of the Age! I offer the rarest and most Splendid of Spectacles. Enter a world of cloth and pigment, transformed by the master's hand into cloud, bone, and fire. The worldly among us will know it for what it is—a true scenic Cyclorama, the bewitching spawn of art and science, the likes of which are exhibited in the finest capitals of the globe! Step inside and let it surround you—no mere artist's trinket, no poor picture in a frame, but a landscape stolen from real life stretching as far as the eye can see, a full painted panorama in the round, taller than a man and detailed to fool the Maker himself. Come behold the awful splendor! Watch the blood run thick at Gettysburg, see the fiery siege of Paris, witness Our Savior suffering without end on the barren field of Calvary. Come men of brave and iron will, women of wise and tender heart, children of fresh and eager minds. Beware of imitations—behold the One True Thing!

And so it goes, day after day, night after night, as I rattle these torn and cheapened canvases around the dim and dusty byways of this once great nation. My tent is always full. Some come to weep, some to pray, some to slide a hand up a skirt in the dark. People are in want of something, poised as we are on this millennial year. Were I in the city there would be other distractions: Oriental necromancers, Turkish automatons, Parisian sensations, swarms of magicians, minstrels, virtuosos, and clowns. But out here, I compete only with the open endless sky and its hard spiteful spasms. I shout over the wind, that prairie plainsong of misery, drawing the people, stooped and broken, out of houses made of sod. They stop scratching the earth long enough to see what I have made.

I have not always earned my bread off the unlettered and ignorant. I was born on the plains to a boardinghouse life, but I've seen cities and know the many ways

a man can fall into ruin. Outside Chicago, my wife died giving birth, leaving me with the boy. He is the only one who could have carried on my work; now I fear there can be no other. These canvases will be my legacy, my blessing and curse. They have grown bigger than their maker. I have become part acolyte, part charlatan, but mostly my will is my own.

This morning, the boy gets up early, as he does whenever it's time to move on. I find him sitting on the wagon, swinging his legs and whistling without tune. His wanderlust is insatiable. We're somewhere in Kansas on the high empty prairie, and our audiences have dwindled from feeble to nothing. It seems best to end our engagement. I tell the boy to harness the mule. Pushing off with his good hand, he flings himself down from the cart. When I ask if he wants breakfast, he just shakes his head.

The boy doesn't talk much. He is thirteen, and lately his days have become a mystery to me. But he's always there to take down the show.

We sit side by side on the wagon, listening to the wheels roll over brittle earth. From his pocket, he produces something he begins to nibble, some food, no doubt, he begged off a pretty girl. He doesn't share, and I don't ask. The boy has grown willful, and each day looks more like his mother. His eyes shine like hers when he's angry. We hit a bump, and the wagon pitches violently sideways. From the back comes a loud thump.

"Did you secure the cargo?" I say.

"Do you need to ask?" he answers between bites. Then he says to the mule, "Hey, mule. When you're tired, I'll take a turn at the bit."

Lately he has been neglecting to tie the poles and wrap the canvases tight—more from malice than forgetfulness, I am sure. When I stop the wagon, I find we've dropped part of the tent and two tins of paint. One of the tins has opened, spilling dark brown umber into the dirt. There is no hope of retrieving the pigment, and so I force the boy to walk. He's lean and strong and outpaces the mule. My anxious eyes grow tired searching for him in the distance.

When he was younger, the boy was terrified of lightning. I would try to calm him best I could, but during one night's storm, as I was driving the wagon, he slipped from the seat beside me. In truth, he was too young to balance on the driver's box,

but, mindful of the tempest, I had set him there so I could keep comfort. I was half watchful and he was half asleep when a great bolt lit the sky. He started and fell into the darkness; in the cold, slick mud, he panicked and grabbed at the wheel. The next flash froze the moment forever: I watched the iron rim press his soft hand to a pulp. I immediately unhitched the mule and deserted the cart, riding through the rain with the boy in my arms to the light of the next town. The crude doctor gave him a touch of ether and said the damage was well past his providence.

The boy's other hand grew calloused and sturdy, but it never showed sign of refinement or talent. For a while after the accident I would watch him in the dappled light of the mornings as he tried to put my brushes in his mangled grip, but eventually it became too painful a sight. He cried like a much younger boy when I finally took them away. Today he remains shy about his disfigurement—a discolored nub, like a hand poorly erased—and he wears a long sleeve, even in summer.

The trouble with the boy started in earnest four months ago. We were stopped at a nameless settlement pitched somewhere at the crossroads of torment and oblivion. After three days of exhibiting my paintings, I was leaving with two foreign coins and a few dried ears of corn.

I was loading the canvases when I spied a little girl drawing with her finger in the dirt. I had noticed her in the tent on several occasions; with her parents' permission, we had made camp within sight of her home, a forlorn lean-to plastered with dried grass and clay. Her skirts were tattered, and her fingernails split. All morning, she had sat on the ground watching us work. I had passed her a half-dozen times, but I stopped in my tracks when I saw on the ground a remarkable likeness of the boy. I had just sent him to get water; she must have studied him closely. When I approached, the girl erased the drawing with her foot. She could not have been more than eight years old.

I rushed to my cart for a pencil and a nickel pad of paper. The girl turned to run home, but the implements in my hand caught her attention. I handed her the pad and asked her to return in a quarter-hour with some sketches from nature. You could count the missing teeth in her smile.

She drew a dead leaf, delicately curled at the tip like an old shepherd's crook. She drew spears of woollygrass, the silky spikes tucked in tight sheaths like

envelopes. She'd taken a common dandelion and made it something new: the head a towering cluster of stern parachutists ready to take to the air. A downy foxtail became—under her hand—a fearsome monument, solid as an oak and brimming with purpose. Her line was strong, her shading skilled, but what struck me was the colossal perspective—she had drawn each form at least ten times larger than life. It had never occurred to me that genius might bloom in the plains. I thought, Here is both artistry and ambition!

I was talking to her parents, a thick, bearded man and his child bride in bandannas, when the boy came around the corner. We stood in the yard, just a worn patch of dirt in front of the lean-to. I was explaining to them what a prodigy was.

I said, "She's the most gifted draftsman I've ever seen at that age. I'm offering an opportunity for her to see more of the world than these four walls of prairie. I have engagements in cities and towns all over this land. Think of Art. Think of Culture. She could have a hand in the leading movements of the day."

The father's eyes swept over his homestead. He kicked at a cedar pole propping up his poor roof. His gaze could go no higher than my chin. "What was that you were saying about an *indentured* apprentice?"

The wife looked immeasurably sad, but she held her tongue.

Finally understanding what was transpiring, the boy started laughing and stomping his feet. He waved his lame hand in the air. "Woo-boy, Farmer John. Watch out! That means he'll pay you beans right now and live off of her for the rest of his life."

The wife burst into tears, and I could see the horses in the farmer's mind start pulling the other way.

"I'm not a man to be cheated," he said as he straightened. "You can get off my land."

The boy spoke to him but looked at me. "That's the right move there, sir. This one would go behind the back of his own kin."

Since then I've been holding short experiments wherever I go, usually when the boy is off on his mysterious errands. Perhaps he disappears because he can't stand to watch. I put out shards of slate and a few nuggets of chalk, and ask the children to sketch what's around them. So far, my efforts have turned up only crude outlines of siblings, horses, and cows.

I am not so vain that I don't see my canvases are tattered and mean. At night I go over every flaking inch, but my hands have grown shaky, and my paints dry in this heat. My works are but poor copies of copies, with outsized horses thundering over off-kilter hillocks, and faces blank blobs where they should be grave. In places, the lines of my unsteady ruler remain evident. I have read that the Frenchman Philippoteaux, the greatest painter among us, travels the world making studies with his team of assistants. His canvases stretch fifty feet high and run four hundred feet in the round. He paints a sky in ten days, working furiously from a scaffold on iron rails so the paint dries without blotches. He takes counsel with the War Department and once spent weeks atop a wood tower surveying Gettysburg. The world's cities—Boston, Philadelphia, London, Madrid, Moscow—build fireproof brick fortresses to display his achievements. Chicago now has four such palaces alone. They pump air into the rotundas so even the atmosphere feels fresh, while I have only this rude tent, rotten with vermin and stench. I offer a flap for a door and incomplete screens between canvases, but there, in the cities, spectators scale platforms overlooking the most artful arrangements—real dirt, cannon, and carriage obscuring the line between pigment and prop. They say men have gone mad and fallen to great injury trying to reach out and touch the illusion.

The martial pictures are what battle would be to a deaf man. Veterans of war break down and weep in each other's arms. Even my poor scenes have their own power. Once, standing before my Pickett's Charge, a woman swooned when a pigeon toppled down from the tent, shocked dead, she imagined, by the cannonade, though in reality probably sick or starved. I have painted my figures as best I know how: vigorous and clear in an atmosphere dutifully rendered—I have tried to put my perspective in harmony with nature's own line. I have spared none of war's pitiless details, providing a multitude of small, terrible dramas—the horse set to stumble, the sharpshooter in the weeds—that quietly unfold amidst the great horror. They say my blood runs a marvelous red.

One night I awake to a noise in the tent. These roads are traveled by thieves. I grab my club and rush through the flap, only to discover the boy lying in the dirt with a maid, his crooked hand down her open blouse. She is a dirty thing with stringy black hair parted tight against her scalp, a flaking white line in the

lamplight cleaving her skull in two. Her head is bent, her lips sour and thin, set in a permanent frown like the top of an onion. With a shake of the lantern, I run her off into the night.

I look at the boy lying next to the canvases. I can see where his boot heel has left a dark smudge. I tell him, "These people are simple. It's one thing to take their money, but another their virtue."

His face is unreadable. Outside the tent, locusts thrum in the dark.

I know a good father would say something more. I add, "You should be ashamed preying on the pity of the dumb."

He stares at me for a minute, then hitches up his trousers with one hand. He says, "Pity is for the lame," and walks into the night.

The next day there is still no sign of the boy.

In the city cycloramas, there are lecturers, often old soldiers who were present, who hold the crowds captive with tales from the field. I do all such presenting myself, going from General Grant to King Wilhelm to the Almighty himself every day we're open for as long as I can. I weave a colorful tale, making it up as I go, and the people in the tent are unaware and—if knowing—wouldn't care. In each scene the story is the same, hope dashed by the failings of men—courage thrown into the bellies of cannons, God the Father betrayed by his sons. (The boy often snorts mightily at this in the back.) Animals scream, the earth shakes, men fall to their knees. And, because I want my audience to come back again and again—because they pay me and because I think my pictures profit them—I end with a hint of redemption, pointing out the small detail in the distance—a white cloud, a soaring bird—that beckons to a new, brighter day.

I have read the great Philippoteaux tell the newspapers that for him art comes second to facts, but surely late at night, behind a muffled door, he would admit that he and I know better. The illusion is all, everything done in service of it. We are masters of this world; we stop time and extend sight, compressing days and deeds in own our dread vision. Still, the painter would say that while we don't give history, we give truth—but out here it is hard for me to keep faith in such a thing. People don't give up their last coins for truth; in this tent we sell pleasure, not grace.

After I find him fondling the girl, the boy is gone for three days. I sit in camp mending holes in the paintings. Philippoteaux's canvases are woven by a French carpet factory known to have covered the halls of royalty. Mine are of the roughest dark linen. What if the boy doesn't come back? How long will I stay here biding my time?

I don't hear him approach, but suddenly he is behind me. He says, "I bet you don't know I can sew."

I stop my work, needle poised in the air. I am determined not to give away my surprise at seeing him. The boy tries to read the emotion on my face. Not even I know how much is disappointment and how much is relief.

I look down and say, "Repairing a canvas requires a light touch. The audience must never see the seams."

He says, "They've always been visible to me."

I say, "That's because you're standing too close."

He says, "No closer than the audience." He points to a jagged tear I'm struggling to close. "Unless you stitch that better, they're going to be able to see it from the next town."

I thread the needle through the canvas, but it rips a bit more. I say, "You don't know a damn thing you're talking about!"

"Yes, you certainly made sure of that."

I say nothing.

He says, "Remember, if I have been cursed, it is by your hand, not mine."

I look at the canvas and say, "Son, what has happened between us?"

He says, "It has only taken me this long to learn this is a show for one man." He begins loading our things on the cart. "And now I want to get out of here."

There are two photographs I carry with me, each in a worn wallet. The first was presented to me by a man who had been to Boston. A small trinket, a commemoration, it shows Philippoteaux at work in his studio. He straddles the steps of a ladder on a long wooden platform, his torso turned, a knee bent, heel lifted, in a classic *contrapposto*. The Frenchman is small but stands straight as a

brush. His striped trousers show careful creases, and his open coat reveals a watch chain looped twice. His round, balding head ends in a dark beard that swoops to a point like the thorn of a rose. He brandishes a palette and brush, his eyes daring the camera. Below him, the platform is littered with the tools of our trade: measuring instruments, field implements, tin paint cans, large hempen satchels, and leather straps of indeterminate use. Behind, on the massive canvas, men march into battle in various brave poses, their foreboding betrayed only by their bayonets, which cross at crude angles. Under the shade of an elm stands a shrewd general, his face clearly the painter's self-portrait.

The other image is a tintype of my wife in a high delicate collar lying amid a profusion of funeral flowers and lace. She is as unstudied in death as she was in life, her face a bloodless bloom, a revelation against the soft coffin dressing. I never once painted her, and this picture is all that remains of her beauty. Her eyes gaze upon something beyond the poor sight of this world. I used to tell the boy how her face shined at his birth, though in truth she died before the midwife could hold up the baby.

She wears an expression I never saw in life. She had a way of opening her mouth wide and taking a sharp breath, then flapping her lips closed before opening them again to finally speak. An innocent but wearisome gesture, one that—if my temper had already soured—could raise a simple argument into something far greater. Now I try to recall her sweet mouth. The wet lower lip, the one she chewed constantly, a dark burgundy that bordered on blood. The thin creases at the corners, faint webs of worry. That is as far as my memory will take me.

When he was little, I would lay out the photographs for the boy, and he would stare at them endlessly. I would tell him stories of his mother and the ambitions of my youth. His rapt attention made my heart beat harder than a packed gallery.

Yes, I know Philippoteaux—singled out for his aptitude at a young age—learned to paint from his father. The two men collaborated on the younger's first cyclorama—completed when he was only nineteen and exhibited for fourteen years on the Champs-Élysées. But Philippoteaux also once said, "When Art battles for souls, there is no room for anything less than perfection."

I am not an easy man. Every father makes his mistakes, but there are tides—of art, of history—that are bigger than any one family, that *must* be bigger than any one family. Otherwise, everything is loss.

Between towns, our days stretch as blank and indistinguishable as the muddy horizon. One morning before setting out, I catch the boy squatting in the shade of the cart. At first I think he's relieving himself, but I see he is clutching a sheaf of creased papers. I recognize them immediately—letters sent between me and my wife. He has stolen them from the bottom of my locked trunk.

I say, "Those are mine." My tone is as gentle as I can bear.

He doesn't even look up. "I've read them before."

"They are too full of the surety of youth." I try to smile.

His gaze meets mine. "Surety," he says. "That's something you've never been short of." He hands the letters to me, and I have to keep myself from snatching them and stuffing them into my pocket.

"There was no one like her," I say.

"I know," he says, and I see what I hope is the faint memory of tenderness behind his dark eyes.

At dusk, the boy ranges ahead to find our camp for the night. I pull the letters out of my pocket. The first is to my pregnant wife. I had traveled ahead to Chicago to find work—painting scenery, painting portraits, perhaps even painting houses, we had joked. I had left her in a small town a few miles beyond the outskirts of the city. I would make arrangements for her arrival once she was well enough to travel. I can still make out my thin handwriting, even in the fading light.

> Lily,
>
> I have occupied myself preparing for you and the baby. But not all has been work. I went last week to see the exhibition of a panorama, or great painting, of "The Battle of Gettysburg." It has created a sensation unlike any other, though on the day I visited it Buffalo Bill and his show had arrived in town, and much of the public had gone to watch his troupe parade through the streets.

In the middle of downtown they have erected a windowless behemoth: a great iron rotunda, vigorously symmetrical and unapologetically ugly, like God's napkin ring. You pay 50 cents to enter the bottom through a long wooden tunnel. It's dark; you stumble forward, confused; the world is washed from your eyes. Then, following the light, you ascend a corkscrew staircase to a platform floating amid the most miraculous scene.

How can I describe what I saw? The platform is bigger than that shanty we're renting; it is as if you had dropped our apartment onto the front porch of History. As I climbed the last step, I heard a sound from high above—which I later learned was a man brushing snow off the glass roof—and a startling clear light struck the painting that stretched in *every direction around me*. I was in the middle of a great painted battle *that did not appear to be painted*. The very canvas exulted: distant clouds began to drift, the buttons on a nearby soldier's coat twinkled as his chest heaved. He was hiding beside a small pool ringed with what appeared to be *real cattails*. The artist had conquered space by eliminating *the frame!*

On the far side, a uniformed veteran began giving a lecture, his empty sleeve pinned across his thin chest. But I was too caught up wiping my tears. I thought, I will never see anything like this.

Afterward, I spoke to the man, who said all of the school children in the city had been let in to see the painting for free one day last month. How they thronged about the platform; he said their cries—of fear! of delight!—approximated the roar of the battlefield. What an instrument of instruction! What hopes I have for our child!

I told the lecturer that becoming a father is one of the ways we enter into history. He laughed and said in that case he'd be well remembered for a leaving the world a mountain of soiled diapers. But it was clear that he understood my point. This is quite easily the grandest achievement of our time. As I stood there, I swear I felt the platform swelling beneath me. Burn all my little canvases and sketchbooks! This is the future. I cannot wait to bring you here once you are back up on your feet.

I refold the paper along the worn creases and hold the second letter against the sunset, though I don't need the light to read the words I know by heart. It is her reply, which arrived a few days later and brought me to tears for the second time that week:

My dear one,

I know you, too, will gasp when you see how I am growing. It is hard to stay bedridden, but when I stand the room spins so! Lucy, the washerwoman, says this dizziness will fade. And so I will recover, and in the meantime you will adventure for both of us. How I have enjoyed your letters. They make the afternoons pass so easily. I was surprised at the last one—not one drawing from you of such a moving scene? Not even a quick little sketch? That spoke loudest to me of your awe. All this you will show the boy. Yes, you're wondering at how I know it's a boy. Lucy told me; she is quite convinced. She took one long sniff of my belly, then made the announcement. I was so startled when she pressed her face up close! She says the gift has long run in her family. So it seems you will have your apprentice after all.

Distressing rumors have reached me. The great Gettysburg cyclorama will be taken down from its exhibition space and sold off to a concern from Australia. Thousands have seen it, and three full-sized copies have been made for $50,000 apiece—yet the enthusiasms of the public blow with the wind. A batch of Buffalo capitalists recently engaged a painter to create a panorama of Niagara Falls, but—finding no theater willing to exhibit it—it is to be exported to London, complete with Indians to heighten the effect. Then there is news from St. Louis, where, after weeks of an empty house, the painter of the Battle of Chattanooga was found locked in his hotel room, having stabbed himself in the heart. The boy hands me the newspaper. He smiles and says, "See? You must suffer for your art."

I seem to be losing paint as we travel this road. At night I apply my brush sparingly, but my tins are emptying far faster than usual. Is it heat loss or some new game of the boy's? Whatever the cause, I point our wagon toward Bloomfield, a larger town than the boy has heretofore visited. I need to replenish my supplies.

"We must go to Bloomfield," I tell him.

"Is that so?" he says. His face is a grin.

It is easier to charm a crowd than to tame a motherless son. I say, "We need paint."

Again he says, "Is that so?" Then softly adds, "Imagine that. One would think such a place might also offer a pool of art prodigies."

I whip the mule. This trip might be a mistake. It is a big town, full of distractions and pitfalls. My actions, I suspect, are those of a desperate man.

As soon as we reach a suitable spot on the outskirts, the boy announces, "We camp here. It's time we shed these filthy back roads." I slow the mule and he leaps from the cart.

He says, "I reckon we'll be staying a while." I don't dare argue. I busy myself with the wagon while his footsteps grow distant.

I am left to put up the tent and hang the paintings. The tight weave makes the canvases bulge in the round; they can't be tied straight because they swell with the weather like living, breathing things. As I affix rusted pig iron weights to the bottom, one breaks loose against my shin, leaving a ragged gash that will need tending: an unlucky start.

When the sun is high, I make my way into the squalid, bustling town. I stop before the first public house and give my grand speech. Some smutty children toss pebbles, but I draw a sizable crowd before the constable makes me move on. That afternoon, a curious few appear at my tent. I lead them through the flap, urging them to pause upon the darkened threshold to shed the day's bright residue from their eyes. Then I usher them into the chamber to behold their first vision.

I have hung the canvases to make the most shocking impact—beginning with the most powerful, a full panorama of Christ's bloody agony upon His holy cross. I have heard men gasp, curse, even blaspheme at the sight. In the most desolate of crossroads people have thrown everything they had—stones, buttons, coins—at the canvases to break the enchantment. When he was young, the boy used to enjoy slipping silently among them to gather such offerings; then together we would sort through his treasure. Today the crowd is quieter; they seem astonished, then bemused, and I hear some laughter as they exit. Much of the audience doesn't even visit the battle scenes.

The boy doesn't return until well after nightfall, and I lie still with eyes shut as he crawls onto his pallet.

In the morning, I tell him we must venture to the square. To my surprise he leads the way. I am slowed by my shin, which is scabby and beginning to weep, but I hasten my step and we set out together. The roads into town are but the avenues of death; at the first crossing, I am almost knocked to the ground by a four-in-hand cart. I fall back to walk behind the boy, who seems to know the route. This town is a madness; men lurk in shadows, while the women cast a malevolent eye. We pass a street gang, crashing headlong through the crowd, a stream of sweaty, bloodied boys carrying sacks of stolen goods.

We are not the only attraction in the square. There are mountebanks and medicine shows, hawking powders and vials, and in the middle a juggling troupe has just set a great ring on fire. At the far end, the vaudeville house advertises a knockabout act called "The Man with a Trampoline and His Son, the Human Missile." The boy stares at the marquee; he refuses to catch my eye. I try to regain my breath. It has been ages since he's seen me make my pitch.

In the middle of it, there's commotion across the way. A short, stout man in a strange cut of suit has climbed atop a tall box. He's shouting and shaking his fist and cackling in our direction. I try to ignore him, but when my small audience drifts over, I know I have a fight on my hands.

The foreigner gestures at me, his thick eyebrows jumping like locusts, as he bellows in a rough, strangled accent: "See for yourselves, ladies and gentleman, the face of the past! Worn down, decrepit, with a low brute at his side! Yesterday some of you were even swindled into visiting his tent! Shown the scribbles of an idiot hung up on string! My strapping son could do better, but he's at home suckling his nursemaid!"

The crowd explodes, their laughter making my ears ring. A few feet away, the boy is doubled over, slapping his knee in patent exaggeration—but his eyes are locked on my face. I raise my voice to a shout, but no one will listen.

The man smiles, spins on a sharp heel, and continues: "For only five cents, behold the acme of realism! The Vitascope, man's latest marvel, a phonograph for the eyes! Come see the moving pictures, life-size projections strutting upon the screen. At the Orpheum Theater—a thrilling show playing every half hour!" He bows with a flourish.

Before the crowd can clap, my voice shakes the streets. "We've all heard of these light tricks on a dirty sheet. What are dancing girls and boxing cats to the tremors of true history? Who would pay to see shadows, ladies and gentlemen, like the

kind thrown off a horse's ass? I deal not in dim shades, but in the world's precious elements. Listen: cadmium, alizarin, viridian—how their names sing!"

At this point, the boy puts the palm of his thick purpled hand to his lips and blows a rude, sputtering noise. The crowd looks startled, then erupts in a frenzy, laughing and echoing his call. They shout, "Listen to them sing!" Bodies press in and force me back down the street. I slip into a side alley. I am light-headed and soaked through with sweat. The foreigner is long gone, the boy nowhere in sight.

That afternoon no one comes to the tent, which is just as well, for I must tend to the crucifixion. Its colors have grown admittedly pale. For accuracy, I stand outside, surveying the landscape. I put the dying sun over my shoulder, raise my black mirror (bought for a penny off an old wheezy Scot), and frame a bleak scene. When it's fixed in my mind, I go inside and touch up the atmosphere and retrace a few figures.

I refresh my own likeness, inserted long ago among the witnesses, just a lesser centurion leaning upon a great shield, watching the women wail. His face seems to capture the instant he realizes he is witnessing an event bigger than himself. That is how I imagine I looked that day in Chicago. It is a scene painted by a much younger man, a minor moment treated with ambition, one I return to from time to time, its poignancy coming more from hindsight than any great skill. I've learned much since then about myself and my art; it is my gift to render the great spectacle, but the still, intimate portrait takes a finer brush than I possess.

That night the boy does not come home.

In the morning, I wake later than usual, well past the dawn, my head clouded and leg throbbing, and I know the unspeakable has happened. I rush to the tent and see my canvases torn asunder, cut loose from their poles and slashed on the ground. My paints are there, too, bled into the sand. I stare for an eternity.

I have never felt more alone.

The Orpheum stands tall at the end of its block. Already the imbeciles line up to buy their way into the show. Limping low behind a group of old women, I slip past the door and barrel down a winding black passage. The cool musty air carries a whiff of dead earth. My vision clouds over, and I grope through spotted darkness until suddenly I'm in a room awash with thin silver light.

For the span of no more than a breath, I am given the grace to survey all that is before me: two dozen torn chairs arranged at the foot of a stage, at the back a flickering, fitful engine clattering like a train underwater, while up front, on a pitted sheet, a flock of bright angels are dancing.

My eyes burn, and I turn to the rapturous faces lifted upward. A young woman sits with her hands folded under her chin, as if she had forgotten she was praying. A bald man with a nose as flat as a board holds a small boy; their eyes glint and their mouths hang open like twins. An old woman whose thin skull sticks out of her dark collar clutches the hand of a man in striped overalls. Their faces contort as if unaware of themselves, pitched between fright and desire. They are no longer in this room. They are greedy to know the best and worst of everything in the world.

At the end of the row, I see my boy—proud and alone, where I knew he would be—a savage, a savant, drunk on the vengeance of creation, the knife still clutched firmly in his hand. He is held in a quicksilver glow more lovely than I've ever imagined, his face an upturned halo in the dark. There is not paint enough for this. Then it is time, and like the muse incarnate I throw myself upon him, my heart pierced and throat singing, my cry lifting mightily up as my club crashes down, as he, strong and shining, leaps to meet the blow.

A Manifesto for Interpretation as Instigation

MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK
—Mierle Laderman Ukeles

For us there are not boundaries between things in such a clear way... We wear our mistakes and missteps out in the open and our arty-ness and politics intertwine in ways that often surprise us ... We are constantly pushing ourselves, and others, to go places where we haven't before with art and creativity.
—Temporary Services

We know that the problems are too complicated, too complex, to define art from a dictionary... We say that art is defined by the people, because the people are the ones who make art.
—Emory Douglas

- The so-called language barrier is permeable.
- Differences in language signal larger differences in perception, culture, worldview, and mode of expression. Capital marshals difference as barrier.
- Language can be used to divide and conquer, and yet it can also be used to unite, to resist domination, to construct more humane and delightful realities.
- John Cage: I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry.
- To listen closely to what someone is saying and repeat it accurately (yet always differently) in another language is a specialized form of speech.
- We have nothing to say and we are saying what *you* said and it is poetry.

- Interpreters say what is being said, what has already been said, and what has not yet been said. Listening to what is being said elsewhere, in a different context, in a different language, can open us to think what we have not yet thought.

- Interpreters do not repeat the words of another person mindlessly, mechanically. Interpreters are not parrots. Interpreters repeat the words of another person mindfully, humanly. Compassion, humility and selflessness drive our practice. Interpreters do not mimic; we embody.

- We believe no expression embodies "original intention." The presence of an interpreter is too often misunderstood as signaling insufficiency and inadequacy: the interpretation is not "the real thing." Yet language is always versions of ideas, thoughts, and perceptions. What the speaker says is no more original than what the interpreter says.

- Interpreters are needed and need is uncomfortable and hence interpreters are made invisible, so as not to remind people of that uncomfortable need. Interpreters can find power in our invisibility. Visibility in our invisibility.

- Ending language dominance requires resources, patience, and tremendous willingness to work together with others in ways that are not always comfortable. To construct a space where no language dominates is an almost impossible dream. And yet we work to create such spaces, to ferret out the best methods for breaking down the inherited, unquestioned dominance of certain languages. We believe beyond the tiniest sliver of a shadow of a doubt that it is worth the effort.

- Interpreters think, speak, act. Our labor must be made visible and recognized. Our labor must remain invisible and unrecognized.

- Interpretation is not translation. Translation is not interpretation. The craft and skills needed for interpretation (oral communication, except in the case of sign language) are remarkably different from those required for translation (written communication). We feel ridiculous when we correct people about these terms. But we are willing to embrace our ridiculousness.

- In our technophilic late capitalist society, the human being is presumed to be replaceable, unnecessary, burdensome and ugly. Humans shit, humans need to sleep, humans have emotions and sometimes have children. Humans are difficult to manage and all-too-often irrational. For all of these reasons human interpreters are radically irreplaceable!

- A machine will never replace a human interpreter. We interpret constantly: the world around us, its textures, its cadences, its dangers. Machines are incapable of this level of cognition. A mechanized handheld interpreting device (an imaginary robot) cannot think, improvise, and respond elastically to unpredictable conditions of speech and relation. Such a device—even if it could function with adequate reliability—would never address the problems of language dominance. And we are in a war with language dominance! We are not providing a mere service for unjust institutions founded on the very logic we are seeking to undermine!

- Even in progressive movements and social justice organizations, language is used to divide and conquer. There is a bias against interpreters who speak with a foreign accent; they are rarely considered as skilled as native speakers, regardless of actual skill level. In fact, we all have accents; our articulateness is not dependent on our pronunciation.

- The interpreter is not a service provider. The interpreter is a curator, community organizer, activator, and instigator. A curator because interpreters can also convene people and objects. A community organizer because our principal role is listening and facilitating. An activator because our bodies are a vehicle for communication, and functional communication produces sparks, makes fire. An instigator because we actively work to demolish language hierarchies as they become real in space and time.

- Down with interpreters as service providers! Long live interpreters as instigators!

- When we interpret, we are not speaking as "ourselves" in any moment. "We" have nothing to say in this conversation; "we" are not "speaking." Through our body, through our voice, another person's voice becomes hearable: a different shape of communication becomes possible.

- When we interpret, we are speaking as someone else, saying someone else's words. And at the same time we are being ourselves entirely, insofar as we are selves who seek a practice grounded in listening, in being the conduit for conversations that otherwise might not take place.

- When we interpret, we become antennae, receiving and transmitting at the same time.

- Interpreters perform radical acts of listening, thinking and speaking, suggesting a model of organizing that entails making space for others to act. Not to be the person in the room who is leading. To work purposefully toward making it possible for others in the room to communicate and to lead. This model is especially important for people who benefit from different forms of privilege (including but not limited to white privilege). Dismantling privilege is an urgent task! Let's get to WORK!

- When interpreters work, we always perform: we perform on the shop floor, in the courtroom, the community meeting space, the poetry symposium, the academic conference, the workers' center, the hospital, the state welfare program, the domestic violence center, the mental health center, the social justice gathering. We believe there is much to be learned by being an interpreter working on a regular basis in the field, doing the hard work in a thousand different contexts with an ear always at the ready. We learn by listening. We teach by listening.

- Interpreters have bodies and occupy space; we are not body-less or space-less. We allow other people's words, ideas, thinking, experiences to live in our bodies for a time. We speak as attorney and judge and victim and defendant and witness. We speak as power-hungry politician, as progressive politician, as progressive organizer, as power-hungry organizer, as undocumented immigrant activist, as deported immigrant, as remorseless murderer, as regretful attacker, as abuser and abused. And despite embodying their language for a time, despite inhabiting their speech, we do not permanently become these people or speak for them. We speak them speaking through our bodies.

- Interpreters speak for them. Interpreters speak for us. We are them. They are us.

- Interpreters are devious secretaries of oral language. We take dictation in our minds, then immediately convert that language into another language. We are not to be trusted, for we can twist meanings at any point. We are absolutely necessary and completely treasonous: the foremothers of interpreters in the Americas are la Malinche and Pocahontas. Interpreters lead to downfall, paving the way to ruin, to societal collapse. Ruin and societal collapse could be a useful path toward remaking a world that urgently needs to be remade.

- The interpreter is a receptacle: constantly filling and constantly emptying. An empty signifier. A body that takes in other bodies, temporarily holding them before releasing them via language, thus making them accessible to other people's awareness, if not understanding.

- The role of mediator, receptacle, body-holding body is one that has been historically gendered "female," and in practice a majority of working interpreters (and translators) are women. Our demand that interpreters be understood as instigators is feminist at its core. These "parrots" talk back; these secretaries write manifestos.

- Interpreting is an embodied poetics. Interpreting is an embodied politics. We bring our whole selves into the room, though we doubt our selves will ever truly be whole.

- Let's repeat. Chant with us: down with interpreters as service providers! Long live interpreters as instigators!

- Interpreting can be recast as performance. We see "performance" as a frame that can be applied to any activity in order to reconceptualize it, to question its premises, contours, or outcomes. To make the master's tools visible. By framing our work occasionally as performance, we seek to instigate: to combat the devaluation of interpreting and to re-imagine it as a generative site for thought, writing, social movement and art, to bring this crucial interlingual labor from invisibility into visibility, and back and forth between the two.

- Through the frame of performance, we gain access to an entirely different set of conversations and resources. Museums or performance festivals or art spaces can function as important laboratories; they have the potential to support research into things that have not yet been done. Research into the undone and the undoing.

- Resources available in an elite high art context must be put to the service of actual living people. The intellectual discourse that exists in these contexts must critically engage with language dominance. There are crucial things being said elsewhere and otherwise: interpretation is a tool to make those things heard.

- Whenever we are able to gain access to institutions and spaces of privilege, it is our responsibility to use that access as a tool for community advancement and as a wedge to open access for others.

- Our work as interpreters is also our poetry. Careful intensive attention to language and to the gaps and fissures between languages. Bodies manipulating language in a hyper-conscious way. A poetics lingering in the space between visibility and invisibility. In the space between spoken and heard. In the space between.

- Poetry is a phenomenon that happens on the page and off the page, written and improvised, spoken and embodied, in motion and in music and in silence. We refuse to accept the confines of received notions of what a poem is or can be. We refuse to stand still with our sheaf of papers, intoning our revelations. Interpretation is movement is instigation is our poetics.

- We do not need our "poems" to be recognized as such by those who experience them: some might see them simply as a transit board meeting or a neighborhood council meeting or a talk by a Guatemalan indigenous woman fighting for land rights and against corporate exploitation of Mayan ancestral lands. Our poetry might be repeating the words of two people as they speak across languages for the first time. Our poetry might be a glimmer of recognition or the snag of non-understanding in the space between two perspectives.

- Whenever two different languages brush up against each other, a spark. Whenever a moment of untranslatability snags, an opportunity to a further dialogue.

- The interpreter-poet rejects heroic singular visibility yet demands that our work not be made invisible. Rejects control over language yet embraces agency in relation to language. Submits to a flow of language and shapes that flow. We perform a service like any other secretarial service and unlike any other secretarial service. Secretaries for language transfer. Spoken scribes.

- We perform our invisibility. Invisibility becomes visible in our bodies.

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Colophon

A Manifesto for Interpretation as Instigation was written collaboratively by Antena in a 1923 Sears and Roebuck kit barn on the estate of Edna St. Vincent Millay in Austerlitz, NY, in Summer 2013. Gratitude to Sally Frater, Daniel Alexander Jones, Autumn Knight, and Rob Ray for their attentive reading and astute comments and to the Millay Colony for the Arts for the space to articulate our instigatory ideas. The cover design for the Antena pamphlet series (also used here) is by Jorge Galván Flores.

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Mexa' bidó'

Ti mexa' bidó' ñee cuanda
nahui bizuudi'
sica rusuchaahui' ti gunaa za,
ma cazui' gui'ri',
nuxhele' Niñu guiropa ndaga guielú,
guicha íque guiiu nabidxu,
gulee' yaande' laa dxi nexhe lade guixi
biquiide' guidiladi ne golabere' ne nisa xhinni
lu mexa' bidó' reeche guie' bigaraagu', guie'xhuuba' ne guie'chaachi'.
Galahui zuhuaa galaa bandá' sti'gue'tu jñaa' Rosi
riná guirá ni ruzee lu' ndaani' yoo.
Ruyadxiee'ni cuyaa gu'xhu'
ne riníti lu bi.
Cani' ti riidxi:
binidxaaba napa xhia.

La mesa de santos

Una mesa de pata dispareja
envuelta en fustán zapoteca,
el cirio agoniza,
un niño Dios abre los ojos como postigos y
su cabello estuco rizado,
cuando lo tiré de su cama de heno
pegué sus pedazos con la viscosa de un árbol y saliva
sobre la mesa se esparce corozo, jazmín del istmo y flores de mayo.
Al centro el torso de mi tía Rosi
observa a los que se persignan dentro de la casa.
Veo las figuras que el humo danza
y desvanece en el aire.
Oigo una voz:
El diablo tiene alas.

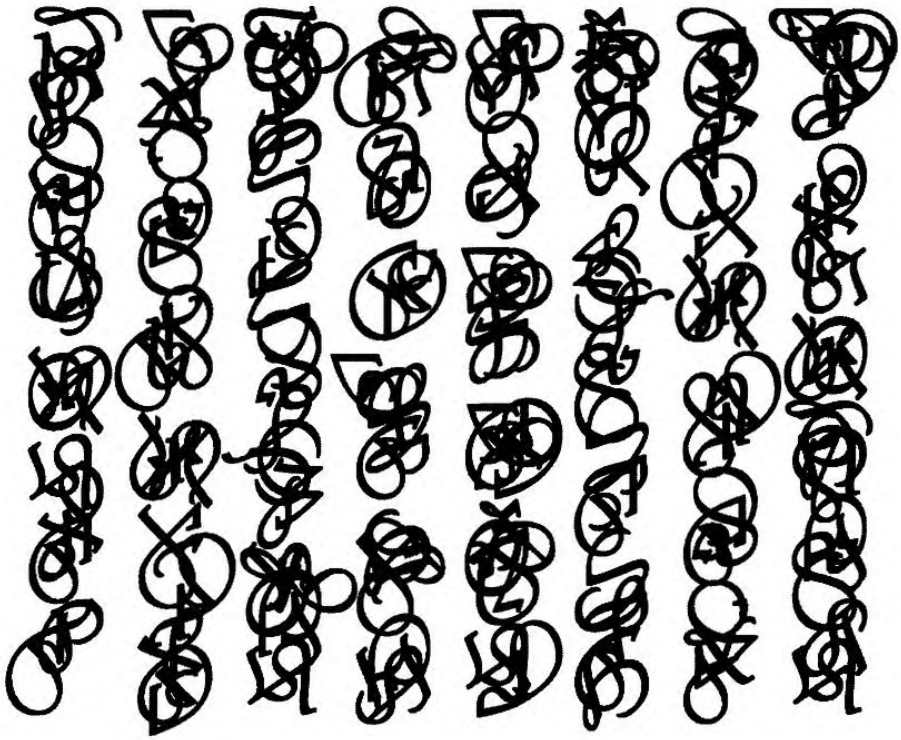
TRANSLATED FROM THE ZAPOTEC AND SPANISH BY CLARE SULLIVAN

Natalia Toledo

Altar

The table with an uneven leg
is wrapped in white ruffles,
a candle flickers
and Baby Jesus opens his eyes—shutters beneath
his curly stucco hair.
After I threw him from his bed of hay
I glued him together with sap and saliva.
Corn cobs, isthmus jasmine and mayflowers are spread upon the table
and in the center of it all, Aunt Rosi's image
watches people crossing themselves in our house.
I see smoke dance
and vanish figures in the air.
I hear a voice:
the devil has wings.

Kelle Groom



Antibody

The person who had the antibody could be used to cure the afflicted on the science fiction show I watched as a child. A serum could be made from the blood of the person with the antibody. The body which had fought off the disease. A person could be a cure.

Bodies bent over other bodies, drawing blood from one into a tiny glass tube. Concocting the serum. Injecting it in others who slumped and then revitalized. Young again. The person with the antibody immunized. I am the person immunized. My boyfriend's brother arrived one night, said, "He doesn't like to be reminded that he used to shoot up." My boyfriend smiles/grimaces. Doesn't meet my eye. At least a year of unprotected sex. But I don't know about hepatitis yet. And yet, my drinking was blackout for years, so maybe, it wasn't him.

Still, when Alice told me she'd been through the year-long treatment, and I told her I'd tested positive, she'd asked, "Did you shoot up?" Terrified of needles, queasy at the word "vein," fainting when blood is drawn, even "blood" dizzying, "No, I didn't." The positive terrifying, and so the liver doctor, the deeper test that showed I have the antibody for hepatitis C. My body's army inside surrounding and attacking the invader. Saving me.

I am a cure, I thought. Imagined the science fiction men in their tight fitting polyblends surrounding me on an alien planet—a violet moon—the inhabitants' children living in caves or blond sylphs in bubbles. Strapping a rubber band around my arm, piercing my vein, drawing my blood to immunize the others. For once not fainting, for once strong, because my body after all had been just that, fighting back. Winning the fight.

Marconi down the road, famous for transatlantic communication. But he also wanted to use wireless technology to talk to the dead. The first transatlantic wireless communication on Marconi beach in 1903. He'd heard something *anomalous* through his radio receivers. *In wireless contact distilled spirits and not bodies communicate.* Marconi's first wireless was *a small and fragile glass tube about the thickness of a thermometer, and two inches long.* Thich Nhat Hanh said that simply because we don't have the television or radio on, doesn't mean the waves aren't there, all the messages being sent. Though we don't have means to receive. *We have not come from anywhere, we shall not go anywhere. When conditions are sufficient, we manifest. When conditions are no longer sufficient, we no longer manifest. It does not mean that we do not exist. Like radio waves without a radio, we do not manifest.*

Hanh said this to help us not fear death anymore. There are parts of ourselves that aren't our bodies. There was a spark. Waves. A key held down. Fine nickel dust in a slit. A current passed through the slit. Later, there were towers that fell into the sea. Or were dismantled. The messages sent across the sea came from a cliff. Each year, the sea took three feet back. Marconi used a simple telephone. *It provided a dimension in which the unheard (and who is less heard than the dead) was combined with a second frequency that could transform it into audibility.*

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook *is dedicated to anyone who has struggled with anxiety or an incomprehensible fear.* There are several specific anxiety disorders: panic disorder, agoraphobia, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is unnerving to see that of these, I may have something of five of the six. It is also a relief to see things named. Fear has two pathways, *fear/anxiety circuit* is fast and focused on the amygdala, sending us running; the *OCD circuit* requires the orbital frontal cortex (slower interpretation that judges the danger). They involve different neurological circuits. Genetics also play a part. *One particular gene, the serotonin transfer gene on chromosome 17, has a short and long form. If you're born with the short form, you are prone to twice the level of amygdala activation as people born with the long form. With the short form, you're more vulnerable to life stressors, more likely to develop an anxiety or mood disorder, less responsive to SSRI medications.*

The book says my OCD fears of others coming to harm, those thoughts, are just *random noise.* I find this hard to believe, but I want to. I worry it's like a telegraph, and I'm its only interpreter, the only one who can understand the signals. The idea that what I fear—though it feels very organized, repeated over and over—is random, is noise. Is inconsequential. Nothing to be corrected, stopped, erased. Nothing at all. It's like a metal belt around my waist came loose. Like something used to hold a condemned person in the electric chair. Undone. What if I could let loose this fear?

Larry said Agnes Martin drove around in her jeep for two years, lived in it, before she settled in Taos. He talked to me about hue and intensity, how light blankets all of us. Paint that—from some place in time—and it will tell us something. Something else can only be seen in black and white. Abstract expressionism connected to the Surrealists, the psyche. Seeing the artist's hand. I could sleep in an Agnes Martin painting. I could eat a sherbet. I could think clearly. She called her catatonic states a trance. A trance so close to dance, but the body's still. She slept in her jeep in those years. Larry asked if I slept in mine. I need to be indoors. My safety needs require walls, roof, door, lock, key. Preferably high above the ground where no one can reach me.

The electronic symbol for ground looks like a sailboat on a tiny sea. The semaphore has an alphabet of two flags. Before Marconi's wireless, to talk to people far away, one could beat a drum, blow smoke, wave flags or oil lamps. Hit the ground and someone else can lay his ear to hear it. Sound waves work in the river too. The telegraph sent signals across cable. You could reach anyone with wire. A children's book advised learning the code by heart. Dot-dash click click click click. *The letter "a" would be bz (pause) bzzzzz.* There are also instructions for making my own telephone with a cell from an old burglar alarm. For fun and to save on phone bills. The glass envelope is sealed. For radio waves, one wire is air, the other is the ground. To receive the waves, you need an antenna. If I receive the waves, am I an antenna? No, I am not a wire. Be careful with amplification, no one wants screeching. I only understood earth science, the naming of rocks on the tables. Surprised when my teacher in El Paso chose me out of all the students to attend the Earth Science Fair. They all seemed broken off. One rock was pink. Many glittered. I remember a white hall, like a blank mall, wandering. Rough ridged fossil bodies like touching the waves of the past, reaching through them to the indentations of a small creature. To receive a radio license from the FCC, you must know Morse Code. *Then the world will be at your fingertips.*

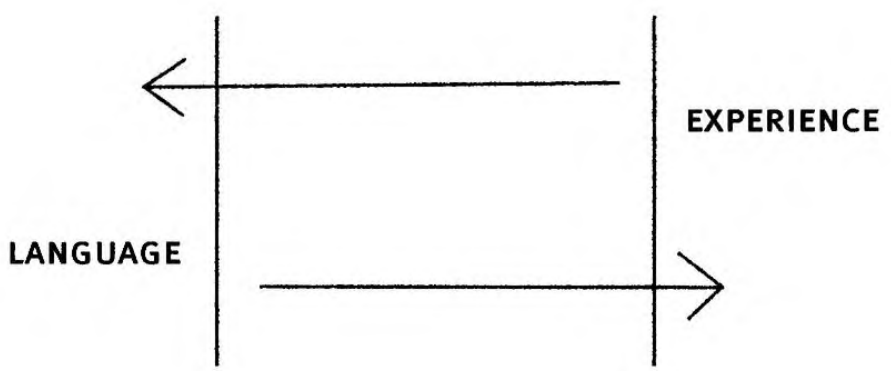
Tony Hoagland

12 Things I Know about the Life of Poetry

1. THE GRID OF EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE

On your right hand side, you got your Experiencing. On the left hand side, you got the biggest girlfriend (boyfriend) you could ever want, the English Language. They are not the same. The energy of inspiration can originate from either bank of the river. After that, the one must move towards and through the other. In the making of a poem, experience must be strained through the altering membrane of language. Conversely, if the poem begins from the ingenious fabric of language itself, that language has to be stressed, brokered, swayed, battered, and transformed by the powerful presence of experience. One dimension without the other will not amount to the dramatic event of a poem. Either way, an alchemical process must occur. Otherwise there is no tension and no magic.

The process can be represented like this:



2. POEMS TRY TO GO ALL THE WAY THROUGH

One of the greatest virtues of poetry is that poems model the possibility of feeling *all the way through* an emotional process. Other poems demonstrate the act of thinking *all the way through* a thought or an idea. This maniacal doggedness is an essential quality of poems I care about.

Rarely in our daily lives do we manage to *finish* a thought or a feeling; we usually get lazy or distracted and quit halfway through. We don't seem to have the time to complete the process, and we dislike the difficulty and discomfort of the task. We walk around full of half-finished experiences.

As a teenager I was attracted to poems because I saw that they had a stubborn tenacity; they would keep chewing on a thing, shaking it after everyone else had gotten bored and gone home. Exhaustive tenacity is one of the heroic dimensions of poetry. And it requires heroism of the writer.

3. TORRENT OF TRASH

Most of what passes through the mind on a given day is just garbage, the same garbage that goes through everybody's mind—and highly redundant garbage at that. Why should artists be exceptions? Petty appetite, resentments, plans, calculations, wound licking, wishes, anxieties about what will happen tomorrow, or what happened yesterday. The daydream of daily life. Of course, great poems have been made from such material. ("This is just to say," for example, or "Lana Turner Has Collapsed.")

Nonetheless, the canny poet might learn to wait and watch carefully, to be selective about what to pluck from this torrent of trash. Instead of grabbing any old thing that happens to be floating by, we can cultivate our discrimination to recognize the occasional thought or observation that possesses some flavor of originality, of distinction, of an encounter which has not been told over and over again.

In fact, there IS such a thing as an uncommon thought, an uncommon perception of human nature, or even of nature itself. Every once in awhile

something atypical shows up, a phenomenon no one has mentioned. Recognizing such an event when it occurs, and snagging it before it disappears downstream, might just be a great labor saver. It may even be a kind of talent of its own.

When you observe the *unfamiliar* quality of a passing thought, perception, event, or feeling, attach yourself to that one, and let the rest of them go.

4. EVERY POEM IS A PICTURE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

It is as dumb to deny the tragic character of the world, as it is to deny the necessity of hope in your account of human life.

The telling question for the artist is: what *sequence* are you going to arrange them in? That order of presentation says a great deal about the artist.

5. SLOW DOWN

You can learn more from reading a single book of good poems over and over than from rushing through a shelf full (or internet full) of randomly selected collections. You can learn more artistically from reading a single poem many times with great attentiveness, than from reading incidentally encountered poem after poem. (See Item #3)

6. REMEMBER:

No one knows what a poem is.

7. CHARITY? THANK YOU, NO.

Poetry is not a faith-based charity. If you don't understand a poem after a good hard look, or you just don't like the way it feels, that might be investigation enough.

Conversely, if you write something that can't be understood, or does not give pleasure (in one of the many ways that poetry can give pleasure), there is absolutely no reason in the world why anyone but your mother should waste their time on it.

The relationship between reader and poet, if it is real, must be reciprocally rewarding.

8. MFA BUYER BEWARE

In the attempt to make a vocation in American letters, it is treacherously easy to become embittered, greedy, careerist, and so on. Most of us have a hungry ghost inside: if you make the mistake of overfeeding it, you may turn into a jackal...err, I mean a complete professional.

An even more sinister possibility for poets is this: It is possible to become ironic without even noticing it. As if you had been infected by some tick bite, or drunk strontium water outside the gates of the AWP conference, clever mannerisms of voice and diction, and obliquities of structure may infiltrate your poetry with an almost inaudible scorn for experience and emotion. Attachment of the self to the world is (and always will be) the testimony that underlies every good poem. We act so civilized, but we still thirst for the depths.

How can this contamination be prevented? Only, perhaps, by a conscious and deliberate, overt, voiced *commitment* to the humanist soul-preserving agenda of poetry. Your choice must be made, and reiterated. Vaccinate yourself today. Read some Emerson. If you can't say, at least to yourself, "I am on the side of the soul," you should change your vocation.

9. GOOD WRITING IS NOT THE POINT

Suspect conspicuously skillful writing, or at least, don't overvalue it. Good writers routinely are lost in the poppy fields of flair and facility. Soon, they don't even know what they are hiding! Eventually, often, it comes to seem that they write so well in order to compensate for having little real news to convey.

A fresh piece of emotional intelligence, a new angle or perspective offered by a poem with adequate language is worth all the exquisitely crafted language in a poem by BH or HN.

10. DIFFICULTY

To write good poems, your life has to be difficult; or, to put it anther way, you must not expunge difficulty from your life. Fortunately, to sustain difficulty in life is not difficult. On the other hand, if your life is too difficult, or if you cultivate difficulty out of a hysterical need for it, this will not be good for your poems, or your life.

11. TEACHING

The job of a writing teacher is severalfold: First, to be a trove of information, a guide and an anthology of what exists and has been done; a reference book, to point students towards poets, poems and poetics that might introduce them to their lineage, and save them time.

Secondly, the teacher should be a reliable mirror for the student's work, describing it back to her or him, identifying with precision its stylistic and substantive tendencies, so that the student learns exactly what it looks like to someone who has read and thought about many more poems than the one at hand.

Thirdly, the teacher holds in place a set of aesthetic positions in relation to which students may form their own identities; they may absorb, circumvent, modify, flow around, or reject the considered poetics of their teacher—the teacher provides a fully developed landmark, a prominent reference point, by which to take one's bearings. It's not that the teacher has no prejudices or is Right; it's that the teacher holds a stable and articulated position.

12. BIG P, LITTLE P

You have to love Poetry more than you love Your Poetry. That way you have a hometown to go back to when you are lost, joyless, dry, and sick with the strivings of self. Big P has hot springs, and Ferris wheels, fear and trembling, motorcycle gangs and churches. It's where strangers tell you things. It's a good place to rest up and be restored. All your old mothers and uncles and girlfriends and boyfriends are still there. When my head is on straight, reading and writing make me happier than I have always been. When I am bent, and poor, and pathetic, and in need of restoration, I go back to Big P.

Camille Rankine

Golden Hour

the screen lights up with a message
about the sky the sky is a fire
I can't help but

be alarmed the way we ruin
are ruined that I could be
loved with an open hand

my stung countenance I wasn't
made mindful or in the right
mind I had nothing correct

to relate no frame in which
to frame my smile so
possible so numbingly

possible so tediously my lips dragging
against the grain as we turn past
each event in the sky determined

and suddenly I was good
for something my hands made a value
of the earth it was mine

it seemed to me because
I held it the story was
mine it's just that

time again that time
of night or in between
light the sound of tires

spinning against the rain
the earthquake of the train the echo
in the stairwell the static

of the city you can't see
the sky it was so pink I cried
I wanted to cry

Coincidentia Oppositorum

I like to think we were born
on the same day. Why not
let's speculate. Your heart

bent and hovering
over the front lawn. Mine
in contrails, softly

against the blue. If it wasn't
like that let's say it wasn't
at all. Don't let's

fight. Don't say I didn't though
I didn't. Let's put everything back
like we wanted. I raise my hand.

A conductor. Darling, lightning,
let's begin. You, singing
in the off key. Me,

in the wrong
skin again. Hold
your applause. Don't

approve. It's not
like that. Let's say
I don't know how to start

a fire without you. I just keep
talking, talking. I repeat: let's play
deity. We weren't born

at all. We were counter-
feit. I made you.
You made me, too.

Rachel Linnea Brown

Memento

What light do I draw

as I lie on this fresh-cut

lawn and watch lines

of ants track

through blades?

Tickle

my ankle. Do I

not move?

Wind knocks pears

from the tree

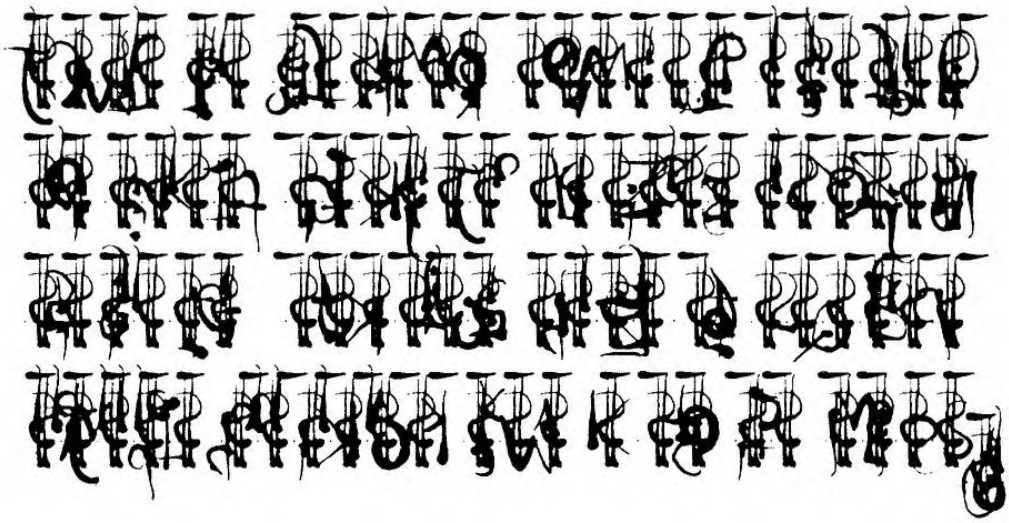
that bows with yellowing fruit.

Come worm. Come fly.

Here is one

for you on the ground.

Amy Butcher



A Slow Kind of Unraveling

I was standing on the cold, dark tile of the bathroom floor when I realized I didn't know how to live without him. It was Sunday. I was barefoot, brushing my teeth. What happened was this: I decided that if I were one tile, and he was the tile caddy-corner to mine, and we were cemented like that, there on the ground, I wouldn't know how to live. He'd be too far away. This is what I found myself thinking: *We could not be tiles that are not right up against one another.*

It was crazy.

So I got in my car and drove. There didn't seem to be another option. I had this idea then that maybe I was losing my mind, like maybe I'd gone bonkers, and then the next logical thought, of course, was that of course this was all his fault.

Even when it doesn't, I find it always comes back to him.

It was early, that time of day when the roads are empty, no cars. The interior of America was still sleeping in their twin beds, and I was panicking like I'd gone crazy, so I did my best to picture them, sweaty and bloated with sleep. It was a trick my mother taught me—I was five the first time she did it, placing her arms above my shoulders, pressing deep into my skin.

Calm down, she said. *Calm down. Try to think of something solid.*

She meant of the Earth: look at a pillow, look at a rug, look at your feet there on the floor beneath you. *Come back down,* is what she always meant, rubbing at the invisible things that—even at that young age—managed to keep her daughter panicked.

I looked out at the farm fields. I looked at cows and dairy barns, paint rusting clean off iron fences. She was half a country away but still I did it, like in those moments, we were connected. I passed one corn refinery and then another, and that seemed to me a sign, so I pulled over in the parking lot and turned the engine off.

What I was waiting for, I'll admit, was that feeling you get when you let go—of anything, really. A house or a hand or a home. Then I thought about letting go of a person and how it's always the hardest thing. It's not just the person; it's the *idea* of the person.

It's the places you've put them in, right there, alongside you.

The machinery was big but silent, its silo looming in the Sunday heat. I sat there underneath it and tried to see just how I felt.

When I told him I loved him, I didn't say it because it was true. That much didn't matter. I said it because I needed to. It was something I'd kept inside of me for so long I was certain it might get lost in there. I pictured the words like strands of hair I pull from my shower drain—if I didn't say them, and say them soon, everything inside me would begin to clog.

At no point did I think they'd matter, those words I said to him.

I said them and then I felt relief, like a slow kind of unraveling. I imagined my kidneys and intestines loosening up, the organs red and gushing, pictured them wobbling around, colliding into one another, rippling, the hair that once held them wet with what was once a part of me.

He didn't look at me, just kept his hands at ten and two. We were driving. I said to him, "Did you hear me?" because I needed to know he had.

"Yes."

"Good," I said.

It was night. We were thirty miles outside the city. Or, less than a city, really—just a bunch of blinking buildings, rotting two-by-fours and chained-up bikes. He'd taken me away from it in an attempt to cheer me up; he knew those busy spaces made me feel crazy from time to time. He thought I'd benefit from Christmas lights strung on pine trees, scarecrows in overalls.

"The road opens up on this stretch of highway," he said, and I said that sounded like something I'd like to see.

We were both from a place of lights and rural people, whole plots of empty land, trucks that kicked up dust and men who spit from rolled down windows. We'd moved here years before without knowing one another, and when we realized our shared origin, it was like we grew closer overnight. Here, in our city-that-was-not-quite-a-city, people leaned into us when we spoke and were always asking where we were from. *Tell me about it,* they'd say, like it was altogether foreign. This was one of the reasons I knew it was love I felt and not some other thing: we both shared in common this far away place that I loved most.

When we reached the borders of our not-city, he said he wasn't ready to drive me home just yet. "Not right away," he said. "I'll feel awful about it later."

By then I didn't very much care how he felt.

"You need to take me home," I said. I tried to make my voice sound hard, like a woman at some point does in every movie. I didn't know what else he wanted. It's not like we could just go drink in the bar we usually drank in. We couldn't just play pinball. "What you need to do," I said, "is drop me off in front of my house."

He drove me there, and under the giant oak tree, put the car in park. He leaned in from his place behind the wheel—"Let's hug, at least," he said—but I knew he'd only said it because he was feeling like shit, or worse. The hug would allow him to feel better, a necessary indulgence.

"No," I said. I pulled my sweatshirt hood over my head so he couldn't see my eyes. It was snowing, after all. I didn't want my hair to get all wet.

What people don't say when they talk about love is how it's not always a good thing. This is something that goes largely unrecognized in television shows and movies; always the love is a good thing, and if it's not a good thing at first, it later becomes a good thing, with a man jumping a fence or throwing pebbles at a window or making pancakes shaped like a heart.

The first man I ever loved—he made me pancakes shaped like a heart. But he did it every Sunday and eventually they didn't mean a thing anymore, because really, how could they?

They were as predictable as Taco Night.

This man couldn't make pancakes, probably not even from a box. That's not an exaggeration. He couldn't make pancakes and he couldn't make French toast. It always came out too wet. But he could make spaghetti with red sauce from a jar. He'd made that for me on several occasions, and always I ate it happily, slurping the noodles loud from my fork as they unwound and loosened from the prongs. He was the first man I'd ever known who did not care if I was not polite, and so I loved to slurp in his kitchen, knowing my slurping was not an issue.

"I love you," I'd said, and he'd said nothing like I expected him to. It didn't matter one bit, because he didn't love me back.

This is the kind of love I'm talking about: the kind of love that's bad.

I'd loved him at that point for months without saying, which is the way the drains work in my apartment: they work for a little while, and then they don't because they clog. Once, I had him over to look at them—back before I realized I loved him—and he analyzed the flow of water for a long time before telling me all I needed was some Drano. I didn't know, because I'd never encountered clogging before.

"Oh," I said, embarrassed. I was standing in my bathroom in my bare feet, and my toenails had been scrubbed of polish and I felt more embarrassed about that.

"You just give it a little pour," he said, squeezing the bottle, "and then the rest takes care of itself."

Back in the living room, we watched Jerry Springer and reruns of Maury, clicking the remote to turn on mute whenever the commercials came on. We liked to adlib, create the people's scripts, imagine whatever ailed them and then find humorous solutions that made it better. This was something we did often. Other things we did included drinking at our bar and eating spaghetti with homemade red sauce and talking about the books that we were reading and whether we thought they were any good. We were graduate students with no money but what we lacked we gained in time, so we did these things a lot, sometimes all at the same time.

There was an Italian place across the street—they delivered your food right to the bar.

The things we didn't do included going to movie theaters, eating in restaurants that lacked back booths, and talking about anything important, especially the ways in which we felt, which was something I was okay with until the time came when I couldn't be okay with it anymore, because of the clogging, and another thing.

Love that goes bad, I've learned, is not like eggs that go bad in that you can't just throw it out. If I could throw out the bad love, I would, believe me—it would be in my trashcan faster than you knew. And then it would be in the dumpster, and then rumbling down the street, and then it would stink and take up space in a field in the middle of nowhere, and I wouldn't give it another thought.

But it's not like eggs, you know. It doesn't just go away. And before long, that bad love rots up your life—an egg that grows roots, grows stems—and it ties up all the things you thought you loved and felt you knew.

And then you've got a real problem on your hands, because everything in your world is now connected to something rotten.

The other thing was this: I thought he was sent to me by God. This was just as wild for me, too, believe me.

I didn't even believe in God.

I'd only been to church three times: once for a christening, and once for a wedding, and once because my high school boyfriend's mother told me it would mean a lot to her if I went. It was Christmas Eve, and when she reached for my hand halfway through the service and squeezed, I'll admit that I felt a little something, however curious and fleeting. But every other time, I just watched people's mouths move.

But I noticed him and then I began to notice other things: coincidences. I see them now as coincidences, but before I didn't. He owned the same tin measuring spoon set that my mother did: the one with the uneven coloring and a million shades of gray. And his father had the same birthday I had, and his favorite football team was my favorite football team, and he wasn't even from that city. The same state, yes, but the other side of it. The one with the *other* football team. And when he told me his great-grandfather had once owned a house in my hometown, of course I didn't think that was just a coincidence. That had to mean something.

It was God coming through to me, I guessed, in coordinating measuring spoons and men in spandex. It was God telling me that I had been trying too hard all those times before—dating men who cut their spaghetti and placed their napkins on their laps, men who called creeks "estuaries" and held subscriptions to bi-monthly peanut-butter-of-the-month clubs.

So I loved him and he was sent to me from God, but now he was rotting and stinking and clogging everything inside of me, tangling it up tight and knotting it. And I'd tell him this if I could, but then I knew he'd call me crazy.

He dropped me off at home and of course I watched him go from the hidden place beyond my curtains. Never in my life has someone's absence exerted so much grief, like I was mourning him before he left, like he was honest-to-god a part of me and I'd missed some opportunity—however small—to finally set things right between us.

This time, however, I'd said everything. *I love you,* because I did.

In the kitchen, I pulled off my boots and jacket and my hair was wet, of course.

The hood hadn't helped at all. I poured a glass of wine and then I filled a tub with water.

"This is it," I said to everyone and no one in particular. By then I no longer felt relieved. I eased myself in slow, taking the time to feel my skin go hot. It stung like a thousand bees but I tried to imagine it was a gentle sting.

I lay like that, quiet, watching the ripples form and move from what was going on beneath: my heart pumping hard whether from love or necessity. Then I took a breath and I went under, squeezing my eyes tight against the heat.

The goal, of course, was cleanliness: like the same way water cleansed my body, a deep breath could make pure what felt impure. But of course I only thought of him: how nothing could help me now, not a drive, and not my mind, and in fact no amount of considering the hard, flat Earth could keep me tethered to my world.

I was drying off when I heard the beeping, so loud I panicked and dropped the towel. It was easy then to think it—I thought, *You are losing all your shit.*

And then, of course, came this: *It's just the carbon monoxide detector.*

The alarm was sounding in the living room, mounted just above the door, and I listened to it for thirty seconds before I thought to phone someone. You'd think I would be scared, but in truth, I felt relief. I was maybe not losing *everything.* I would hang onto my sanity.

"Get out of there," the 911 operator said. "I can't believe you're even calling."

I felt a little bit like an idiot, but I was also wet and naked, smiling like a goddamn fool, so I first pulled on a sweatshirt and brushed my hair and found my keys and thanked the Lord. For my sanity, I mean. And plus if He wanted to take me back, the least I could do was look halfway decent. I'd be found dead in my apartment, poison gases swirling around men in Hazmat suits, but no one would be able to tell the papers I didn't look pretty as it had happened.

In the car, I didn't know where to go. I couldn't go over to his house, which is probably normally what I'd do. It would send him, I thought, mixed signals. Instead I drove out to the outskirts of our not-city to a hotel shaped like a castle,

a real Renaissance-style place, and bought a room called the King's Lair and a Kit-Kat and a Coca Cola. Then I sat against the window, looking out at our still, dark town, which I liked as possibility: how I was home and yet not home, close to him but also far.

I watched from a distance as living room lights turned on, cars braked and blinked with color. Maybe, inside those rooms and cars, people were sharing the things I had. The uglier parts of their lives, all the things bad love made bad. A stepchild in purple hair-ties. Her custody, or worse.

Who's to say what they were saying? And there was a certain thrill in this: how I had no idea the parts of their life they were sick of sharing with just themselves.

I don't remember when I finally slept, but I know it must have happened. I woke and it was daylight and so again I filled a tub. I didn't have any experience with shaking love, and I felt awful, like I had the flu. I'd read somewhere that water always helps—it reminds us of our *first* origin, the home our species once inhabited before we grew legs and lungs and brains—but even in thinking about people as lizards, I found I only missed him more.

He'd correct my imagination. "Evolution moved *slowly,*" he'd explain.

The tub did no good again, and seconds later, there came those tiles—how even in their placement I felt worse—so what else could I do but get back in my car and go?

Maybe, when you can't rinse or throw away or distract yourself from what's upsetting, you get in your car and drive. You race out into the countryside, into the place we've yet to taint. You drive until the landscape becomes infinite landscape, until all those yellow fields bend into green where they merge with sky. You park beside a refinery and you stay quiet and you just listen.

You wait and you wait. There's no God out here. There's no imagined entity called love.

There's just these fields and you, this empty stretch of road that's opened up. These men hunting in the lowlands, clutching guns to their narrow chests. They're waiting for the sound of movement, for the first sign of any health, and you must live, somehow, despite them. You must remember that you're alive: that that right was given to you, as well.

You have to think about the processes: all it takes to maintain a life. Call to mind each and every organ: your lungs, your limbs, your heart. Picture the ventricles and all their movement—how hard they work even when you don't want them to. And then picture them renewed, the way a sponge takes shape with water.

The animals that survive—they do it by knowing their own behavior.

They know when to be a child or to look at the earth or else stay silent. One miscalculated move and there's no saying just how much damage. It doesn't matter how small the bullet. How insignificant it might seem. They don't give them the opportunity in the first place—to stake their claim on something pure.

Because bullet or bad love or otherwise, there's no telling how fast it moves. How quickly it ruins your everything. What does it matter, a gun or man? The last sound is always the same: the soundtrack to submission, the cry curling upwards and out of the throat.

Eric McMillan

Hadji

Hadji was a grey beard. On Route Mambo there were only grey beards and ninjas and seven-year-old punks. So far as we could tell, the grey beards had no jobs and no purpose in life except to smoke cigarettes and complain. Several of them would meet at the chai stand near the highway, a few dirty red and white plastic tables and chairs under a canopy of palm fronds, where they would drink tea, play checkers, and bitch without cessation from the morning's first prayer until curfew. They bitched about the government—"those mobsters"—and they bitched about the American occupation, and they bitched about the heat. We bitched about the heat too. That much we had in common.

Hadji kept to himself. He lived in a one-room adobe house that he shared with a dying heifer. Part of his ceiling, a few sheets of overlapping corrugated tin, remained open to the sky. Every day I made a point of stopping in to ask Hadji if he had any new information he wished to share.

"You are bastards," he said. My interpreter, Barzan, a magnificently mustachioed Kurd who loathed talking to the grey beards almost as much as we did, rolled his eyes.

"That is not new information," I replied.

We had our ritual. Every morning, Hadji pushed his empty cart up the road, and when he came back before sundown, the cart was empty again. He said that he went to market.

Each day I would be like, "You go to market with nothing. You come home with nothing. How is that not suspicious?"

Sometimes, he produced from the pockets of his dishdasha small tokens of his bartering, relics and artifacts. A withered Persian cucumber. A magazine ad for a Rolex watch. A pack of Gauloises cigarettes.

"You go to the souq every day?"

"Yes."

"And this is all you bring back?"

"Yes, Captain." He could be a polite asshole. Or artless. It was hard to tell which. Bowing and nodding and wringing his hands, he made himself smaller and smaller.

"Either you are lying," I said, "or you are the world's worst haggler." He laughed every time I said this, and then I would say, "You know what I think?"

"Yes," he said.

"I think you're working for them. I think you're passing information." Then I leaned in, real close, like I was taking him into my confidence. "Prove me wrong."

Hadji never did.

If he had been working for the insurgents, then he was such low-hanging fruit that we figured it wasn't worth our time to snatch him up and turn him over to the MPs and intel analysts for interrogation. The only suspicion I harbored was that we wasted a lot of time questioning the village idiot.

Then again, if your whole mission is a waste of time, why not talk to the village idiot?

Of course, that wasn't his real name, Hadji. For what seemed like forever, I tried to get my men to stop calling him that. It was disrespectful, a slur, something we were briefed not to do. The men tried, they really did, but the name stuck. Over time I let it go. I cut the men some slack because, after all, you've got to know how to pick your battles.

Route Mambo was a well-worn, one-lane dirt road that ran from the farms in the south up into the city. We didn't see much tactical value in it. Neither did the previous rotation. Our replacements, who would eventually repair the damn thing at the insistence of the local nahiyah council, didn't care much for it, either. But some pencil-necked nerd up at the Puzzle Palace must have known something we didn't. Instead of committing our company to the incessant fighting in the city—which is what we thought we were supposed to be doing there—we sat out the war on Route Mambo, the men dying slowly of boredom, until at last, after a few months of playing "picket line" on a deserted country lane, I got so fed up that I went to see my boss, the Lieutenant Colonel, up at HQ, to see if there wasn't anything more useful we could be doing.

"Nope," said the Lieutenant Colonel. "Can't win a war without roads. Supplies have to move south, casualties have to come north, that sort of thing."

Sensing my consternation, he added, "This may come as a bit of a surprise to you, Captain, but you and your men are doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing."

"By doing nothing?"

"By holding that road." Whenever his patience wore thin, the Lieutenant Colonel spoke to me slowly, as though I were a retarded child. "We're keeping the enemy out, keeping coalition forces in business, and showing the locals who's in charge. So, in effect, we're winning."

"That's what victory looks like," he said, and I said, "Like nothing?" and he was like, "Like crickets chirping. Like tumbleweeds blowing. Like paint drying and grass growing and whatever fucking metaphor suits your fancy."

So the company sat out there for another month, a month in which nothing happened, and despite the fact that innocent civilians and soldiers got butchered in the city streets every day, not a single shot got fired in anger out on Route Mambo. A month: all day, every day, day in and day out, rotating platoons through shifts until every day became the same, the interminable crucifixion of those long hours on the road and the slipshod hours in the rear spent getting ready to go back out.

Long hours, we sat and we watched and we waited. There were four posts on Route Mambo: one near the grey beards' chai stand, one next to a shady grove of acacia trees where thrushes sang at sundown, one next to an abandoned fertilizer plant that hosted a pack of wild dogs, and one next to Checkpoint Tango.

That's where Hadji lived. Aside from his house, there was nothing much to see. A bend in the road atop a culvert with a wide dried up canal full of reeds that stretched back to the west, where a grove of palm trees wilted. It was so boring it made me want to stick a knife in my eye.

In June, temperatures rose well over a hundred and ten degrees. Each day we spent staring at ruts along the side of the road, dust djins, and haze on the horizon. We marked the time in rings of sweat. The barren fields fissured and the mud hovels cracked. Reeds spontaneously burst into flame. On more than one occasion, I witnessed an emaciated ox halt in the middle of the road, collapse on its haunches and drop dead.

Although thirst was probably the culprit, we suspected suicide.

By the time July rolled around, I told myself, *Goddamnit, I have a responsibility, a responsibility to my men and the prosecution of the war.* So I barged into the doublewide trailer housing the Battalion HQ, straight into the Colonel's office, and told him the truth.

I told him about all the side missions I'd undertaken of my own initiative to root out any insurgents along Route Mambo. How I'd sent patrols up and down the road, entering every farmhouse and hut and shack within a two kilometer radius, how we'd probed and prodded and dug up the fields and combed the palm groves searching for caches. I showed him the database we'd built with digital photographs and fingerprints and retinal scans of every man, woman, and child. I told him about the aerial drones I'd sent overhead, the random search checkpoints, the bomb-sniffing dogs, how we'd even conducted pat-downs and waved metal detectors and searched under cars with mirrors.

He looked at me in amazement. "We had a lot of time on our hands," I said.

And after all of that, I told him, we still found nothing, no evidence to suggest that the insurgents were active along Route Mambo.

Look, I said, if the insurgents want to smuggle weapons and fighters into the city, they have literally hundreds of ways to bypass us out there. We're merely inconveniencing some farmers who happen to suck at farming. Then I asked him if he would please, please, please, for the love of Sunny Sweet Jesus, pull us back and commit us to the real fight by sending us into the city.

The Lieutenant Colonel, whose head was down and who rubbed his temples between his thumb and forefinger, squinted up at me, lips curled and nostrils flared, and told me to cut the road at Checkpoint Tango. I almost didn't catch what he'd said, I'd gotten so carried away.

"It's become imperative to cut the insurgent ratlines into the city," he explained.

"Sir, weren't you listening to me?" If his pistol had accidentally discharged in the room, I couldn't have been more taken aback. "What about the supplies that have to go south, the casualties that need to come north?"

"Captain," he said, as though I'd insulted his intelligence, "that's why we have helicopters and alternate routes and armored trucks."

Well, I didn't need to be told twice, so I hastily planned a patrol, pulled together the necessary resources, and that very night led a convoy of flatbed rigs down to Checkpoint Tango, where, with a backhoe and a crane, I supervised the excavation of the road. A tank ditch: six feet deep and six feet across. On each side of the ditch, we hoisted into place a series of three-foot Jersey barriers made of reinforced concrete arranged into chicanes to block traffic. The job took all night.

When the sun came up and curfew was over, out came Hadji to inspect the work in front of his house. He demanded to know how he was supposed to get his cart to the market now, pointing at the tank ditch.

"This means that we will leave," I told him. "Gone. Departed. Adios. Vamanos and vaya con Dios, amigo. We are out of your hair. You are free, Hadji. Free."

As this dawned on him, he rubbed his beard and shook his head. From his house, he retrieved a prayer rug he'd woven out of dried reeds.

"I pray for you," he said. "God have mercy on you, you bastards. Fem'allah."

I examined the prayer rug and said, "This is one ugly piece of shit," then turned to Barzan and told him not to translate that. Then I smiled at Hadji and said, "Good. Shukron. Good." Hadji shook my hand. At first, he moved in to kiss me on both cheeks, but then he drew back, as if he thought better of it, as if it were,

perhaps, more fitting to take my hand instead. His hand felt limp. I smiled again and thunder clapped him on the shoulder, then led the convoy back to base so that the company could prepare for combat in the city.

"Hold on a minute," the Lieutenant Colonel said when he took me aside in his office. "I never said your company would leave Route Mambo."

"But—"

"—An obstacle is an obstacle, and when you put one in place, it is worthless unless constantly observed."

I hated to concede the point, especially when I knew how disappointed the men would be. Most of them would rather take a bullet to the face than spend another minute staring off into the vast abysmal plain surrounding Checkpoint Tango. Some of the boys even worked up the nerve to tell me as much. They were soldiers and they wanted to fight. A man likes to feel that what he does is going to make a difference. But the Lieutenant Colonel was right.

The summer wore on, and because summer is fighting season and everyone's pissed off by the heat, there was a significant uptick. My buddy Andy, who commanded Bravo Company, lost two of his men in a firefight, and Chris over in Charlie Company lost one to a sniper, and they were both like, "Hey, why aren't you helping us out in the neighborhoods?" and I was like, "I don't know." I felt like a schmuck.

On Bastille Day, the insurgents decided to celebrate by blowing up a couple of fuel tankers, about 250 meters from the chai stand. It burned for hours and was a horrible fucking mess to clean up, but by the time we'd finished responding to it and returned to our posts, lo and behold, we discovered that all the Jersey barriers had been knocked over into the ditch, and that someone had backfilled the hole using a tractor, packing in the loose dirt on top. This created a new dip in the road, and there were tire tracks traversing it.

When the Lieutenant Colonel came to investigate for himself, he dismounted his truck, stormed around the remnants of the obstacle, spat on the ground, and said, "Motherfucker!"

Hadji, who happened to be outside his house, tending to his dying heifer, copped a squat and grinned like an idiot at all the commotion.

"Look at that little cocksucker," the Lieutenant Colonel said.

"Sir," I said, "you're barking up the wrong tree. We're down here every day with this guy. He doesn't know anything."

"The hell he doesn't!" The Lieutenant Colonel gathered Barzan and me and stalked over to Hadji. "You know who's behind this."

Hadji waited for Barzan to translate, looked up, and shrugged.

"I know you know who did this," the Lieutenant Colonel said. "You can't not know. You saw, didn't you?"

Hadji said that he'd just returned from the market. As evidence, he pulled two onion bulbs from his pocket and held them up for our inspection. "They are for her," he said, referring to his heifer.

The Lieutenant Colonel looked so mad he could have knocked the onions out of Hadji's hand, like he was about to kick the cow square in the ribs, but instead he turned to me and instructed me to detain Hadji. That's pointless, I tried to argue, because without evidence, the holding facility would turn him loose in a matter of hours. The Lieutenant Colonel wouldn't hear of it.

He said, "Well then a few hours in a cage might make him reconsider how much he knows."

"That'll just waste everybody's time, sir."

"Captain," he said, "if I didn't know any better, I'd think you were sticking up for this, this *hadji*."

Now, I didn't trust Hadji. Who's to say he wasn't playing us for suckers? Who's to say he hadn't, at the very least, been an informant or, at the very worst, organized the obstacle's destruction? But on the other hand, who's to say that any one of a dozen local farmers with access to a tractor wasn't behind it, having capitalized on a long-awaited opportunity to repair the only thoroughfare to get their livelihood to paying customers in the city? The whole thing was stupid, and *goddamnit* it was hot, and frankly, I didn't care if Hadji had to spend a few hours in a holding cell. But there was the principle of the thing.

"You know," the Lieutenant Colonel kept repeating to Hadji. "You saw."

Hadji kept grinning.

"How about I give you some time to think about it, then I come back down here tomorrow with a tank, and if you still can't tell me who's responsible, I'll hold you accountable."

"Sir, we can't do that," I said.

"He doesn't know that," said the Lieutenant Colonel, who squatted down and met Hadji's blank, unflinching face with a penetrating gaze.

"All I want is for you people to live in peace," the Lieutenant Colonel said, changing tacks. "If you people can just live in peace, then I can bring my men back home. Don't you want that too?"

Hadji offered us one of his onions, either because Barzan's translation was bad or because he didn't understand what the Lieutenant Colonel meant. Or maybe he understood too well. Who knows? I found myself wanting to tell Hadji to wipe that smile off his face, to stay still and let the whole thing blow over. I considered telling him if he could get whoever was responsible to lay low and not interfere, I'd pay cash.

"The future is in your hands," the Lieutenant Colonel warned.

Hadji just picked his teeth and returned to swatting flies out of the dying beast's damp and wild eyes. Exasperated, the Lieutenant Colonel bolted to his feet and said, "All right! Goddamnit, all right!"

Then the Lieutenant Colonel walked back to his truck, but not before telling Hadji, "This will be on you." I looked over my shoulder again at the old man as I followed the Lieutenant Colonel back to the convoy. After all the times I didn't snatch him up, this was how he repaid me. Hadji stood there cradling the heifer's face delicately in his knotted hands, inspecting her gums.

The second time we attempted to cut Route Mambo, a suicide bomber detonated himself in the middle of the market in Charlie Company's sector, so we had to hurry up because they needed the crane to clear the rubble. That time, we dug our tank ditch eight feet deep and eight feet wide, removed all the debris from the demolished Jersey barriers, and in their place erected Texas barriers, eight feet high.

When the obstacle got torn down again, the Lieutenant Colonel made me go down to Checkpoint Tango and arrest Hadji. Even though he must have heard us coming, he lay there on his grass mat without stirring and looked up at the stars through the hole in his roof, then came quietly.

"Yes, Captain," was all he said.

It was the day after the insurgents overran a police checkpoint near the mayor's office that we went back to rebuild the obstacle a third time. The Lieutenant Colonel wanted the Texas barriers to have a warning spray-painted on them; he even chose the wording. I asked Barzan to translate the message for me.

"It say no to destroy obstacle or we kill you."

I pointed out the folly of this to the Lieutenant Colonel. "You know most of the people who live on Route Mambo are illiterate, right?"

"Either way, that obstacle is PDSS now," he told me.

PDSS, a person or place designated with special status, a justification for the exercise of lethal force to protect politically sensitive targets. Normally, that kind of thing gets reserved for a national President or the Parliament building and not for a hole in the ground, but the Lieutenant Colonel was adamant. "I cleared it with the lawyers," he said.

The situation wasn't the Lieutenant Colonel's fault, really. He was doing the best he could. By this time, pretty much all hell had broken loose in the city, and we routinely conducted raids and searches in the neighborhoods when the other companies got stretched too thin.

The fourth time, we replaced the Texas barriers with Alaska barriers, ten feet high, and the fifth time, we installed surveillance cameras that had motion detectors built in and a direct satellite link to a battery of 155mm howitzers on the nearest firebase. That way, someone would always be watching the obstacle, even when we got pulled off.

Of course, when the cameras actually caught a group of men digging in the tank ditch a few days later, a barrage of high explosive shells practically vaporized the saboteurs. It also inadvertently destroyed the cameras. So on the sixth time we returned to Checkpoint Tango, the Lieutenant Colonel ordered me to set a trap.

"I want those sonsabitches stone dead," he said.

Although I knew the mission was bogus, I didn't have the heart to contradict him. The Lieutenant Colonel was having a rough go of it. The day before he ordered me back down to Checkpoint Tango, a new type of roadside bomb, one we hadn't seen before, incinerated a truck from Bravo Company, killing four men, and that pretty much convinced the Colonel that the bomb came from the farmland around Route Mambo.

Still, just in case we were jumping to conclusions, I decided to schedule the mission for Friday, reasonably certain that the locals would observe the Sabbath, or whatever they call it, and not interfere with the obstacle between sunsets. First, I placed a sniper team in Hadji's house; he'd been in detention at the holding facility for weeks, so I figured he wouldn't mind. We cut loopholes in the adobe walls, slits just large enough to take aim out of. In the dried canal bed, masked by reeds, I left two squads in an ambush position.

Before noon, three men passed out from heat exhaustion. Twice I thought we might have to abort the mission because a couple of teenage boys herding goats passed within a few paces of the ambush. Scorpions crawled over my boot. All day we tried not to make a noise when eating or drinking water, not to stand up or stretch or yawn. When we had to piss, we rolled over and pissed on the ground next to us. We communicated by hand and arm signals alone.

No breeze moved through Hadji's house, and the sunlight through the open roof stabbed us in the neck. I could not bear to look at my watch, and I could not bear to watch the obstacle. The whole day passed in a state of agitated meditation, waiting for sundown, when I could pull us off target and egress back to our extraction point.

The plan should have worked.

Not a single soul showed up until dusk, when a man with a shovel climbed down in the ditch and began hacking at the sides of the hole. "Shit," I said under my breath, and we froze. The man started to fill the ditch back in.

So we shot him. I didn't want to, but we had to. We shot him, he dropped the shovel and collapsed, and we waited for him to get back up, but he didn't. The men wanted to know what to do next.

Thing is, once you commit, you're committed, so even though the men were getting edgy about sticking around after our position was compromised, I told

everyone to stay put. To see if anyone else showed up, either to help dismantle the obstacle or to fish the body out of the hole. That way, we could kill them too.

The sun went down, and I initiated a rest plan. Night was even more suffocating than the day. Slower too. I took the midnight shift and saw the dawn and drifted into sleep only to have one of the snipers tap me on the shoulder and ask if they should shoot the man standing on the edge of the tank ditch.

"Hold your fire!" I said when I saw who it was.

I walked out of his house with a few of the men to explain to Hadji what had happened.

"Welcome home," I said.

At first I didn't think he'd heard me. That stunned expression on his face. Looking at the man lying motionless in the ditch, he told me, "Police say leave, so I go. Days now. I walk." The trek had to be maybe 30 or 40 kilometers, and I could only guess that it had been hard on him. There were cracks and sores and blisters on his feet.

"Did they at least feed you well?" I asked.

Hadji made no reply and would not stop looking at the body.

"I've had to cut some holes in your walls," I told him.

Hadji looked through me, pointed to the body, and said, "That is my brother."

"Your brother?"

I didn't know whether to believe him. Hadji didn't seem upset. He didn't even raise his voice. If anything, he looked worn out: the eyes duller, the crags in his face deeper, the corners of his mouth drawn tighter. I studied the dead man to see if there was a noticeable resemblance, but to be honest, they all look the same to me. We stood in silence by the side of the tank ditch as if paying our respects at the man's grave, and I asked Hadji what he wanted to do. He asked for help lifting the body.

"We had no choice," I told Hadji.

"Yes."

"Wrong time, wrong place, simple as that."

"Yes, Captain."

"Was he an insurgent?"

Hadji never answered that question. We brought the corpse inside Hadji's home and set him down gently, and gave Hadji a few bottles of water so that he could wash and prepare the body. I even had the snipers try to patch the holes, though they botched it and made them worse. Later, we loaded Hadji's brother into his cart so that he could push the body another two kilometers down the road to the cemetery.

Not once did Hadji complain. He insisted only that we pay the reparations so that there would be no more bad blood between us. Of course, I didn't have the funds on me, so I wrote him a note, an IOU. It promised payment of 2,500 dollars. American, not dinar. I doubt he got the chance to submit the claim, because later that night the insurgents blew up the Ministry of Finance building.

"I know how much Route Mambo has meant to you and your men," the Lieutenant Colonel said to me in late August.

He called me into his trailer to give me some "bad news." I guess he thought I'd take it pretty hard and didn't want the news to come from anyone other than himself. I didn't have a clue why I was in his office. As Ramadan neared, the city lay in ruins and nearly anyone left with any sense had fled, including most of the insurgents.

"It's a shame that you won't get to see this mission through, Captain. I'm sorry." The Colonel clasped my shoulder. It had been weeks since the ambush down at Checkpoint Tango, and the company hadn't been back to Route Mambo since.

"But—"

"—But before I pull you back permanently, I need you to go down to Checkpoint Tango one last time and take care of it for me. Okay?"

"Take care of it, sir?"

"I want you to blow it up."

That would be no easy feat. To do the job right meant having the Air Force drop a 2,000 pound JDAM, but I knew that I'd never be able to push the approval paperwork through fast enough, so we had to do it ourselves. I figured that ten cratering charges and forty men carrying forty pounds each of C-4 blocks, bundled

and taped together, with enough shock tube and blasting caps and detonators, ought to do the trick. If tamped and shaped correctly, the resulting crater would be about a hundred and seventy-five feet across and fifteen feet deep. A hole like that would take weeks and construction equipment to repair.

So that night, I infiltrated down to Checkpoint Tango on foot with a platoon, and called inside the adobe house. Hadji was less than thrilled to see us. He must have thought we were detaining him again. Instead, I gave him an eviction notice.

"It's for your own safety," I said.

He refused to go at first. "This isn't the time to be stubborn," I said. And it wasn't, because all the charges were set and the airspace had been cleared for detonation, and we were running out of time to back off the minimal safe distance.

"I not leaving," he said.

But leaving him simply wasn't an option. He wouldn't have survived the concussion, let alone his house collapsing in on him.

I had some of the men zip cuff him, drag him out of his house, and escort him up to the abandoned fertilizer plant. There, we took cover in one of the old brick buildings and got everyone down on their hands and knees, like in the tornado drills they made everyone do in elementary school, with our eyes shut and our hands placed over our ears to muffle the boom of the explosion. Everybody braced themselves, and then, just as we began the countdown, Hadji popped up and started shouting.

"We have to go back!" Barzan translated.

"The hell we do," I said. "Wait. Why do we have to go back?"

"He say he forget his cow."

There was no time, and I had to reach over and shove Hadji down onto the ground, pressing his body against the wall. Just then I looked up. The shockwave from the blast sucked the air right out of my chest, and I could feel it pass through the front plate of my body armor and rattle the back plate. Like the wall of a sandstorm crossing the desert, the smoke, dust, and debris came rushing into the building, and through that wall I thought I saw palm trees thrown into the air as though tossed by a hurricane.

We choked and gagged for over five minutes as everything settled, then marched down to the crater to investigate our handiwork. When he saw the rubble of his house and the carcass of his heifer, Hadji broke free of his guard's grip. He sort of went berserk. Although his hands were still tied and there really wasn't much damage he could do, a couple of men took off after him. "Let him go," I said.

For maybe another half hour, I could hear him running through the darkness. "You bastards," he kept crying. "You bastards! You bastards!"

But I sort of lost track of him after that. There were a dozen small brush fires ignited in the reeds we had to put out, and since there was not much water to spare, we had to kick sand over the flames and smother them with our boots. I had a security perimeter to man, reports to send over the radio to higher, and a couple of soldiers suffering the effects of mild smoke inhalation. Most of the men were over-the-fucking-moon that we'd finally gotten to blow something up. They ran up to one another and hugged, high-fived, and thrust their hips as if celebrating a touchdown.

Ash fell like snow. Our night vision became useless, the lenses clouded by fallout coarse as volcanic sand. Listening for Hadji's voice again, all I could hear was the sizzle and pop of palm fronds as they burned down to coals. I knelt down at the rim of that crater, still coughing from breathing in all that shit, and peered inside. Yes, I told myself, we'd made a neat, clean job of it. When I stared into the pitch black below, it was as if there was no bottom.

CJ Evans

The Cycle of the Dragonfly

1.

It's inside myself that I must create
that someone who will understand

that cold can be human, can accompany
me into my bed and take me in its mouth,

but I can't teach it to know me.

Dragonflies break from the field,

as if gravity has given. Bodies
hurl away with no hope of rest.

Ghosts are always by themselves.

2.

Ghosts are never present enough
not to be alone.

I know it's hard: but let's go toward
ourselves,

because if the orbit isn't balanced, gravity
brings the bodies close just to whip them away,

and when the shivers subside, the cold
holds me; it breathes on my lips.

Dragonflies gather in the pondlight,

and it's more than the space, it's my body
that's a wall.

3.

I can't teach you to know me;

every ghost is as skittering as sand,

and when the dragonflies cling to each other,
they puncture their partner's eyes.

(Pardon me for giving you this, hand
holding mine, but I don't want this for myself.)

With sky and with snow, the cold makes
a gray house and takes me inside.

Such force as this was
is so unique as to seem designed.

4.

There's so much energy released
in the snapping.

I'm a confusion of long corridors and locked
doors,

and I envy snow's ability to let itself
be burrowed into, to be packed and shaped around a body.

Ghosts warn me from wherever they are.

Kissing your face is the saltless and busy
patient work of love.

Dragonflies arrange like buckshot.

5.

Dragonflies arrange like storms,

Entropy is not drifting apart, it's moving
toward simplicity.

And I didn't know, I didn't know

I'll always be a foreign body.

The ghosts are forever the same—displaced
from the place that gives them meaning.

The cold is supple; it fits each person
as they are built.

6.

Let the avalanche replace me.

The paired dragonflies are violent, they drive
each other to a new trajectory,

and ghosts echo what I've taken.

At the end, the dust is small
and evenly mixed.

I am the stranger, looking.

I am the one who pulled my hand away.

Alone on the Ark with Sirius

Out of concrete with rebar bones,
tempered glass, I-beams, and structural
bolts, the buildings are impossible.

But they grow from this same
ground, and they sway the same,
and beneath our feet, the whims

of limestone seams can undo them
also. And we will all, eventually,
be carried away by wind.

I'm thankful for these things we make,
though I know we live above ghosts
of old cities, whose inhabitants

believed what we believe.
But the indelible mark isn't built.
It's in the wooden box of private

letters written in private years.
And not even the box and not
even the letters, but just this:

Dear CJ. Far from me, somewhere,
that thought was thought in a mind
so utterly not mine. Behind the storm

frames of a remote lighthouse
she lit the wick, and the light
breaks me from the endless order.

Melissa Kwasny

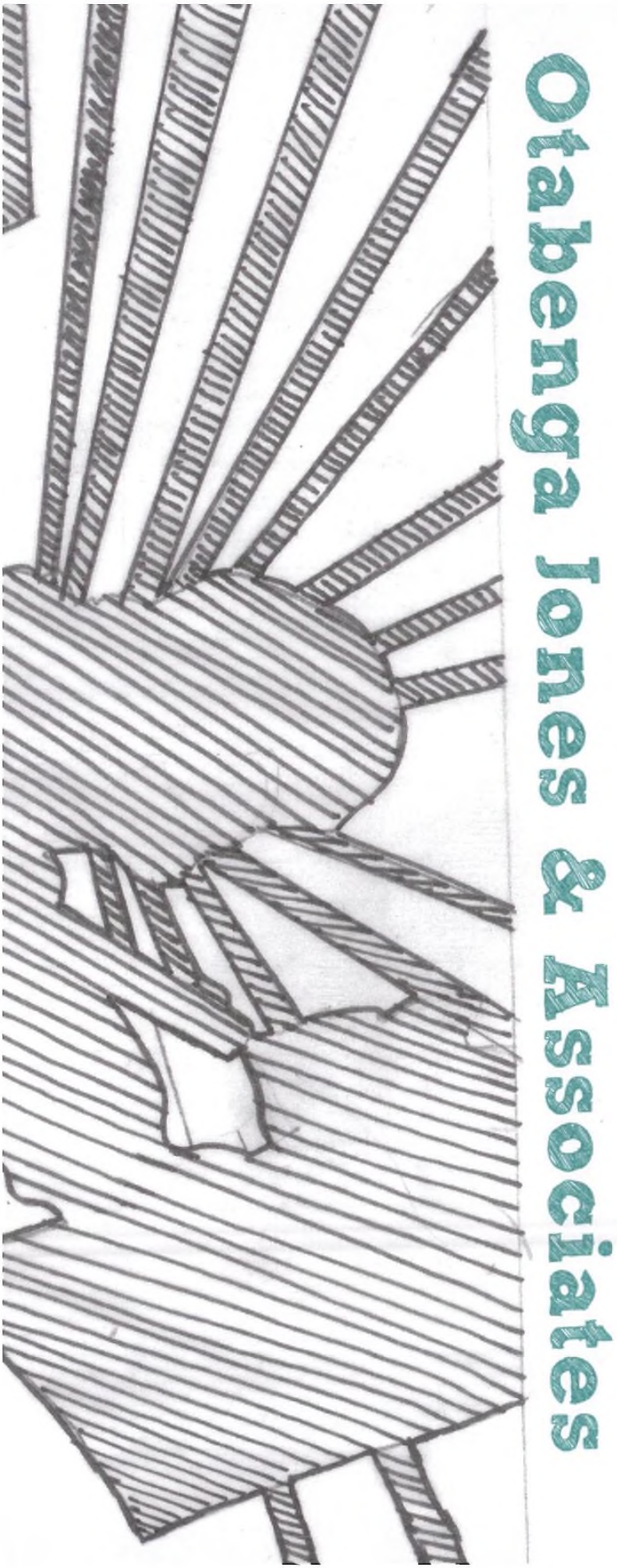
Another Letter to the Soul

It is the soul that binds us to the unseen and uncreated.
—Robert Duncan

You are the story of our love in ruins, the garden we planted in what was left of the concrete. You are the back step of childhood, mother and father so absorbed in each other their children were like ants got into the kitchen, a nuisance, an insignificant grief. Let us start there. Our pilot light, you led us out. We recognized you first in the side yard, in the hard-packed solitude where the roses grew. In our long adolescence, you taught us to bear the heavy self, like carrying loads in our arms of wet laundry. But what are your attachments? We feel as if we belong to you, but you belong to something else. You are older than us, wiser, more well-connected. What now, we know we keep asking. What should occupy us in these last days? Day air in the clearing, life-long friend of trees, it is possible that you direct the full itinerary. Arboretum of the unclaimed versus of the leaf.

You are the sound of rain, if it weren't falling but rising from below, a ground-nester, not a tree one, such as the bobolink or longspur, created below our feet, like the oil is. Rain in the ears and snowmelt rushing through the heart, a distant sound, as of the past retreating. Though loud, continuing your retreating presence. What can the flood teach us about you? We see frothing at the surface and watch ourselves pulled in, as if memory were an antithesis to gravity. Yet not knowing is part of you, whether we sink or swim, whether we abandon the house or stay and fight for it. When someone says "you will know," do they mean the soul speaks? What part, then, indecision, net of doubts we might call debris, web of plastic tape roping off the danger? Mud-banks where the deer's leg sinks in.

We are working out the days of the week, their attributes and powers. Today is the day of the dead again. On Tuesdays, we are heron, overtall, marked by blue, so quiet in public we are barely perceptible. Tree days, during which we whisper and don't answer the phone. We woke up one morning and vowed to practice: days when we are creek bed, taking naps and sleeping long. There are, of course, certain strains we have to bend to. Perhaps you reveal yourself as we get older, though you become harder to define, bedding yourself down, flattening the grasses. Like the deer under the cherry tree, gone at first light, yet, in late September, moving ever closer to the house. On deer days, we are alert for traffic, ready to abandon the road, remind ourselves to stay close to those who follow. Though it is not in the mind that we want to venture out. We enjoy our references, the laying out of the picture cards, but it is in the exterior where your visions must be enacted.



p.97 *I Am A Revolutionary*, 1969
Emory Douglas
Photo collage with prefabricated material.
Courtesy of the artist.

p.98–99 *The People's Plate*, 2014
Otabenga Jones & Associates
Lawndale Art Center Mural Project,
Image courtesy of Lawndale Art Center.
Images provided by Lawndale.

p.98–99 *Mural Studies*, 2014
Otabenga Jones & Associates
Digital collage, Graphite and Ink on Paper,
11 x 17 inches each. Courtesy of the artists.

p.100–101 *Lanier East Hall Men's Dormitory at Texas Southern University*, 2014
Otabenga Jones & Associates
Mixed media, Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston, Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

p.102 *Unity National Bank*, 2014
Otabenga Jones & Associates
Plaster, paint, wood, stanchions, felt, Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston, Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

p.103 *Lanier East Hall Men's Dormitory at Texas Southern University*, 2014
Mixed media, Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston, Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

p.104 *Carl B. Hampton Free Clinic*, 2014
Otabenga Jones & Associates
Wood, paint, metal folding chairs. Drawing by Mathieu Jeanbaptiste. Detail, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston, Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

Ryan N. Dennis

Art for the People's Sake[1]

Otabenga Jones & Associates, formed in 2002, is a Houston-based collective of artists Dawolu Jabari Anderson, Jamal Cyrus, Kenya Evans, and Robert A. Pruitt. The collective operates under the advisement of artist and educator Otabenga Jones, whose parents were members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a Black Nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914. Jones's namesake is Ota Benga, a member of the Batwa people from the former Belgian Congo, who was brought to the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 as part of an anthropological exhibit. Two years later he was put on display in the monkey house at the New York Zoological Park to illustrate human evolution.[2] Sourcing from this deep well of history surrounding Jones, the Associates engage new ways to address black representation and ideology in art, promote the core principles of black radical tradition, and "teach the truth to the young black youth."[3] Otabenga Jones & Associates identify and integrate within their work a shared repertoire of images and objects that urge viewers to question dominant historical perspectives. They aim to restore agency to the individual, mobilize time travel by sourcing and re-presenting African American history from 1960 to the present, and situate visual art within the complexities of contemporary society.

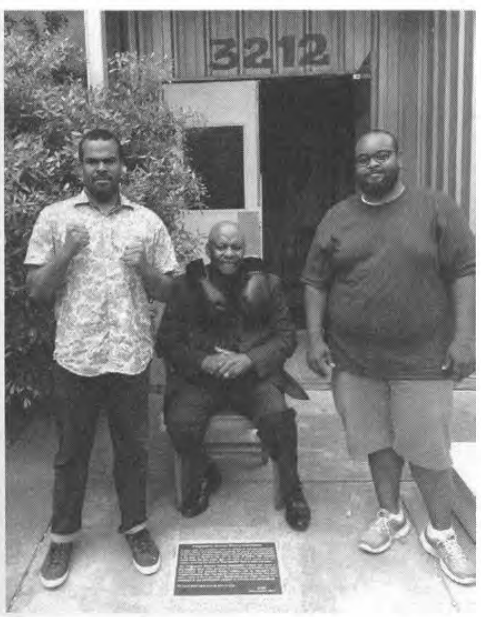


Fig. 1. Pictured left to right: Jamal Cyrus, Rev. Ray Martin, and Robert Pruitt at the historical marker dedication for Progressive Amateur Boxing Association (PABA), Houston, TX. April 12, 2014. Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Ryan N. Dennis.

[1] Title adapted from a lecture given by Emory Douglas at Fisk University in 1972, which focused on the role of art in the struggle for survival.

[2] Michelle White, "Pedagogy, Poetry, and Politics in the (Museum) Classroom," *Lessons from Below: Otabenga Jones & Associates* exhibition gallery guide, Menil Collection, Houston, 2007.

[3] From a line spit by Russell Tyrone Jones (1968–2004), best known by his stage name Ol' Dirty Bastard (or ODB), an American rapper and occasional producer. Jones was one of the founding members of the Wu-Tang Clan, a rap group primarily from Staten Island, New York that first rose to mainstream prominence with their 1993 debut album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*.

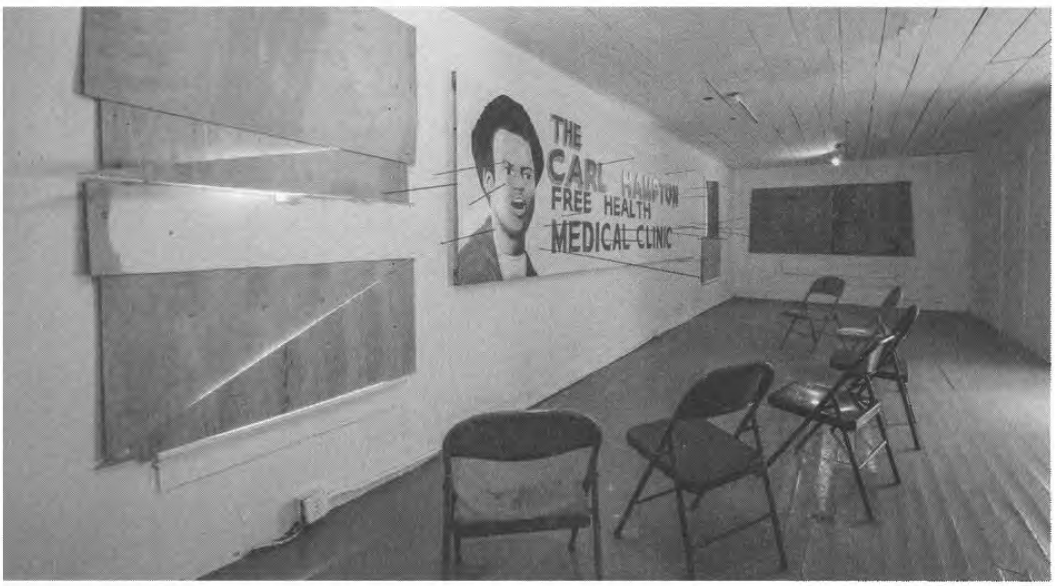


Fig. 2. Otabenga Jones & Associates. *Carl B. Hampton Free Clinic*, 2014. Wood, paint, metal folding chairs. Drawing by Mathieu Jeanbaptiste. Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston. Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

The group's myriad pedagogical methods manifest in writings, musical interventions, and installations, and explore the influence of African American history and culture. In 2005 they organized a public happening to respond to the controversial exhibition *African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in order to question who determines the value of African objects. The artists termed this happening a "seen strategy," emphasizing that the intervention was widely visible.[4] Then, in *Lessons from Below: Otabenga Jones & Associates*, which was on view at the Menil Collection in 2007, the artists presented an installation of books, objects, artworks, and artifacts which were united by their connections to black history and culture. These objects, both ancient and recent, were all selected from the Otabenga Jones & Associates' archive and from Menil Collection treasure rooms.

The artists culled and sifted through the elements of this exhibition in a manner recalling similar projects by Andy Warhol at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and Fred Wilson at the Maryland Historical Society, both of which presented objects mined from institutions' collections in ways that would not have been otherwise orchestrated from within. Otabenga Jones & Associates organized

[4] Franklin Sirmans and Otabenga Jones & Associates, "Correspondence," *Lessons from Below: Otabenga Jones & Associates* exhibition gallery guide, Menil Collection, Houston, 2007.

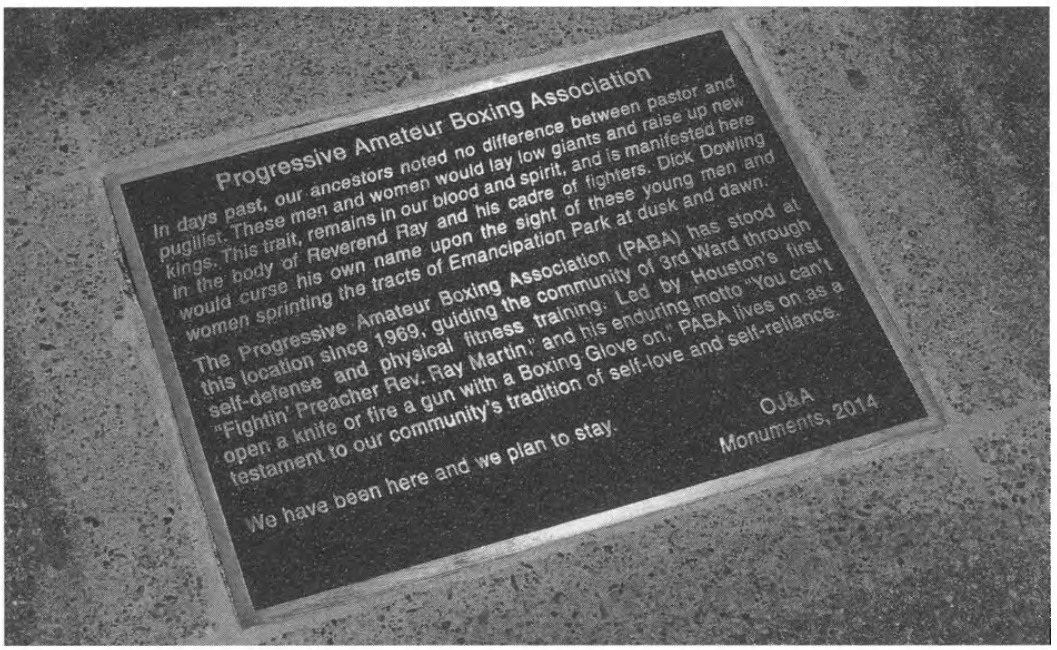


Fig. 3. Otabenga Jones & Associates. *Monuments: Progressive Amateur Boxing Association*, 2014. Historical marker. Courtesy of the artists.

a series of lectures in conjunction with the exhibition that included activist poets Amiri Baraka (1934–2014) and Obidike Kamau, artist Terry Adkins (1953–2014), professor and photographer Deborah Willis, and former Black Panther and political prisoner Jihad Abdul Mumit. By juxtaposing historical narratives with objects and ephemera and presenting public programs in a classroom-like setting, Otabenga Jones & Associates did more than "teach the truth to the young black youth." They also managed to teach people who weren't young or black.[5]

In addition to showing work in formal spaces like the Menil and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (where their work was showcased in the 2006 Whitney Biennial), Otabenga Jones & Associates has worked in alternative spaces and community-based arts organizations in Houston, including DiverseWorks and Project Row Houses. From March 29 to June 22, 2014, Round 40: *Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses featured Otabenga Jones & Associates' attempts to counter erasures in Houston's historic Third Ward.

In response to demographic shifts, housing redevelopments, and expansions at the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, Otabenga Jones & Associates identified five sites that have contributed substantially to the fabric

[5] Kelly Klaasmeyer, "Lessons from Below: Otabenga Jones & Associates," *Houston Press*, December 5, 2007.

of the neighborhood, all of which have maintained resilience through struggle despite the economic forces converging against them. This installation marked the first time all seven row houses, all of which are devoted to art or art installations, have been given over to a single artist or art collective. Inside each of the houses Otabenga Jones & Associates represented a neighborhood site, some of which are no longer extant: the Blue Triangle YWCA, the former Lanier East Hall Men's Dormitory at Texas Southern University, the Carl B. Hampton Free Clinic, the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association, Unity National Bank, and the work of sign painters Israel McCloud, Bobby Ray, and Walter Stanciell.

The group also installed plaques on the sidewalks in front of the Progressive Amateur Boxing Association at 3212 Dowling Street, and at the location of the Carl B. Hampton Free Clinic at 2828 Dowling Street, which in 1970 was a space that addressed the lack of health care in poor communities by providing accessible social services for Third Ward residents. The plaques are an "unseen strategy"—accomplished without official permission but with intentions of being very public—as a way to acknowledge the sites' relevance and value. The artists' gesture of marking and highlighting black history aligns with black radical traditions that promoted self-education and self-reliance as a means for defending black spaces and preventing systematic erasures. Otabenga Jones & Associates' actions call

Fig. 4. Otabenga Jones & Associates. *Sign Painters: Israel McCloud, Bobby Ray, Walter Stanciell*, 2014. Wood, paint. Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston. Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

— NO MINORS —

PASSWORD ENTRY
REQUIRED

DRESS CODE
ENFORCED

BYOB

ADULT AFTER HOURS

for a critical dialogue around black neighborhood sites by seeking participation of others to understand and tell the history of African Americans that occupy, enhance, and contribute to black spaces locally and nationally.

Otabenga Jones & Associates looks to the history of black power movements from the 1960s through the 1980s to edify their ties to the past, to continue successful methods of community action, and to acknowledge the strength of individuals willing to oppose the status quo and demand political, social, and cultural change. Their most recent project is one that can't be missed, literally. Entitled *The People's Plate*, the work is a public mural on the northeast wall of Lawndale Art Center, positioned off Main Street along a busy corridor leading into Houston's Museum District, where it is seen by 30,000 drivers daily—a seen strategy for the group. The mural is derived from a 1969 work by Emory Douglas called "All Power to the People" and depicts a young Black Panther holding a Panther newspaper in one hand that reads, "Dare to Struggle, Eat to Win." In his other hand he holds a bag of groceries. Commenting on the fact that a large number of residential pockets are "food deserts,"Otabenga Jones & Associates is attempting to raise awareness of the political injustices over having proper access to food and the related health crisis and risk. *The People's Plate* was inspired by the Black Panther Free Breakfast for School Children Program, a social initiative that provided breakfast to poor black youth in every major city with a Panther chapter.

In designing the mural, Otabenga Jones & Associates looked to the work of Emory Douglas, the former minister of culture for the Black Panther Party, to communicate their message. Douglas's graphic art practices helped empower communities and pushed the Party's agenda by creating a unified bold visual aesthetic of young black revolutionaries in action for their print materials. In *The People's Plate*, Otabenga Jones & Associates have similarly utilized visually striking representative tactics to highlight and address an issue that greatly impacts Houstonians, particularly those living in the Third Ward.

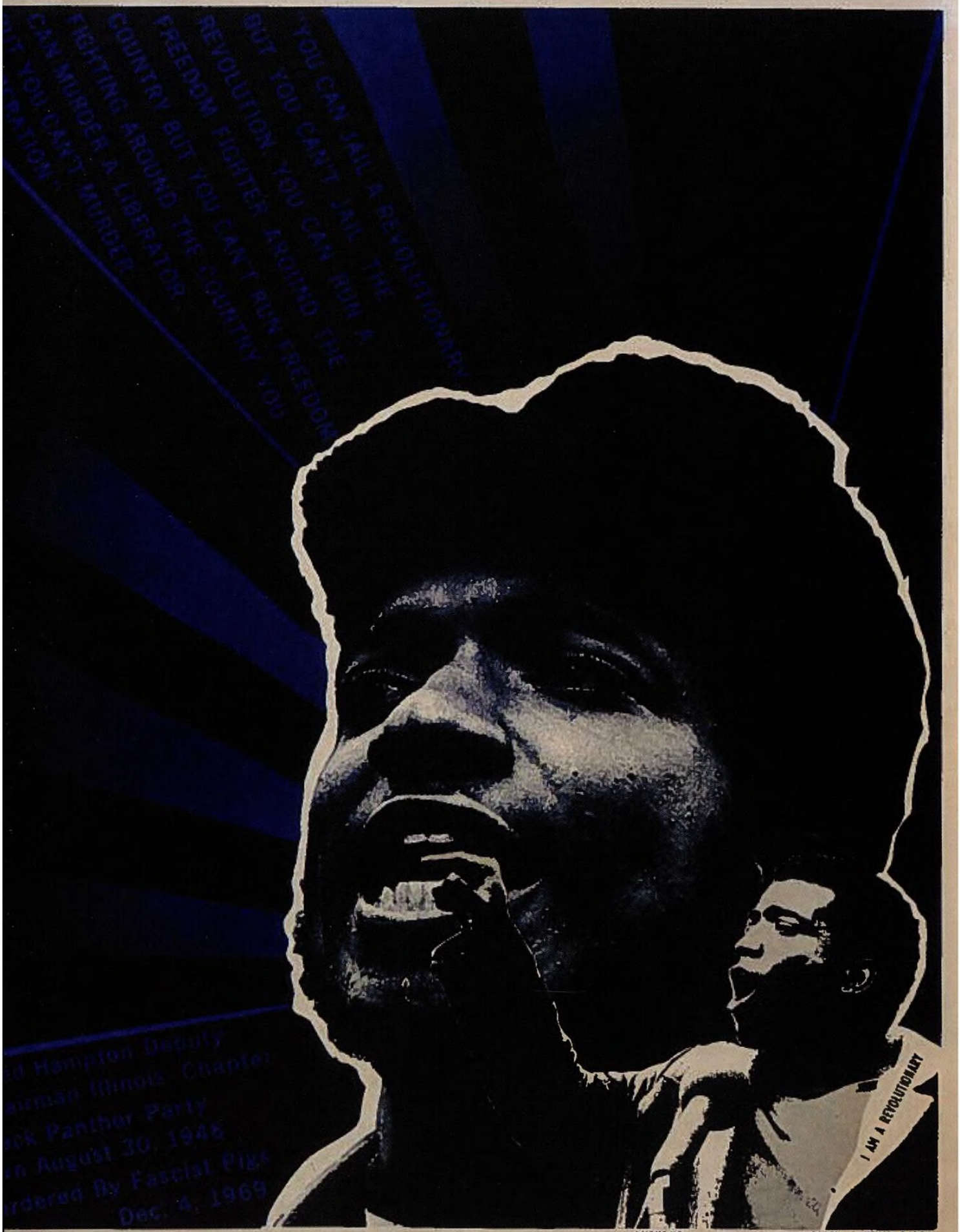
Otabenga Jones & Associates worked through a series of studies to make the mural, which reveal insight into their creative process. All of these studies incorporated Douglas's techniques: bold, colorful rays that lend a sense of movement or suggest action. The art collective ultimately decided to layer the rays and represent the architecture of a shotgun home. Their decision speaks to

Fig. 5. (opposite) Otabenga Jones & Associates. *Sign Painters: Israel McCloud, Bobby Ray, Walter Stanciell*, 2014. Wood, paint. Installation view, *Round 40: Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* at Project Row Houses, Houston. Courtesy of the artists and Project Row Houses. Photo: Alex Barber.

a vernacular African American architecture in southern black neighborhoods, addressing the local while highlighting any potential neighborhood impacted by food issues: poor, brown, and black. The artists worked with local consultants to translate *dare to struggle, eat to win* into Spanish, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Arabic, as they recognized the languages representing some of the highest populations of ethnic groups in Houston. They were also inspired by the Organization of Solidarity with People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) posters from the 1960s to the present. In addition to the mural, Otabenga Jones & Associates is organizing a series of public programs throughout 2014 connecting food, political struggle, and self-determination. These will include lunchboxes distributed to the public, as a seen strategy that promotes their causes and recalls Douglas's and the Black Panther Party's tactics of distributing ephemera.

A mural can offer a gesture of solidarity, recall the ways in which visual, spoken, and written language are used, and provide insight into the teller of stories, both spoken and unspoken. *The People's Plate* and its associated programs reflect an investment in the core values and pedagogical mission of Otabenga Jones & Associates. The work is not just a mural for mural's sake; rather, it uses an image that was the face of a hyper-political time in (African) American history to entice the viewer's curiosity, connect the past to the present, and recognize issues of food injustice as a real issue in urban communities. The mural, and its scale, is the ultimate seen strategy. There is no room for the work to be hidden, tucked away, masked, or misconstrued.

The artists have utilized "seen and unseen strategies" in powerful ways, whether in a mural, a protest, or by showing work in a formal art space or alternative space—their foundation of the past continues their intellectual curiosity for learning, re-presenting and creating what I like to call black radical ingenuity through artistic practices. The work of Otabenga Jones & Associates is a study in how the particularities of specific historical and ongoing struggle can be united to the struggles of others. Their work is expansive, stimulating convergent histories to produce a more complete understanding of black folks' place in that history, and inspiring new associations through relationships created by viewers of different backgrounds. Otabenga Jones & Associates activate layers of deep history to strive for the continued visibility of the past and its influence on the present and the future.


YOU CAN JAIL A REVOLUTIONARY
BUT YOU CAN'T JAIL THE
REVOLUTION YOU CAN RUN A
FREEDOM FIGHTER AROUND THE
COUNTRY BUT YOU CAN'T RUN FREEDOM
FIGHTING AROUND THE COUNTRY YOU
CAN MURDER A LIBERATOR
BUT YOU CAN'T MURDER
ed Hampton Deputy
hicago Illinois Chapter
ack Panther Party
on August 30, 1946
rdered By Fascist Pigs
Dec. 4, 1969
I AM A REVOLUTIONARY
PHONE NO.
BLACK PANTHER PARTY
W.MADISON ST.
CHICAGO,ILLINOIS


DARE TO
STRUGGLE,
EAT TO
WIN!


DARE TO STRUGGLE, EAT TO WIN!
12' 6"


ATREVASE A
LUCHAR,COME
PARA GANAR!
Dám đấu tranh ăn
để chiến thắng
आगप करहनयकी
हामबकरोखकरनिो
اجرؤ على النضال
أكل للفوز


ROYAL


T
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Matthew Olzmann

Contradictions in the Design

Here is the planet where Beethoven was deaf,
where Walt Whitman was fired for his poems.
The designer of the Eiffel Tower was afraid of heights,

and the guillotine was given the name of a man
who opposed the death penalty. And none of this
makes sense; none of this is reasonable. But this is how

the blueprint gets approved. A collection of scraggy lines,
like those illusions: posters where if you stare long enough
you'll swear an image pushes through. Don't believe it.

That's just your eyes as they begin to fail. I think of these
lapses in reason, of these men who built things,
and of what exactly they built, and of what exactly built them,

and I wonder about it all each time I envision the carpenter
who pulled this all together, the first designer who designed
the Earth and all its rooms. All his fears. All his strange

quirks, and bewilderments. Desires—terrifying or harmless—
scuttled like mice through his study as he studied.
How he was alone in the frost before time began.

Drafting and erasing and already: so tired, so frazzled,
confused. The tools he used, scattered about his desk.
The ripsaw, the bucksaw, the hacksaw and the lathe.

Elegy Where Small Towns Are Obscured by Mountains

I get news of an old friend's suicide
while I'm on the highway, in the middle
of moving from one state to another.
Questions: a swarm of hornets: *God,* and

Why? and *When?* and *How?* and then,
more difficult, a question that won't become words,
like a door where the hinge jams, like a silhouette
that won't step into the light, and abruptly

I remember my dad—decades ago—wrestling
a riverbank with a fishing pole, how he struggled
with a shadow that thrashed beneath the surface
and he could never wrench it closer. The hooked

mouth chose to remain submerged and violent
below the reeds and river moss. Whatever
question I can't ask now, is like that,
but I suspect it wants to know how the world

is different today, even though it's just one person smaller
and everything looks the same. Look at the rush
of cornfields. Look at the exit signs on sheets of steel.
Watch the cities as they shrink behind us.

I had not spoken to my friend in years.
There are reasons for that, but they seem small
when the Blue Ridge Mountains surge before you.
Then, you're among those peaks. Nothing but

trees, ridges and valleys so vast and ancient,
you suppose—if you could climb down inside one—
you'd locate the origins of the Earth. Eden. Actually,
there are clusters of homes. Diners that close

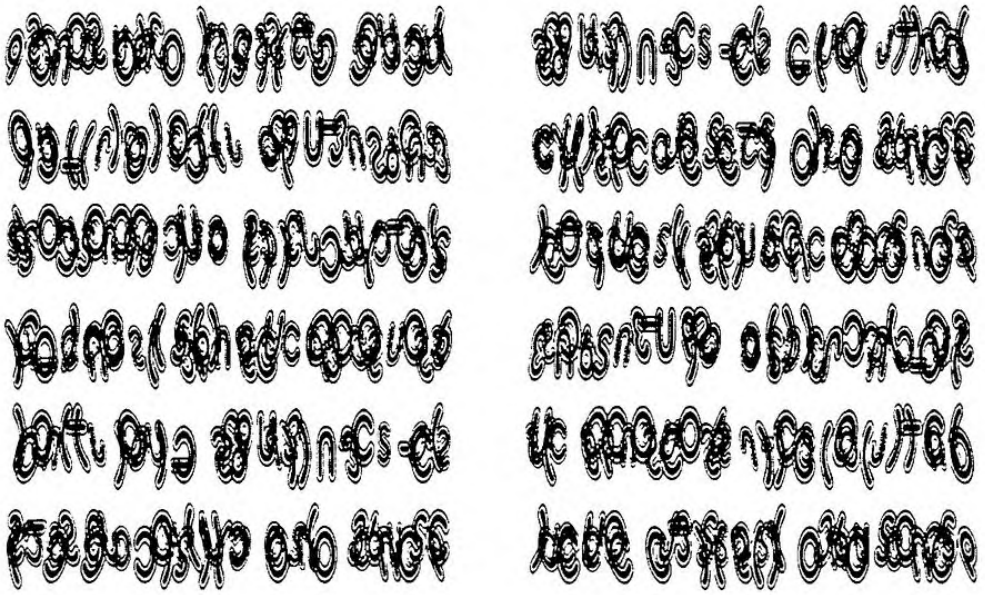
at dusk. Gas stations with one pump. I hope
the afterlife bends like one country road
into another, unseen from the greater highway,
and passing through small towns the way

autumn passes through the wind chimes slung above
the trailers and front porches out here.
Look at the peeling paint, the stoic railings,
and the wood warped by rain. There are all kinds

of stories eaten by history and silence
and neglect. Above a door, something stirs
the chimes, and reminds someone inside
that where there is wind: a song,

however faint. A man hears it, and passes
through a screen door into a night of fireflies.
He looks around as if called by a voice.
The wind has passed. The chimes are still.

Jonathan Callard



Explode

I never met Franny, but I know his face. In my mind I walk my father's family house in Nahant, Massachusetts, north of the Boston Harbor. Inside, I see Franny's black-and-white high school picture everywhere, the same one in different sizes: flaxen crew cut and upturned head, delicate cheekbones like his mother, shoulders squared in suit and tie. And the eyes. Melting almost, like you can step into them.

There's a life-size version outside the master bedroom where Grandmother would iron shirts; a smaller one in Grandfather's study, where relatives now keep dented Wiffle ball bats, towels, tennis rackets, a croquet set, dogs; another along the stairs to the second floor, where Grandfather fell a year before his fatal stroke; and then on the third floor, a photo from freshman year in college, the tiny oval of Franny's face among his classmates.

No one speaks his name. But if it is the first weekend in July, at the Nahant Village Church next to our house, the bulletin will state that the altar flowers are dedicated to Henry Francis Callard, 1937–1956.

When art students have trouble painting negative space, teachers often give them a viewfinder and construction paper and ask them to cut out its shapes instead, paste them on a surface. In the negative space surrounding Franny, in the holy glow of photos, a ghost.

When I visited my parents' home in Washington, D.C. several years ago, I noticed a watercolor painting of tiny houses on a snow-covered mountain hanging in the guest room. I had never seen it before. The hills looked blurry, submerged. The sky was dark; yellow light shone through tiny porthole windows. Three trees in the upper right hand corner, two in the lower left, the rest bare snow. A road winding diagonally, down, up, over, disappearing. "H.F. Callard" scratched just below the road at the bottom. An MFA writing student at the time, I felt a sharp jolt of recognition—here was a fellow artist, one who shared my father's blood.

"Did you see Franny die, Double?" My younger sister Hannah, just out of college. She calls my father Double, for T-Double C, Timothy Cooley Callard. I don't like the nickname; it shrinks him down to a baby, helpless, not in control.

"No, I was not there." My father's voice, far away. It's 2001, August, and hot, nearly a half century since the accident. He wears a green knit shirt, sweat stains under the armpits. He's driving all of us—me, my brother Andrew, my sisters Hannah and Katharine, my mother—to a New Hampshire lake.

"Who told you what happened?" My twenty-eight-year-old voice.

"Aunt Libby told me."

"Was Franny dead when you found out?"

"Yes."

"What happened to him, Double?" Katharine too. Double.

Two boys and a girl go sailing in Nahant. Franny and his brother David and Anne Bangs. They swim in from the boat, David sees his brother go under, dives down, finds him, pulls him to shore. People try to resuscitate the unconscious Franny, he's swallowed water, they try an artificial compressor, no use.

"We need to get gas," my father says, and takes the next exit. Hannah massages his shoulder by the pump as he fiddles with the handle.

"You never have said that much about Franny, Double."

"Nobody asked me."

I got my father's attention with deeds. As a boy at a boarding school headed up by his friend, I couldn't stop pushing myself—I measured my worth in A's and athletics. Until my body and mind gave out, until I had to leave Groton and enter the hospital, a twenty-three minute walk, on streets, from where I had once lost a shoe as a boy ("Use caution," says Google Maps—"this route may be missing sidewalks or pedestrian paths").

After the hospital, I began to reconstruct myself through writing. When words—and emotions—swamped me, I ran away to find my other shoe—retreating to schoolwork and sports to keep from drowning in rumination. From then on, caring so much about anything scared me, but so did stopping—pauses could lead to paralysis.

Franny was a painter. He made the mountain covered in snow at my parents' house, the samurai cut out of reds and blacks hanging in the Nahant living room, the watercolor of the Nahant Village Church in the dining room, the lines of its stones rising and falling, like it's floating, a ship bearing people and prayers aloft. Franny could touch its wall from our driveway, just walk thirty feet across the grass.

Franny is only nine this Nahant summer. Maybe his short sleeves droop loosely on his arms, one hand grasping a brush, the other a palette. His knobby knees perhaps poking out of his shorts, his tennis shoes gripping the gravel. He's learning to be still, to view the church in front of him through small strokes, the edges of its walls and roof forming the sky.

I came to believe, as a child, that the silence around Franny meant that someone had done something wrong. But now, I'm wondering if there is a link between my own fear of stopping, and my lack of knowledge about Franny. If in both cases I have misperceived, if in pausing to raise my voice, I am breaking the surface of my shame, and a family's pain.

My father doesn't want to put a halo over Franny's head, he explains in our interview, but he marvels at how kind and gentle he was, with a vulnerability that was almost Christ-like. I've come to know Jesus as much for his lacking as his giving—like Franny, or my gung ho, pre-hospital self, or perhaps even my father, he is the figure just around the corner, the person who loved us, left us, and whom we always desire to return. We tell stories about him. In her novel *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson writes that Jesus's friends missed him so much after his death that they started to see him on the road, or on the beach, or in their home. As if his negative space allowed them to know him.

Jesus kept busy. But in the midst of his labor, he had the courage—no, the need—to stop. He worried. He wept. "And in the morning, a great while before the day," Scripture reads, "he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'" Prayer became his power. Perhaps there is agency in letting go.

Franny is permanently still. He stands in relief to my own life of frenetic motion, a trait picked up from my father.

I found my father sealed in pages of yearbooks, leading a football sweep, searching for someone to block. His helmet, a u-shaped bar curling down from the top of the mask, made him a saber-tooth Princeton Tiger. He moved. He could not deny ambition, despite Franny's death; maybe he too was trying to win someone's affection. His father, like mine, was principal of his son's school.

When my father started up a school in a cornfield in my teens, he drove us there every morning over dirt roads in a green Peugeot with a hole in the floorboard. I treasured this time with him—I could reach out and touch his tweed jacket from the back seat. The road rushed beneath my feet, so close, as close as his breath to my cheek in the night corridor of my fourth year, bending, singing to me *hush, hush, whisper who dares / Christopher Robin is saying his prayers,* then in the early morning spinning on a yellow bike to Princeton, satchel over the handlebars, the university's youngest admissions dean, tense as a tripwire.

Jesus dunked his head in the river, and God said, "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

Franny was born as a surprise. After Grandmother gave birth to Uncle George, her first, she was told she could not bear any more children. When Franny arrived four years later, he was a miracle. He was named after Grandfather, had his red hair—something I did not learn until my interviews, because in early black and white photos, he looks almost blond—slack-jawed, his mouth an O, eyes wide as a fish.

His three brothers are natural athletes; he is not. They all go to Princeton; he does not. As a teen, Franny is timid, does not date. School is difficult for him, he doesn't fit in, has to work very hard to get B's.

I see a boy in Baltimore walking like a metronome, bullet head wagging back and forth, tracing lines in sidewalks on the Gilman Upper School campus with his eyes, noticing how cracks form shapes. A lone artist in a male-dominated family living at a jock school run by his father. I've stared at the same cracks, holding my father's hand as he led me to Gilman, he to work, I to first grade.

Franny's art teacher befriends him, invites him to Italy and France, and over the summer the boy becomes an expert in art history, grows in confidence, writes long letters home. His family joins him the next year when Grandfather does a Fulbright Exchange with King's School in England. On trips to the Continent, Franny is their guide, the most adventuresome of them all.

He returns from England to repeat the eleventh grade; his brother David, originally a year behind, now joins him in the same class. Franny bulks up. See him picking up his wooden lacrosse stick, cradling the hard rubber ball and whipping it against the brick wall of the porch at home, thud, thud, thud. Maybe he notices the space between the bricks, how the cement holds them together.

"I mean he was really maybe the strongest of all of us," David tells me. "We used to wrestle and I could beat him but it wasn't certainly because of strength. . . . He was very powerful, didn't know his own strength."

Once I worked at a prep school in Providence, Rhode Island. I lasted only a year as a college counselor and lacrosse coach before burning out at twenty-six—I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be still and know that God is God, beating no longer the educator path of father, grandfather. A colleague bought me breakfast at a diner before I left the school.

"You're in free fall," she said.

I have never been to England, but I go there in my mind when I'm afraid. It's where my strong self runs on the beach like the Olympians in *Chariots of Fire* with the anthem "Jerusalem" as a soundtrack, William Blake's words wondering whether Jesus visited England during his younger years, and made it heaven.... *And did those feet in ancient time / Walk upon England's mountains green* I sang in Groton School's chapel at sixteen; someone preached on the *dark Satanic Mills* and days later I couldn't think. When I ran my body hard in football practice, squeezing out endorphins to counteract black moods, I strained a groin, had to stop, and panicked—no longer, it seemed to me then, a master of my universe.

I'd left my father's school—where he had taught me philosophy and religion—to shine on my own four hundred twenty-four miles away in Massachusetts. I'd chosen Groton to become the kind of iron duke, replete with lacrosse stick and well-defined latissimus dorsi, I'd seen strutting the campus of Connecticut's Hotchkiss School when my father was its headmaster. I reveled in FDR's engraved name—class of 1900—on the wooden wall next to my Groton Schoolhouse desk, famous alums like Acheson and Bundy and Harriman who began and ended global wars. But I could not keep up my pace.

I was focused, like a beginning drawing student, on objects and objectives, and ignoring the negative spaces that shared their edges—the hunger in my stomach, the M&M cookie I ate out of desperation, the loneliness, the need to lie down—all threats to mastering my universe. I marveled at suicidal thoughts, strange shapes that they were. My head had engulfed me.

I spent the night at the school chaplain's apartment, and when I couldn't sleep, he told me to picture lily pads floating, holding me up, and I thought of the ones my family found in summers at Squam Lake in New Hampshire, still tucked into green bulbs—we scooped them up, tugging gently at their stems,

and brought them back to the cabin and placed them in bowls of water; some bloomed at breakfast. I tried to imagine them in the chaplain's guest bed but I kept slipping off them into the lake, and like Franny's heart when he hit the water that July day thirty-three years before, I fell out of rhythm and fell out of Groton, out of my football pads and into my father's rental car and flew home and became sick, very sick. Jesus was far away.

When we lose something close to us, Uncle David says, we close a door on it, we focus on its absence. But this lacking itself takes its own shape, one that we often miss. Some call this resurrection; for David, it's simply that his brother Franny is "still very much here"; he tries to "leave the windows and doors open for that continuing presence."

Maybe early morning, summer 1956. Franny lies in bed on the Nahant house's third floor, waits for webs in his eyes to clear. When did he rise? I have slept in this same bed, smelled the sea, heard the foghorn warning ships away from shore.

He removes the screen from the window. Climbs out, scraping, lifting his body up the tiled slope to the flat metal tin of the roof, the chimneys. He sees the sun dance on the water. Standing with him on the roof, I am still, praying, listening—gathering strength.

He once spent a summer steering a freighter to Newfoundland—for those moments, the captain of his ship, scanning the horizon for icebergs. Perhaps, in his watching, he glimpsed a green flash—horizon plus sun rising, yellow mixing with faraway blue, which is the color, Rebecca Solnit notes, for distance—the light that doesn't travel all the way to our eyes.

My father loved England. He lived there the year Queen Elizabeth II was crowned, anointed with holy oil, when Grandfather led his family across the Atlantic. I can see my father's house. Faded fieldstone, dark windows, iron workings around their edges. Old, old trees towering over cottages, where breaths make smoke in the cold air.

"It was so soon after the war," he likes to say. "You could see the devastation. They were still on rations. They were still rebuilding. You saw entire sections of cities, still demolished. No one complained."

My father inherited a footstool used in the Coronation, blue with yellow trim. Someone knelt at it in 1953 in Westminster Abbey when the choirs sang *and all the people rejoiced and said God save the queen, Long live the queen, may the queen live for ever. Amen.*

Thirty years later, he lost his job as headmaster of Hotchkiss, the Connecticut boarding school. "Callard resigns," the *Lakeville Journal* headline read, and to me, that meant he had elected to leave on his own, though I didn't know why. I couldn't fathom somebody firing him.

I never saw him cry. He played records, paced back and forth across the parquet floor of the dining room in the school's white mansion. *Long live the king.* He smashed his fists in the air to the gale of notes.

I was reading my father's paperback *Day of Infamy* at the time, about Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. In it, a Japanese submarine captain runs aground, and decides to scuttle the boat by blowing it up. Before he and his mate dive into the water, he speaks to the sub, and says, "We're leaving now—explode gloriously." Then he swims to shore to surrender himself.

On the day we moved out of the white mansion, I wrote "We're leaving now—explode gloriously" on a piece of paper, tiptoed to the corridor connecting the house to the school, where in the day, the sun poured through windows so old there were bubbles in the glass panes, like we walked under the ocean when we flowed past them, following our father to the dining hall.

I lifted the wooden ramp abutting the doorway, slid the paper underneath. "Explode"—from the Latin *explodere*, to drive out by clapping or hissing a player off stage. I swore to work harder, for him.

Franny and his brother jump off the boat in Nahant, following the Bangs girl. Franny's arms pull through the water, he watches bubbles shoot from his fingers. "Explode"—from the Latin *displodere*, the bursting of the bladder to drive forth air. His heart trips.

"Explode"—all you thought infallible, destroyed. Turning yourself over, Franny corkscrewing, releasing, stop the strain.

Two boys, then just one. I can't see him anymore.

On the day Franny drowns, my father stands still. The sidewalk buckles outside the house. My father's sister runs to him, Franny is unconscious, no, he's dead. What does my father's face look like?

In one photo before Franny died, my father looks like a monkey in an oversize black suit, too big in the shoulders, dwarfed by George, Franny, and David.

I'm fourteen, and my father is seated in his black wooden Princeton University chair, his name in gold letters on the backing. We're holding a family meeting. Something upsets him. He takes off his glasses, and I see the marks on his nose where they squeeze his skin.

I'm thirty-eight, asking him about Franny. He pauses several seconds between sentences. His mouth curls up and down, as if the lips are arms, they have nowhere to put the thing they are holding, where does it go?

I am dredging up something that has been buried under the sea, trespassing a threshold, the way I stepped up into the Box, my father's childhood room, in Nahant when I was little. You approached it through the dark hallway, which split Grandfather and Grandmother's bedroom from the bathroom across the hall, where I could hear Grandfather splash in the tub behind the closed door.

Instead of my father, the pictures in the corridor spoke to me then, conjuring wished-for strength—one of Grandfather as a young headmaster, his face hopeful and turned to the side, wearing a suit with a folded white handkerchief in his breast pocket, and one of Franny, his head blown up almost two feet tall—my father now tells me that when they tried to resuscitate Franny with the compressor, it distorted his face, and my father did not want to go down to the beach to see him, and as he says this I feel as though I am poking into his privacy. Yet I am the one who closes the hour-long interview—he's showing me Franny's face in the class photos, wondering aloud how Franny shaped him. I'm the one who is withdrawing, have what I need, thanks.

Maybe grief can be its own sealant. You lose something, and the gap of it does its work inside you. You become immune to any leaking. Unlike the tides, nothing comes in, nothing comes out. Others around you marvel. How can he stand it? What does he feel? But you steal yourself away, leaving behind pools—a crab crawls, the water reeks, the seaweed's sick.

Grandfather blamed himself. Doctors figured it was arrhythmia triggered by Franny's leap into the cold water, but Grandfather couldn't get over the fact that Franny, like him, did not love the water, was not a strong swimmer. Grandfather had taught him late, pulling his arms through the shallows at the beach.

A family friend, who at that time was a Gilman student, recalls running into Grandfather on campus after Franny's death. He did everything as the school's headmaster—stoked the boiler, subbed for the night watchman, preached in chapel. To me, he was wire-rimmed glasses warning me and my Frisbee away from the French windows.

"Something terrible has happened," Grandfather told him, and began to weep. This friend, only fifteen, stopped in shock, as his leader stood there, exposed.

I try to picture his face breaking. I want to see this, if only to excuse my own struggles to keep it together; I don't want to see this, if it means that I must let go of the illusion that I can achieve mastery, that I too can be mythical, a portrait on the wall like Grandfather is today at Gilman.

We fight the water. Making sand castles as a child mainly meant digging around them, which made the walls stronger, and higher, so that when the water flowed into the trenches, the walls did not crumble at first, but turned smooth, like gilded stone. My father taught me this; we patted down sand on Joe's Beach, not far from where Franny expired.

"And I turned around," Uncle David remembers, "and he had surfaced, his face looked a little white, and rather blank, and then he just sank."

When I read the report of my hospitalization years later, with words like "dysthymia" and "unmet oral needs," I didn't know the patient, as if he'd run through a door and left an outline of his shape, and the report was tracing the borders—but he was gone, no longer there.

In one Gospel story, Jesus heals a madman, casting his demons into pigs that run off a cliff into the sea. Grateful, the madman clutches at Jesus, says, take me with you. Jesus says no—stay and tell the story of your healing. And Jesus climbs in his boat and crosses the sea without him.

Fearful of drowning again, I keep moving, until I am exhausted, then I collapse. Surrounded by boxes of books in a new apartment, lying on my bed in the kitchen while the steam-cleaned carpet dries, I am adrift. An injured knee keeps me from the swimming that regulates my moods. A failed relationship triggers grief. My impending unemployment raises questions of whither hence, what for. A wisp of grey flashes between the cupboards below the kitchen sink. A rat? It can't be. Three black rodent droppings and several weeks later, I'm sitting at the kitchen table, when suddenly a long tail, furry body, not a whish but slower whir, the tail hanging out against the white baseboard. No mistaking that tail.

The rat is my mind, the sadness I've been running from for years. I turn to embrace it, if only because nothing else has worked. I kill the rat in a trap, a carcass on my kitchen floor that I place in a trash bag. Another may come, but I begin to value negative space, the slow time where something new in me can be born. In depression's coldness, clearness—"an articulation of thoughts otherwise hidden behind the screen of lighter moods," writes Thomas Moore. As if there is a loss of perspective in getting too happy, too close.

Today my father walks fast, even with a prostate removed, two corneas replaced, a cataract cleared. He visited England with my sister Katharine several summers past and made a mad pilgrimage to Somerset where he lived that Coronation Year. He dashed in and out of old churches. My sister could barely keep up with him.

In Florida, at age eight, the boy climbs onto his father's shoulders. They can afford to go here because the father is still king of the Connecticut school and the white mansion. The father wears a red-and-black-striped shirt with a collar to protect his skin from the sun.

They wade out into the waves, the father's legs straining, his breath growing louder, until he cannot stand up anymore. His head dips. The boy can only see a floating mass of black hair, the edges curled in the green water. "Are you ready to go under?" the father gasps. "Hold your breath."

"Yes," the boy says.

A Gilman teacher told my father that it was like everyone in the family took on a trait of Franny after he died, as if they lifted a limb of him from the beach, attached it to their bodies, so that he breathes in them, dispersed.

Franny opens his mouth. He begins to sink. Behind him, the boat, his brother swimming towards him. Ahead of him, the Bangs girl. Joe's Beach. Below him, through green water, the old house he lived in during that Coronation Year in England, when his hands froze in the cold. It is Sunday, July 1, chilly, grey.

Inspire: "to breathe in." I seek him in me too. So that his wound and my father's and Grandfather's and mine are all the same, nothing separates us.

The father kicks them high into the air, the boy inhales, snatches one last view of the horizon, and then they drop beneath the surface. Things slow down. The father's legs are pale white. Someone is pulling on them, the boy thinks, down, down, down. The father's grip loosens; the boy clings to his bull neck.

As Franny falls, he remembers painting the mountain landscape, how the houses nestled in the snow and made him want to walk towards them, to the heat and the light and the people who lived there. When the snow melted, the water would raise those houses up, bear them aloft, like arks, and they'd land on a high plain. Surrounded by a snow sea, the people would grant themselves permission to rest.

Franny's head snaps back to the sky. He does slow somersaults. The water fills him, and on the beach I can hear it roar, engulfing the house in England, rushing over my castle walls.

Jessica McCaughey

Bealton

It is a big truck, a dually with two tires on each side in the back, which is what all the boys in your Virginia high school want but few have, and the blue and white metal is always clean, extending over the wide bed like muscled shoulders from a slim back. When it pulls down into the driveway, you run out.

You open the door, and the console between the seats is at eye level. Justin's Mountain Dew can sweats against the truck's heat in the early November cold.

You say, "I don't think I can go to school."

The afternoon before, you sat at the island in your family's kitchen, the one with the faux green marble top, stretching the cord from the far wall. You were, at first, happy to hear the voice of an old neighbor. But quickly, she said, "There was an accident."

The details: A young girl, one of your closest childhood friends, leaned in to say goodbye, her seventeen-year-old boyfriend's foot holding his hulking old car, against gravity, on the steep hill of her driveway. Perhaps his shoes had lost their tread. Maybe he was stretching to better see her, the freckles, the perfect dancer's body. When his foot slipped from the brake, the open car door pinned her against a tree, crushed her in an instant.

You tell Justin this story, and he says, "Oh my God, Cork," a nickname derived from your own: McCaughey to McCaugh, to McCork, to Corky, the name of a mentally disabled character on an early 1990s TV show called *Life Goes On*. Shortened, finally, to Cork.

He drives you back to his parents' house in Bealton, away from the neighborhoods and into the farmlands of the county, and you tell him that, as girls, you two had roller-skated to the *Dirty Dancing* soundtrack and to Whitney Houston cassettes on a patio in New Jersey.

From Justin's parents' kitchen phone, you call your mother at work and say, "I need just one day," and with a sigh you cannot read, she says, "Okay."

In the living room, you consider the oddity of being alone with this boy on a Thursday morning, the freedom to watch or say or do whatever you want. Even

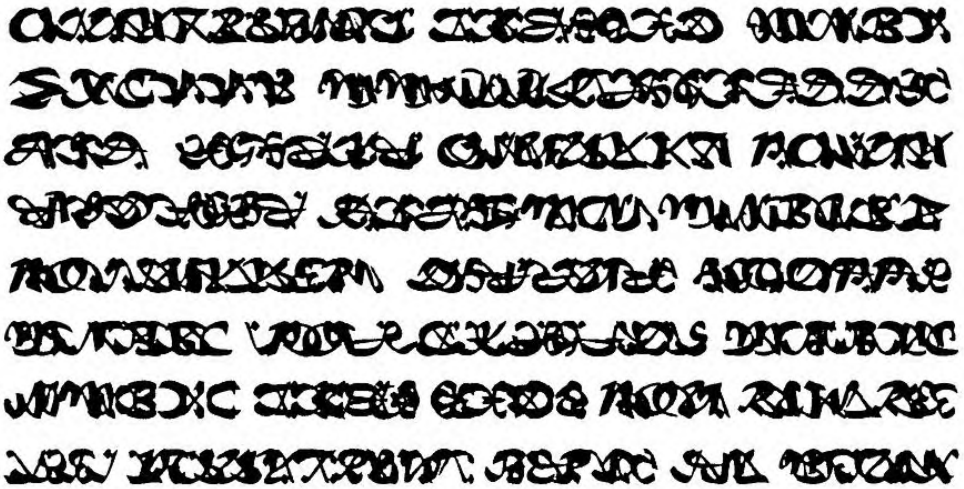
though the violent images that will trouble you for years are beginning to appear, this freedom still excites you. Decades later, you will not quite be able to harness this feeling—so long ago did independence lose its novelty—and you will feel a sadness, a strange longing for this time when you were simultaneously so afraid and so free.

You watch two episodes of *Wings*, and then you doze on the couch while Justin makes Kraft macaroni and cheese. You stretch your feet under the pink afghan his aunt crocheted. The two of you are quieter than you have been in your eight months of friendship. He does not tease you. You do not complain about girls at school. You are silent, soothed and terrified.

Later in the day, he puts you in his bed alone, the fumes and grease and gasoline smells from the connected garage forming strange connections with your body's reactions forever after. You move your nose around like a dog, smelling his pillow. You cry in there. You sleep hard, and when you wake up, the sun is going down.

When you find Justin upstairs, he is reading an automotive magazine in his mother's rocker. From the hallway, you stare. You want to put his thick, brown, shaggy hair in your mouth, or braid it with your own, and lightly squeeze his earlobe between the padding of your thumb and pointer finger. You want his hand on your sweatered shoulder and maybe other places. You want to examine those hands closer up, maybe use your nails to pick or slide away the residual dirt from changing oil after school that remains no matter how much gritty, orange-scented hand cleanser he uses to slather, to scrub. You picture your friend against that tree. Your own steep driveway. The weight and heft of the dually truck outside. You shake these away and focus on Justin's thick, pink lower lip. You want to suck on it and maybe bite it, although you cannot understand why, exactly, or how.

Daisy Hernández



The Bus Stop

1.

In Texas, a man burned the Mexican flag in front of the Alamo. He tried to get a permit to do it, but the city said no. They didn't issue permits for burning nylon or polyester or rayon in public, even if it was somebody else's national flag.

He did it anyway. Burned the red, white, and green. This was in 2007. He was a white man, and he needed Congress to know that no one should get amnesty. No one should be let in, forgiven, overlooked.

2.

What scares me about the people who hate us is not that they hate us, but that I might understand them. And to explain that I need to tell you how it was before.

Before the Salvadoreños and the Hondurans arrived. Before the Mexicans and the Dominicans y los Nicaragüenses. Before the Pakistanis across the street and the Indian family down the street and the Brasileños around the corner and the Koreans and the Japanese two towns over. Before us. Before my Cuban-Colombian family. Before one small town in New Jersey turned white, then brown.

3.

The streets in Fairview are empty. The bus stops, too.

People here have cars and houses whose front doors stay closed year round. In 1982, I am old enough to march from the A&P with a two-liter of orange soda swaddled in my arms like a newborn. I am seven. Behind me, my mother carries the eggs and Trix cereal, the frozen steaks and Betty Crocker cake mix, and my sister toddles next to her.

In Union City, we had buses and live chickens. But that was before Papi took a bus twenty minutes north and found factory work in Fairview and a house, as well. Here we are then: the soda in my arms and block after block of silent air and skinny trees.

4.

A Republican Congressman from California thinks children born to undocumented immigrant women should be deported. It takes a lot to be an American citizen, he tells a crowd of Tea Party members in 2010.

It takes the stuff from before.

But what exactly?

It's what's in our souls, he declares.

5.

In the 1600s, New Jersey belongs to women. Brown-faced women with thick, black hair, children at their feet, and corn in their hands. The Lenape Indians.

Citizenship is based on the mother. The child belongs to the clan of the mother, and in the 1600s, Fairview is not yet a town but only hills and grass and trees, a place where citizenship is bound not to the earth but to the one who gives birth.

6.

The wall.

It is the color of wheat. It's the back wall of the fire house in Fairview, and we live in the house right behind, so the wall is a yellow sheet lining our front yard. Nothing is sweeter in summer than a smooth wall.

Someone brings the red handballs. The girl from across the street maybe. And pistachio green tennis balls. A carton of them. We slam the balls with open palms and jump in the air to hit them and race around each other to not miss. We bruise ourselves, the joy is so much to bear.

7.

Over coffee once, a white man asked me if I had been born in this country. He was from Arizona and we were talking about his home state and the show-your-paper laws. He wasn't a racist, he told me. His ex-wife is Mexican.

Yes, I told him. I was born here.

8.

The Dutch arrive in New Jersey, boats bulging with pale-faced men who descend to the land, march with their feet, their language, their governments. More foreign faces slip across the ocean, thrusting themselves at the horizon. The English, the French. They seep into these wooded areas.

Change requires time, insists upon it. It takes another three hundred years, until by the late 1800s, the Lenape have been forced to leave Fairview, shoved West to a patch of earth named Indian Territory.

9.

The white man at the Alamo was a former police chief.

His town, the streets he watched over, has less than two thousand people. I imagine him in San Antonio, pulling out a box of matches, the Mexican flag dangling from his hands.

10.

Fairview is a town cracked in half under the sun. A single hill separates the homes in the upper part of town from those below. Two cemeteries line the hill, so that whether ascending or descending, it does not matter. Every direction is the final door: the huddle of leafless tree branches, the rows of gray stones.

One-fifth of the town's land is dedicated to the dead.

11.

Every morning as a child, I walk about twenty feet, cross the street, and fling myself into the arms of St. John the Baptist.

He stands at the corner of Walker and Anderson. Not him but his Roman Catholic church, though it might as well be John himself. A man of stone and brick and stained glass windows.

12.

A few years ago, a friend of mine, a white woman from Long Island, wanted to explain her thoughts about immigration. She didn't want to burn anyone's flag, but she had some ideas about population control.

Before she continued, she looked over at me and asked, You were born here, right?

13.

Before a place can become a place, it must have streets. And before that, a man must have needs.

In the 1800s, it costs a man fifty cents to have himself and his wagon towed up the hill of the dead in Fairview. While he waits for his turn, he indulges in the Holy Trinity of Whiskey, Gossip, and Man Talk, all of which explains perhaps why a Baptist church opens at the foot of the hill.

14.

No one in Fairview ever asked me where I had been born. Sometimes, I think it was kindness. Other times, the violence of erasure: I don't ask because I don't see you. Mostly though, I think it didn't occur to anyone. We were so few.

15.

The pizza parlor in Fairview smells of flour and basil and lust.

In eighth grade, my friends and I waltz through the front door and whisper about the owner's son, his dark curls and the pile of gold chains around his neck. He has skin the color of pearls and a chest the size of Manhattan. He wears tight

shirts, and instead of asking what we want to order, he gestures at us with his chin. He has the most marvelous chin. It's so marvelous he doesn't have to speak. We are all planning to marry a boy like him.

Before the pizza parlor, Fairview is acres of dairy farms. Cows are woken, milked, pushed into the fields. Fairview is a lush green field, and the cows are drunk with their love.

16.

If I tell you how it was before, then you'll understand why I loved the one who ignored me and neglected me and eventually wanted to throw me into the fire.

17.

The harvest dictates the migration North. The wars also. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Before the harvest and the wars, the hilo is queen. Spools of black thread, of amber, saffron and ivory reign. The Austrians and Swiss and Germans have washed onto the shores of Jersey with lines of credit and the huge Schiffli embroidery machines. Entire houses are built for the giant needles and bobbins of thread and also for the smaller Merrow sewing machines. The Houses of Hilo.

World War II ravages Europe and the spools of thread. It becomes impossible to import the large embroidery machines. Out of necessity, one is produced here. American made.

18.

Fairview is lonely in the winters. At the bus stops, it is often just me, my mother, and the howling wind.

But I do have my favorite bus stop. It is at the corner of Anderson and Fairview avenues. Here, my mother searches the street for signs of the bus, and I pass the minutes studying the old covers of the *Saturday Evening Post* that are pinned to the windows of the Safe Drug pharmacy. I am not sure what street Mr. Norman Rockwell lives on, but I like his people. White, dimpled faces, freckled boys in suspenders, a sunset and creek. Easy, pleasant lives. I like too that each of Mr.

Rockwell's drawings is about a single memory that holds the larger story as told by its title: After the Prom, Check up, The Shiner.

If there were such a portrait of me and my mother, if Mr. Rockwell had painted us, it would have been titled The Bus Stop. It would show us in winter, bundled in dark coats and boots, purple scarves across our faces so only our brown eyes show. Maybe it would have my mother pulling me into her, warning, No dejes que el viento se te meta en la boca.

My mother issues orders in Spanish that sound dramatic in English, but that are meant to prepare me for this town, this country. El viento is not wind; it is a man's tongue, his index finger, his ideas. Don't let them crawl into your mouth.

19.

The man who burned the Mexican flag in Texas. After the cold winters in Fairview, after the awkward promises of spring, in the full flush of summer, he would have brought us tomatoes, like our neighbor.

She knocks on our door one day, shortly after our arrival. She pushes the tomatoes into my mother's hand. She is the child or grandchild or great-grandchild of another country, of the English, Dutch, German, Irish, Italian. She wants us to eat from her garden.

"They think we're Italian," my mother giggles, as if she has snuck a puppy into her parents' house.

20.

The Houses of Hilo.

At the women's factory, I walk past the rows of sewing machines, keeping my hands stuffed in my pockets less the máquinas with their speeding needles bite my fingers. The women's eyes travel with me, curious to see which machine will claim me.

When I stop in front of my mother, the Italian and Yugoslavian ladies congratulate her in the English words they share: Your daughter? How old? Very good. My mother beams, having learned to say that I am hers, that I am smart, that I am ten.

This is the eighties. Yugoslavia is pretending to be one country and Colombia is exploding every few weeks, but motherhood, like faith and rubber bands, stretches across geography and time. It is a collection of rituals, the most ancient call and response.

21.

A Latino family moves in next door. The mother is tall with a broad forehead. She could pass for Italian, as could her son. But her husband is short with a brown, almost flat face, and their daughter has dark, curly hair. My mother whispers: No one's bringing them tomatoes. She is nervous about this, about the kindness that is so easily withdrawn, and she keeps her voice low even though we are in our own home.

22.

Archie Bunker: *One colored family is a novelty. Two is a ghetto.*

23.

How can I explain myself now? How can I tell you about loving a place so much you have room for fear and bruises? That before you grow up and realize you can leave a place, it is the only place. Your place. What they do or say is not racist, because you don't know that word. You only know it is another part of this place. There's my pizza parlor, my John the Baptist, my wheat-yellow wall where I play handball. There's the lady with her fat, ripe tomatoes.

24.

The wall in the television falls.

Men and women dig their fingernails into bricks, throw them to the ground, lift them to the sky. They are tearing down the Berlin Wall, and soon the Yugoslavians up the street will become Croatians.

25.

My father moves us to a new house in Fairview, a two-family house. The second floor is ours, and he rents the first floor to two men from Central

America. The men are in their twenties, their forties. They leave early in the mornings and return late in the day. Their place is like ours: a kitchen, a bathroom, and three small rooms.

A few weeks later, a third man arrives to live with them. A brother or cousin or friend. Then, another and another. Soon, eight men are there. Tía Chuchi, my mother's sister, has counted.

In our home, on the second floor, we are five, but six if you count the months Tía Rosa came to stay with us and seven if you count all the hours Tía Dora spends in our kitchen and nine if you count the men they married.

26.

A few years ago, I gave a talk at a college about growing up as the daughter of Cuban-Colombian immigrants. During the question and answer segment, a young, white woman in the audience argued that people here should be obliged to learn English. An older woman, a profesora in the audience, answered that if that was the case we should all be speaking the country's original mother tongue: a Native American language. People clapped. There were murmurs in the auditorium when the young woman claimed she was part Native.

My lecture, like our debate, all took place in English.

27.

The men downstairs ask my father for money. A brother of theirs is stuck at the border. Arizona or Texas or California. One of those places with walls of rivers and cinder blocks and binoculars.

At the bus stop now, a few men are waiting with us. Brown-faced men, shaven and single and without papers. They look like the men from downstairs. Pobres, my mother says with both pity and memory.

28.

Hardy, fat shrubs line the periphery of our house. They are green gossamer curtains, a wall that breathes, that is so easy to push aside. And men do that now. One passes out in our yard. Another pees in the shrubs. We don't know who they are or where in town they live.

They are coming from regions in Latin America where the bathroom is outdoors, where it is so much harder to make a dollar and so much harder to find cheap beer. Here, five dollars feels like five hundred, and the liquor store in Fairview prices accordingly.

I come home one day and my father has hired men to tear away the green gossamer curtains, the neat line of shrubs. I stand there and eat my tears, because what would be the point of saying, I want it the way it was before? Before is over and this is now.

The men shove the steel poles into the earth, lift a chain link fence around our house.

29.

I dated a white man once. He voted Republican. He said to me, You have so much empathy. He said it like it was syphilis, like I was in danger of blinding myself. He said it as though I could see the men passed out in our yard and forget that Reagan had sent weapons and soldiers into Nicaragua and El Salvador, and Clinton and Bush had sent American companies to harvest in Mexico, displacing peasants, fishermen, entire families.

You have so much empathy.

He said it as if I didn't know what it felt like to be at a bus stop in the middle of winter, the cold biting my nose, my mother squinting for any sign that the bus might be coming, me trying to paint myself into Norman Rockwell's country, and that whole time, the Cadillacs and the Oldsmobiles crawling past us, their windows shut tight less the snowflakes gain the upper hand and sneak into the cars.

30.

The chairman of the City University of New York understands that people are arriving from farmlands, like the Italians and Jews and Germans and Irish and English. And he doesn't care. They're indios, he declares at a luncheon for educators. They are short and dark-haired, and he adds: There is no tradition of education in Mexico and Central America.

He should know about education. He is a graduate of the city college, a former Congressman. Herman Badillo. A Puerto Rican, he looks like my father and my mother and my aunties and my sister and me: a mass of thick eyebrows and dark hair, his face pale as long as he stays out of the sun.

Down the street in Fairview, a "For Sale" sign goes up. Then, another.

31.

Before the women, it is only men.

They stand in the doorways to stores and apartment buildings, wearing jeans and baseball caps. They wait for the pickup trucks that come rumbling at dawn and take a few of them for a day of work. The rest wait. Some board the buses further west into New Jersey for factory jobs, for work cleaning floors.

On Sundays though, they meet at the park, and there the book bags undergo a metamorphosis in the grass. The bags turn into goal posts, and someone has brought a soccer ball, and it is summer in Fairview now, and the joy is so much that they bruise themselves.

32.

Norman Rockwell is still at the bus stop, and I am in college, still living in Fairview, still living with my parents, still pausing every now and then to study his drawings. The edges of the posters are curling. Two and three layers of Scotch tape hold the images in place in the pharmacy windows, the cinta brown and chipped, the adhesive fighting against time.

It is evening. I am at the pharmacy windows, and behind me the men from Guatemala and Brazil and El Salvador and Nicaragua and Honduras are rushing to catch the bus that goes down the hill, past the cemetery, further west into New Jersey.

The past is in front of me and the future behind.

33.

Las mujeres follow the men. Babies are born. The 2000 Census claims Latinos are a third of Fairview, but no one needs those numeros. No one here is blind. We

can see the coches and the bicicletas. At the park, two poles spring from the moist grass and a net, as well. The men have an official fútbol field.

At the bus stop in winter, I rub my gloved hands, listen to Ani Difranco on my CD player, and keep un ojo on the woman with the hard eyes. There is always one now at the bus stop. She spots the bus as soon as it turns onto our street. The moment she reaches for her bus pass, I scoot behind her. It is impossible these days to get a seat on the bus.

34.

My mother returns from city hall con las noticias. A Latina is working for the mayor! she cries.

In the kitchen, the three of us—my father, tía, and I—turn our faces toward her. My mother continues, excited: I went in to pay the taxes like always, and she came up to me and introduced herself.

Pero en inglés, my auntie interjects.

No! En Español!

My mother's face is flushed, as if she has won a prize. We stare at her until finally my father lets out a low whistle.

35.

Before the Guatemalan restaurant opened, the pizza parlor closed. The boy with the marvelous chin that talked left. So did his father.

I am thinking about the man who burned the Mexican flag at the Alamo. I believe he knew a boy once and a pizza parlor and a chin that was marvelous.

And yes, I would remind him now of the loss, la perdida, and he would throw the lit match into my dark hair and not think twice.

36.

The new Guatemalan restaurant is named El Quetzal, because before Fairview and Italy and pizza parlors, there was Guatemala and before Guatemala, the Mayans and before them, the green bird with the iridescent tail and red breast, el quetzal.

The bird's breast is red, because after the Spaniards murdered a Mayan chief, el pajarito landed on the dying man's chest and the grief was so great that the bird stained his own feathers with the dead man's blood.

Now the quetzal is here in Fairview. His image is painted on a beach towel and hung on the wall of the new restaurant. I am eating tacos, and the men coming through the front door are calling out dinner orders, and I want them to win—the people, the bird, the beach towel. I want all of us to have exactly what we all truly want: the idealized past.

But the future is at the door.

A dark brown teenage boy, his hair dyed a painful platinum, strolls in with a white girl. He is silent; she is flaca and probably broke and she is most definitely hungry. She talks about the menu and the benefits of a no-carb diet and the places where her corazón has been broken. He's fortunate, she says, because his papi is in New York. Her father left when she was ten.

Where am I supposed to go for the weekend? she spits. Nowhere.

The boy doesn't answer.

She is sure that she looks like her father. She says, It's just that no one has seen my father to say you look like your father.

We are, each of us, walking images of other times and other places.

37.

John the Baptist is muerto. The school has closed. Not enough attendance, not enough money for the tuition. At the public school a few blocks over, the town's superintendent of education has sent three children home before the almuerzo. He has ordered them out of the school and out of the country, because, he insists, they don't have papeles.

He doesn't ask to see papers for Dora, though. She is the world's most famous brown child and she lives here in Fairview, too. Dora La Exploradora. For two or three years, the actress, Caitlin Sanchez, is homeschooled aquí, and every weekday, two million children watch Dora and hear Caitlin from Fairview, and Nickelodeon earns 1.2 billion dollars in gross revenues from the show, but more from the Dora bed linens and rocking chairs and dress sets. About 11 billion dollars in merchandise sales.

38.

A man knocks on our door one day and asks my father if he can put his election sign in our yard. My father says, I don't care, and up goes the sign for the mayor's opponent.

The mayor's office phones me. It's the Latina the alcalde has hired. She wants to know why the aviso is up. Our house sits on a busy corner. Prime real estate for election signs. El alcalde is calling it a Latin revolution.

39.

The papers didn't say what country his mother was from, only that the teenager had a Spanish surname and that he broke into the home of an old Italian. He knew the man's grandson. The nieto had helped him steal from the old man before. But now the teenager with the Spanish apellido beat the old man so hard that the eighty-eight year old was rushed to the hospital, to the tubes and machines and doctor's hands. A week later, el viejito died.

The teenager fled the scene before any of that was reported. He had stolen the man's billetera, and he went shopping in Washington Heights. It was the middle of summer. He bought new shorts perhaps, another pair of sneakers, a baseball cap, white socks with the Nike swoop.

40.

The man in Texas was charged a hundred and ninety-eight dollars for burning without a permit. He hired a lawyer. He sued. He wanted to remind the court that in America you can burn a flag in public. It's a constitutional right.

He wanted it the way it was before, when you were young enough to believe it would always be that way, that there would never be a before and an after, because time somehow would stand still, while you grew older and so would the people and the places and the drawings you loved. It would always be there: the country you imagined.

41.

Norman Rockwell is gone. The pharmacy's windows are empty and papered with "For Sale" signs.

Alicia Rebecca Myers

Addling

My father carried corn oil into dusk:
the translucent plastic like a lantern
held aloft, the yard pared down
immaculate—and overrun somehow
with a wild stamina. The light
was just ending. The geese were out,
feeding on the seeded grass. They lunged
the narrow slick of their bills
into the loam, weeded stalks
unmindful of the space between them,
the whites of their chinstraps
impellent, unrehearsed, in rhythm to collective
hunger and inner-directed. Larger
than each bird alone I watched my father:
his stooped shadow, his flannel untucked
like a lake spilling over its banks. He moved
outside their periphery until he was nothing more
than pine, a mere familiar. Then I watched him
unscrew the cap and pour oil onto cloth,
lower into a nest of moss and feathers,
into a clutch of eggs I couldn't see
but knew was there.
The geese continued to eat.
The eggs absorbed the oil.
I tried to pick out the mother
while my father asphyxiated embryos,
his head turned towards the gaggle in humane
say-so. I wanted to feel her bristle.
He said she'd be misled into believing
the eggs would develop. That not knowing,
she would tend to them the same.

Cyrus Cassells

The Shadow

after Hans Christian Andersen

Traveler, I came to a colossus
of clustered houses—a sultry kingdom,
replete with breeze-swept balconies,
belled donkeys, and vying boys
slyly triggering Roman candles—
all of it beneath a glittering
caravansary of detectable stars—

In the bullying heat
of that equatorial city,
my rambunctious shadow grew
thinner, desiccated, restless,
and leaped, abracadabra
(more jack-in-the-box
than agile gazelle!),
onto my mysterious neighbor's
intricate balcony.
When my rogue-swift, dark counterpart
returned, I asked:
What did you see? Who lives there?
Poetry, he revealed.
Yes, Poetry, as numinous and longed-for
as the Northern Lights,
often lives, in palm-guarded places,
as a shuttered Garbo, an elusive
recluse cloistered among us—

Imagine: I was a seeker tantalized
by light and shadow
that I faithfully mimicked

in expressive oils and aquarelles,
an ardent, itinerant painter, attuned
to the way garden shadows
become diligent brushstrokes
or late afternoon lace.
So why should I be surprised
at my headstrong shadow?

After his first inspiriting adventures
in Poetry's captivating rooms,
in one magnanimous gesture,
I set my shadow free to become
his own up-and-coming man,
to acquire blue serge, a boutonnière,
a dapper bowler—
But he employed his newfound humanity,
his effusive charm and flair
to persuade the winsome princess,
my beloved fiancée,
that *I* was the unruly impostor, the mad
shadow who deserved oblivion:
first bedlam, then the chilly
volley of a firing squad—

And in the flash point I was manacled, I saw
our fierce mirroring was never
friendship, twin-ship,
but a crafty fisherman's net,
a supplanting spider's stratagem—I saw
how slowly and inexorably I became
a Christ in distress,
and my rebellious shadow
a charioteer, a ruffian god,
a key-cold executioner.

The Red-Haired Puppet

Say I sloughed off tenderness, playfulness
as a pipe-dreaming boy,
so my ready bond, my matchless odyssey
with the red-haired puppet,
purchased one rain-slick Parma morning,
took me by surprise.
For weeks (everywhere the boot-shaped land's
allure, the benign dragon's breath
of in-a-rush trains)
I was an ally of the artful sun
and tallying wind,
the framed, wavering havens
of fast-glimpsed, exhilarating fields—
an unabashed witness
to an ever-shifting tableau,
an audience to the fullest diameter
of everyday eagerness,
shy blundering or brash posturing,
that displayed little difference between
motives and marionette strings—

In those mercurial spring weeks, I confess
my true companion was of insouciant yarn
and papier-mâché, little elating clown
with crescent-thin, cobalt eyes,
and I christened her in a daydream:
Antonella La Rossa—

Immodest Venice greeted us
with a double rainbow,
and the gingham-clad puppet,
all peach-colored, bruiseless hands,
seemed eager to applaud the city's
bonanza of showy beauty—
so like a sunburned Prospero,
a jubilant, just-washed-ashore magus,
with the supple, acceding wand
of welling hope,

I brought her to life.

Caitlin Horrocks

Mermaid and Knife

Honfleur, 1872

Today, the boy is ordinary. Not extraordinary in any way yet, not someone that you, right now, should care to read about. The accomplishment he is most proud of is winning a neighborhood farting contest back in Paris, and he was the favorite in an upcoming belching competition. He is missing it right now, he realizes, calculating the hours eaten by the train carrying his newly-diminished family north. There have been so many sadnesses it had seemed there was not room for more. But now they all squeeze tightly together in Eric's heart to admit another: this lost chance at glory. He confides in his sister about the contest, a plea for sympathy. "Mother would be ashamed of you," Louise hisses.

Eric is a boy magnificently without shame, but Louise's statement makes him think. Their mother wouldn't be exactly *pleased*, he decides, but she would not be ashamed. He would still be her little monkey, and he hears his name the way she

said it, the *r* at the top of her mouth, the sounds of her language like rain drops on a muddy yard. He sticks his hand in his armpit, makes farting noises at his sister. Louise rolls her eyes, asks their father to make him stop. She is one year younger, but her gestures are a disapproving old woman's, wagging fingers and pursed lips. Eric loves her anyway. When she bossed the neighborhood children, Eric would always convince them to take her back, let her play again. The neighborhood parents liked Louise because she could always be trusted to tattle when something risky was afoot. "Little mother," the woman in the next apartment called her, and Eric cringes when he thinks of this, as if the word has been said aloud, as if their father could hear him hearing it.

But their father is a lightning-struck tree. Alfred slumps in the bench opposite, on the other side of the train compartment, and stares out the window at the black and white cows in the endless yellowing fields. "I grew up here," he says, his palm against the glass, and the children glare. They were supposed to grow up in Paris. They feel kidnapped, not by fate, or by death, but by the only person present enough to blame. "Do you remember your grandmother?" he asks them. Louise shakes her head. Eric says he's hungry.

Alfred sighs and takes a red apple from his satchel. Eric's already bitten into it when Alfred tells him to share with Louise, opening up his pocketknife and holding out the handle. Eric doesn't move. He's never sliced an apple before, and if his father wants it done on a moving train, surely he can do it himself.

"That's all right," Louise says. "I'm not hungry." For once Eric wants her to boss, to explain to their father that children shouldn't be cutting fruit on their own laps.

"Take it," Alfred says sharply, fingers pinched around the flat of the blade.

Eric does, gingerly, and Alfred settles back into his seat. "You mustn't act this way at your grandmother's house," he says. "She won't have it." Eric follows his gaze as it returns to the window. Nothing but bare fields, bled of color in early November, stolid cows, stark stone houses and barns. The train curves slightly and below an indentation in the fields Eric sees water.

"The Seine," his father says. "Our river, all the way out here."

Louise slips the knife from Eric's hand, folds the blade away and tucks it in her skirt. Eric imagines wrenching the window open and flinging the apple

into the river, flinging himself alongside and bobbing all the winding way home. He imagines a note in a corked bottle: PLEASE HELP. KIDNAPPED TO NORMANDY. COWS EVERYWHERE.

But who would find it? Home is an empty apartment now, sun-stained rectangles on the wall where they took down the pictures, the curtains off their hooks to be beaten, grit flying in the light from the dirty casement windows. When Eric thinks of ghosts, he doesn't picture smoky wraiths but clouds of dust suspended in sunshine. When he closes his eyes and presses his fingers against his eyelids, he can give the golden dust the shape of a woman. He made his eyes sore last night, doing this. He and Louise had slept on the piled curtains, mattresses sold, bedframes in storage. Alfred promised that they could say goodbye to their friends before the train, but when he shook Eric awake in the dark, the boy knew his father had lied. Milk wagons creaked past their cab, the roads nearly deserted. Eric squeezed his eyes shut, ground his fists into his ears, because he did not wish to remember the city this way, witchy and alien.

On the train, Eric watches the river. He stands and moves close to the window. His father puts a hand on his shoulder, leans into his ear. "It's flowing westward," he says gently, almost a whisper. "The Seine starts in Dijon. Honfleur is in the estuary. The water's moving out to sea."

"Oh," Eric says. Has his father guessed his plan? Eric looks down at his tooth marks in the apple, white flesh already browning. He thinks of his imaginary note moving helplessly into the great nothing of the Atlantic: PLEASE HELP. COWS.

In Honfleur, his grandmother Eulalie assigns Eric a lumpy horsehair mattress in the attic. The garret windows rattle in the sea wind, salty air eating at the wooden frames. Everything about this town feels wrong, blown raw and new each morning. There is no warm smell of sewage on the river, no coal dust collecting over the sills and doorstep. Even the milk is grotesquely fresh, with a grassy, fleshy sort of taste. The butter is of a color and sweetness like fruit. It makes Eric gag.

"Too fresh?" his grandmother says scathingly. "How about that. And the wind? You're half Scottish, you know, so you should be all right with the cold." This quickly becomes the retort for everything—Eric can't complain about the draft in his room because of his mother's Scottish blood; he can't complain about the scratchiness of the linens because Scots wear rough tartans; he can't complain about the food, because Scots eat oats and sheep stomachs. Since Normans are supposedly of hardy, Viking stock themselves, Eric and Louise are effectively never allowed to complain about anything.

For the first few days Alfred seems to be pretending they're on holiday. He gives them tours, pointing out where Champlain set sail for the New World, but also the home where Jane was visiting when she met Alfred; the hotel where her parents stayed to meet the bridegroom; the Anglican Church where Eric was baptized, Eulalie shrieking that neither she nor God would forgive Jane for this. Eulalie never did, and while God's opinion could not be known for certain, Jane's death seemed a kind of proof.

The church Eulalie would have preferred was St. Catherine's. This is also on the tour, the largest wooden church in France. The old stone one burned centuries ago in the Hundred Years War, their father explains, praising the local shipbuilders who, rather than wait for the war to be over, for the Church to allocate funds and masons and craftsmen for a new one, built with what they knew. All axe-work, he says, the beams and the thousands of wooden shingles covering the roof and walls. The beams in the newer bays are shorter, mounted on stone footings, and do not match the towering straight oaks of the old nave. There are no longer any such trees to be found in Normandy. There is an obvious lesson here, Eric's father explains, about *resourcefulness*, about *initiative*. "They didn't wait for someone else to help," he insists. "They made the best of things."

"Well," Eric says dismissively. "One hundred years is a long time to wait."

"They didn't know it would be a hundred years. And the war wasn't really like that. It kept stopping and starting." Eric senses his father's impatience, as if Alfred knows he is not getting through. "They might have thought the war would be over in days, and they'd have all the stonemasons they wanted. No one knows these things, when they're living inside them. Wars only have their names put to them later."

Eric can make no sense of a war lasting a century, of how long that might be. He can make no sense of a war fought with England, a place the family vacationed once, at the seaside in Brighton. A voice whispers in his head that his mother will be dead for a century, and a century after that, and all the centuries after.

That Eric's own name will last a century after his death, a century at least, does not enter his mind. He does not feel born to fame, nor entitled to it. Greatness sounds like a lot of work, frankly, and he is not given to study, nor to practicing his piano. There are other kinds of fame, that require provocation more than they require accomplishment, and people will argue, in the years to come, whether Eric's claim is to the former or the latter. His name will last at least to the moment you are reading this page, but may not last a whole century more. This will still be longer than his mother's, longer than his sister's or his grandmother's or his father's. But none of this has happened yet. Lives, like wars, carry names only assigned to them once they're over.

The family climbs the St. Catherine's bell tower, set across a small courtyard. The church sits on a slope overlooking the harbor, and the height of a bell tower invites lightning. The largest wooden church in France is also the most flammable church in France. The roof shingling is green with moss, and there is a moist, rotting smell in the small belfry. Bats rustle above them. Alfred lifts the children up so they can see through the wooden window slats: the harbor, the town, the city of Le Havre across the narrow channel, all barred into dim slices. "Townspeople here call it 'the city on the other coast'," their father tells Eric, of Havre. He is trying to share a joke, but to Eric the distance looks vast enough for the name to be entirely appropriate. On the way back to his grandmother's house, Eric whispers words of his mother's English: "House, house, house," he says, and does not think to say "home." He traces the letters on his leg, his finger moving through the fabric of his pocket, a frantic charm against forgetting.

Their uncle Adrien insists on being called Osprey, in English, by everybody: the children, his parents, friends and business associates and the passers-by who wave at him in the Old Basin. He owns a boat there that never leaves its mooring, although he pays a sailor to look after it, keep the sails mended,

ropes coiled, railings freshly varnished. On weekends and evenings Osprey sits on it smoking his pipe. He has a wife and three children of his own, and either his stationer's shop does much better than it appears, or he has some second source of income, or his family simply goes without, that he might have his toy boat. The adults grouse about this over dinner, their disapproval of Osprey couched as concern for his family. This is the only thing that seems to console Eulalie about her influx of Parisian grandchildren; there are now new people to whom she can complain.

When Osprey comes to Sunday dinner, they all have to listen to Alfred rattle off old grievances, how Osprey used to short-sheet their bed, planting dead mice under the coverlet. Once he placed a baked potato under the covers that was so hot, Alfred burnt the bottom of his foot and limped for a week. Eric knows he is supposed to feel loyal to his father, but mostly what he feels is embarrassment. His father did not get the best of Osprey as a boy, and now as a man he has not gotten the best of anything else. Alfred complains about misplacing his pocketknife, eyeing Osprey as if he might be somehow responsible for that, too. Osprey retreats to the garden to smoke before the main course is finished, briny lamb raised on saltmarshes near the coast, a local specialty Eulalie prizes and the children loathe. Eulalie soldiers on with dessert, an apple tart drenched in eggy custard. Eric tries extracting the apple slices, but his father makes him eat the entire quivering yellow square. Their jaws work dutifully, and Eric thinks that his father looks like a cow, chewing its cud.

"You're still here," Eric says, surprised, when Eulalie finally excuses him from the table, and he finds Osprey sitting on a wooden bench in the back garden, tapping his pipe out and then rubbing ash into the gravel with his boot.

"Do you and your sister get along?" Osprey asks.

"Mostly."

"Well good for you."

Eric feels that he's disappointed his uncle. Both stare at their shoes. Eric notices that Osprey's feet are exceptionally large.

"Have you found the mermaid?" Osprey finally asks.

Eric shakes his head.

"Come for a walk." They leave out the back gate, and then circle around the block, passing the front of his grandmother's house and turning left up a pedestrian stairway, one of many shortcuts that mount the steep slope rising from the harbor. The sides of the staircase are the ivy-covered walls of private gardens. Halfway up Osprey pauses, looks around as if to mark his bearings, and then pulls at the ivy, searching for something. "Here it is," he finally says, and holds the leaves aside.

Inlaid in the brickwork is a large brass plaque without words, just the relief of a mermaid, her tail curled into a J and hair streaming down around it. She is topless, with rounded breasts and tiny nubs of nipples. The plaque is a weathered, greenish color, except for the golden breasts. "Boys used to rub her for luck," Osprey says. "We passed her every day on the way to school. There were little spells people would say, for extra luck, or to conjure the mermaid in real life."

Eric isn't sure if he's allowed to rub the breasts. Is his uncle showing him this so he can carry on the game, or so Eric can see that Osprey was once foolish, too, at least as foolish as Alfred? Believing that a mermaid will grant luck, or that responsibility will bring happiness: perhaps both are equally improbable.

"Go ahead," Osprey says. "Make a wish."

Eric thinks at the mermaid, harder and harder, until his brain feels the way his eyes do when he pushes on the lids, the way his ears felt when he pressed his fists against them on that eerily quiet last morning in Paris. He strokes the mermaid's hair, dabs the tip of his finger to the two fin-ends of her tail.

"Now you know the secret of the mermaid," Osprey says. "You must be a good steward."

That night Eric worries over what it means to be the steward of the secret of the mermaid. Should he share it with Louise? There were those bright scandalous breasts. There was the risk that she might tell Eulalie, and Eulalie would find some way to ruin it for everybody. I can wish hard enough for us all, Eric decides.

Is that all right? he thinks into the air, imagining the darkness of a sea at night, the moonlight catching on the silver streaks of fish, a pale woman with a finned tail. He presses his hands to his eyes until she flickers into movement. *Of course*, she says. *That's fine.*

The next morning their father is gone. "On the first train," Eulalie tells them at the breakfast table. "He's...traveling." Eric sets aside a part of himself to be especially angry that his grandmother has rehearsed no better explanation than this. He does not really expect adults to be truthful with him, but surely they might take their lies more seriously. "It's impossible," Eulalie says. "A man trying to mother two children. That's why I told him to bring you here."

That afternoon Eulalie walks Eric to the shops in the town center. From a crisp envelope she unfolds a list: one mirror, two combs, a brush, a shoehorn, a prayer book, a glass and set of silverware, bed linens, twelve handkerchiefs, eight shirts, twelve cloth napkins, twelve small towels, six pairs of summer stockings and six winter. Three pairs of plain leather shoes. At the shoemaker Eulalie orders three different sizes, the largest so big Eric needs two pairs of stockings and crumpled paper in the toe just to keep his feet in them. "So they won't get outgrown before they get outworn," she says. For the shirts and towels and sheets, his grandmother buys yards of fabric. She does not buy the finest of anything, nor does she buy the cheapest. This is, Eric thinks, as much love as she has shown him. "You can take flatware from the house," she says aloud. "And a glass."

"Take it where?" Eric says.

She ignores him, but at the cabinet maker she reads off precise dimensions for a box, absolutely no more than a quarter-meter high. "I don't know why," his grandmother says, "but those are the instructions."

"So they fit under the beds," the cabinetmaker says. "Dormitory size. I'm sure we've got one ready-made. Do you want it delivered to the house or the school?"

"The house, for now," Eulalie says. "He'll start next week."

Eulalie walks him home past the Collège de Honfleur, the same one his father attended as a day student. It is one street over and one above his grandmother's house, a five-minute walk.

"It's so close," Eric says. He does not say, "Don't send me away." He does not say, "Please."

Eulalie says nothing. She hems the towels and sheets, begins work on the shirts, poking Eric with pins by lamplight. After she's cut and joined the pieces, Louise sews on the buttons. "Will I go to school, too?" Louise asks.

"One at a time," Eulalie says. "I have to figure out what to do with you children one at a time."

There has been no word from their father. As the shirts are finished Eulalie folds them into the wooden box. Eric slides it in and out from under his bed to be sure that it fits. He dreams entire nightmares of arriving at school with a box too big for the bed. One night he opens the box and finds a packet of licorice, tied with a ribbon, tucked inside one of his new shoes. When Eulalie suggests in the morning that he leave for school that night, to settle in before Monday morning classes, he is prepared. He begs for one last Sunday at home; he loves the saltmarsh lamb, he claims, the eggy apple tart. Eulalie twitches an eyebrow in victory.

All that afternoon the children make escape plans, divide Eric's school bounty into two neat piles of shirts and stockings, although Louise is scandalized at the thought of dressing like a boy. "We'll set sail," Eric announces. "On Osprey's boat. We'll travel all the way to Panama."

"That's too far," Louise says, sensible even in play. Eric assumes they're playing, only playing, until Louise runs to her bedroom and returns with their father's pocketknife. She's kept it secret since the train, she says, hidden from Eulalie.

Eric thinks that he could have told Louise about the mermaid after all, that she would have kept that secret safe, too. "Where should we go?" he asks, sincerely.

"To Paris, down the river."

Eric gives Louise the licorice, draws maps with her and makes provision lists until it's a game again, until the daylight runs out and their bellies are podgy with custard and Louise is yawning. Eulalie sends her to bed and Eric follows, watches as she tucks the pocketknife between mattress and bedframe. They wish each other goodnight, sweet dreams. He doesn't tell his sister what their father told him, that the river flows north, and that there will be no going back the way they came.

From the school office, Eric can hear the all-week boarders clattering in the rectory. The hallway gets rowdier as Eric's fellow Monday-through-Saturday boarders arrive. The headmaster chats interminably with Eulalie, asks her to sign the necessary paperwork. Eric pushes his head through the open door, watching

the parade of dark-uniformed boys milling in the white hallway. They remind Eric of the cows out the train window, black spots against white flanks. He remembers that he is wearing the same uniform jacket, that he'll be a splotch of the same cow. A boy turns and makes eye contact and Eric pulls back, embarrassed, scratching his temple on the brass edge of the strikeplate.

"Your father was a student here," the headmaster says. Eric presses his left palm against his temple. The office is a cavern of blood-red wallpaper and mahogany furniture, a silver coffee service on a side table, a heavy leather blotter. Eric looks at his grandmother sitting in the visitor's chair, her dress nearly matching the upholstery, and thinks how at home she looks, how this is probably the velvety sort of space she once hoped to live in, but never had quite enough money for, even before three grief-ragged people fell into her starched lap. Eric feels a dangerous empathy uncurling inside him, and purposefully tamps it down.

"He knows. About his father and uncle attending here," Eulalie says. Eric pictures his adult father walking among the children outside, two feet too tall, his legs hairy above his stockings, leaning down to make fun of the boy with his face stuck through the headmaster's office door. No bell or alarm has rung, but there is the sound of classroom doors being unlatched, students filing in. "I've kept you too long," the headmaster says. "Let's get your things upstairs, and then to class with you."

Eulalie stands and looks at Eric. He wonders if she's going to embrace him to say goodbye, the way a mother would. He wonders if he wants her to. "Behave yourself," she says. "I'll see you Saturday. We'll have apple tart, now that I know you like it."

The headmaster hefts Eric's school box into the air, balancing it on one shoulder like the men offloading boats in the harbor. Eric tries to pick up the rolled mattress, bound with twine and wrapped around the bedsheets like a pork roulade. But it's heavy for him, and awkward, so the headmaster lifts that, too. The walk down the hallway is excruciating. The boys in the classrooms have only notebooks and pencils in front of them, or a small school satchel hanging off the day students' chairs. To have his box paraded down the hallway on the headmaster's shoulder, filled with everything he owns, is hideous. His rolled mattress might as well be a flag made of underpants.

He follows the headmaster up three flights of stairs to a long attic room with rows of iron beds. There are several bare metal frames, but the headmaster

seems to know which is meant for Eric. "You'll be on this end," he says. "With the younger children." The box slides easily under the bed, and Eric sighs with relief, lets loose some small corner of a larger fear. The headmaster puts the mattress roll on top of the metal frame. "I'm afraid I don't have anything to cut the twine. You'll have study time before and after supper, and an afternoon recess. You can come up and make your bed at any of those times, though the light will be better, earlier."

Eric nods.

"Ask one of the teachers to give you a pair of scissors. I should have given you time to do it this morning. Before classes began," the headmaster says.

Eric shrugs.

"You could have met some of the other boarders."

Eric looks at the nearest bed, neatly made, and at the dresser he will apparently share with this person. There are two drawers that will be his, a basin of water. A window directly above his bed, and Eric doesn't know if this is a desirable spot, because of the view, or a bad one, because of the cold. He looks at the gray water, the gray hump of Havre across the channel, the gray sky above it. He looks at the rows of gray houses marching down towards the harbor and, by counting the streets and chimneys, realizes that he can see his grandmother's roof.

The neighboring bed has a small wooden cross and a photograph nailed to the wall above it, a portrait of a family—mother, father, two tall sisters, a boy of about Eric's age. Eric's family never sat for a portrait together. It was expensive, and there was always a reason to delay—until his father's business took off, or until his mother said she felt slim again, no longer big with Louise, then—

"I'm sorry," the headmaster says. "About your mother."

What about my father? Eric wants to say. And my sister, and my friends, and everything else. What about everything else?

"I've got your schedule here. Penmanship is first. Then hygiene."

"Hygiene?"

"It's just once a week. Health and manners and so on. I'm sure your grandmother has kept you quite well scrubbed."

Eric grimaces, and the headmaster smiles, slightly. "Then drawing, and English. I assume you speak some already? I'll tell Monsieur Aguillard to keep an eye out for you. Make sure you're properly challenged."

Eric stares out the window, at the roof and the sea.

"I'm sorry about your mother," the headmaster says again, in English, and Eric understands. His breathing grows jagged and desperate, and he lunges at the basin on the dresser to splash his face with water. It's chilly and not fresh, but he supposes he'll always be washing now in some stranger's water. Hygiene. He wonders how hard it might be to fail the class. It might be worth doing, just to make a point.

"How about you skip penmanship? Just for today. You'll hear the bell once, and then you've got five minutes to go downstairs before the second bell. Here, on your schedule—you can see the room numbers go with the floors."

Eric nods gratefully, his face still turned away. The headmaster puts his hand on Eric's shoulder, and leaves. When he's gone Eric drags his box from under the bed and opens it. He needs his notebook and pencils, and a handkerchief. A folded paper slips from the notebook, a drawing Louise has snuck in. Eric is glad she's labeled the figures—Eric, Louise—because the sketch isn't any good. Both the children are composed of sticks and circles, Louise's dress a black triangle. They stand close together in the center of the page, although Eric's black-dot eyes are placed strangely, staring somewhere beyond the paper's edge. Louise's eyes stare accusingly forward. He wonders if the drawing is the kind of thing he might tack above his bed, or if he'd be made fun of. *Do I put it up?* he thinks towards the mermaid.

How in the world would I know? she answers. *You've seen where I live. Paper gets wet, so we keep no pictures.*

So how do you remember?

Remember what?

The people you love.

We don't. Sea creatures are very forgetful.

What did my uncle ask for, when he talked to you?

I don't remember.

Wednesday mornings are religious instruction; the free afternoons Eulalie has already filled with music lessons. Eric is sent to a house in the Rue Bourdet, where the only decoration is a black and white print of a piano hanging directly above the actual piano, as if without it Monsieur Vinot would not seem sufficiently musical. "I teach German, too," Vinot says, shaking Eric's hand and giving him a business card. "Very reasonable prices. Pass that along to your parents."

Eric stiffens.

"Play something," Vinot says, gesturing at the stool. "Show me what you've learned so far."

Eric stares at the dark curly hair that crawls down Vinot's face and wraps around his chin and mouth, side-whiskers so fecund they remind Eric of the ivy over the mermaid. A new piece, he thinks. Vinot will be so impressed he'll tell Eulalie and somehow, she'll tell his father. His father will come back to hear it. Not a little minuet or gavotte, but something big like the ocean, with beautiful things floating inside it. Sweet arpeggios like mermaids, a melody like a mother. Eric builds the song in his head, how grand, how beautiful, how the footsteps in the street outside will stop to listen.

He holds his hands over the instrument, but as he looks down the yellowed keys seem different, somehow, than the ones he pictured. Vinot clears his throat, and Eric plunges his hands down—too loud, the chord is too loud, the piano has a lighter touch than the one in Paris. The notes are the wrong notes, too low, so Eric tries to move up the keyboard, the next notes higher but dissonant. The more he tries to play, to recapture the music he heard in his head, the worse it becomes. "What game are you playing?" Vinot says, and it becomes even more important that Eric somehow rescue the song. He plows ahead until Vinot grabs Eric's wrists and lifts his hands bodily off the instrument. Eric is breathing hard. "I expect you to take your lessons seriously," Vinot says icily.

I was absolutely serious, Eric wants to explain. I had such plans, and they all went wrong. Outside he hears a snort of laughter, perhaps other boys waiting for their own lessons, and he imagines them trading looks, imitating his playing. How much worse if they knew it was supposed to be a song about the ocean, about the endless things it gobbles up.

"It was just a joke, sir," Eric says. "I won't do it again."

After Saturday morning lessons the week-boarders are allowed home. Eric has stolen a piece of chalk from a classroom, and stops at the mermaid to outline her form, her curved fin, her curved chest. Once it's done, she just looks dusty, sullied. *I'm sorry,* he whispers, rubbing at the chalk lines with his hands, then his handkerchief, arriving home with chalk dust on his cuffs and trousers. He tells Eulalie he was invited to model his letters on the board for the whole class. She seems almost to believe him—penmanship is one of his few discernible talents.

Sunday morning at St. Catherine's they're joined by a man Eulalie introduces as her brother, the children's great-uncle, in from Havre with his wife. "Monsieur Fortin will stand as your godfather," Eulalie says, and Eric shrugs, fidgets through Mass. At the end of the service he moves swiftly off the pew and towards the back doors. Eulalie catches him by his jacket, and leads the children to the nave. They stand alongside two other infants of the town, and Eulalie has them re-baptized as Catholics. Eric lets it all happen around him with bemusement. For once Louise is the one who makes trouble, trying openly to squirm out of the priest's grip as Fortin holds her in place. On the way home Eric tries to take her hand. Water has run down the collar of her dress, and she waves him off so that she can use both hands to hold it away from her neck.

The weather is cold now, although there is no ice in the Old Basin, and the ships still come and go easily. Fortin escorts his wife to the ferry dock and comes to Eulalie's house alone for Sunday dinner. He quizzes Louise relentlessly: "What is the prayer Jesus taught the disciples? Can you recite it? What other name does it go by?" From religion Fortin moves on to plants and animals and the capitals of Europe.

Louise fields the questions with increasing despair. "She doesn't know that. Nobody knows that," Eric tries to help, as Fortin asks something about Belgium.

"*I* know that. Do you want to grow up to be the kind of man who knows nothing about Belgium?"

"Yes," Eric says emphatically. "And Louise doesn't want to know anything about Belgium either."

"I'm trying to see what she knows," Fortin says.

"She's reasonably clever. She'll learn whatever you want her to," Eulalie offers.

At dinner Fortin says grace, adding a special thanks for the opportunity to meet his great-nephew and niece and guide them in their religious education. The children eat in silence until they are excused to play. Eric offers, generously, he thinks, to play paper dolls with Louise.

"It'll be all right," Eric says. He doesn't know what he's referring to.

"Don't you understand? We'll never see her again, now. Not ever," Louise says.

That night Eric dreams that both heaven and hell, Catholic and Anglican, are nothing but ocean, infinite and gray. He can swim, and even breathe underwater, but he is alone. He looks all night for his family. He can't even find the mermaid, although he swears he hears her singing.

Then Eulalie is waking him up, telling him to dress, putting his packed satchel on his shoulder and a piece of bread in his hand. On the way back up the hill Eric stops at the mermaid. He looks at her for a long time, so long other boys run up the stairs behind him. "We'll be late," they say, trying to be friendly. He doesn't move. He waits for the mermaid's thoughts to pierce his, for her voice to ring in his head the way Fortin said God's can. Eric holds his eyes open until they dry and blur, waiting for her shape to change, for some other truth of the world to present itself. She grows blurrier, and his eyes ache, and a bell rings, and nothing is different. He goes to class tardy and is made to sit in the corner, and still the world is just the world.

The next weekend Louise is gone. "She's to live with Monsieur Fortin," Eulalie explains. "He agreed to look after her. Two children! I'm not young anymore." Eric has more pilfered chalk in his pocket, and that night he sneaks into Louise's bedroom with a candle and draws on the wallpaper. He makes a picture of her, but it doesn't come out. He tries a picture of the mermaid, also a failure. He gives up, chalks the floor until the pieces run down to nothing, until the tips of his fingers are bleeding from running them directly across the wood. The white splotch is nothing more than a pond, but Eric pretends the ocean. He drags a blanket off

Louise's bed and sleeps there in the sea, and then there's chalk all over the blanket and Eulalie takes him to church the next morning without breakfast. Some of her friends ask after Louise. "She's been kidnapped," Eric says, and then Eulalie doesn't feed him lunch, either, and packs his bag with a note for the school's night chaperone and a few coins so Eric can join the late meal with the all-week boarders. Before he leaves she makes him scrub the floor in Louise's room, and he thinks to check the bedframe. He reaches under the mattress and touches the pocketknife, feels sure Louise has left it for him on purpose. *So I can rescue her*, Eric thinks. He finishes his scrubbing, takes his satchel from Eulalie without protest, slipping the knife out of his pocket and into the bag as soon as she shuts the front door behind him. He walks down the street towards the stairs, and then he walks past them.

He walks into town, past a ship's brokerage and Osprey's shop, past the cobbler and a joinery and the clockmaker. It's dark, but in December it grows dark early, and there are still plenty of people about. Eric attracts no special notice. He walks around the Old Basin to where Osprey's boat is tied. Eric didn't know if Osprey might take it out of the water for winter, but tonight, at least, it sits close against the wall in the still water, snow collecting on the deck, the top of the railing, the spokes of the wheel, little white hillocks on the tie posts on the shore. "Clove hitch," Eric remembers, seeing the knot and following the rope back up to a cleat on deck. He even remembers his uncle showing him how to undo them, taking the working end under and around and throwing the rope onto the deck of the boat.

When he heaves the rope, it smacks the side and slides down the hull into the water, but Eric is still able to jump easily on deck and pull the rope on after him. He coils it near the jam cleat, although the fiber is wet now, and his coil is sloppy. He is so focused on the rope, he doesn't realize at first that he isn't going anywhere. The boat hasn't moved.

Havre. Just on the other coast. Alfred laughed when he said it. It mustn't take long to get there. The ferry boats when they dock aren't terribly big. Eric has not thought about how one raises a sail, or which way the wind is blowing. He hopes that his Viking heritage will awaken in his blood, that this is something all Norman boys, even ones raised in Paris, can do, or at least something they can do when their sisters are in peril.

The boat still refusing to move, he decides he needs to push off somehow from the wall, and looks for an oar, or pole, or fishing gaff. He can't find anything long enough. Frustrated near the point of tears, Eric shoves himself against the railing on the opposite side, wondering if he can somehow rock the entire boat to freedom. He spins the wheel—also nothing. He leans back over the side and looks out. The lights in the building across the street have gone out. The square is emptier. The temperature is still dropping and Eric's bare hands are stiff—he tries to wiggle his fingers, and watches them move slowly, brokenly. He can barely see them. He could hop back over the railing and walk up to the school. Rumor has it that the all-week boarders get hot chocolate Sunday nights, to console them for not being at home like the other children. But if he can hop over so easily, that means he can also push the boat while standing on the wall.

In his new shoes, still not quite broken in, he braces his feet on the slippery, snow-covered stone. This works, well enough that Eric is startled by how quickly the boat rocks away from him. His weight pitches forward, and then he throws himself back, off the wall, but is so afraid the boat will float off without him that he climbs back up and leaps. The boat isn't far, but Eric conservatively aims for the railing, to grab it and pull himself over. His hands are too frozen to close the way they should, and he slips straight down the side with a splash.

The cold is shocking and black and silent. There is no clatter of feet on the stones, no lantern raised over the wall. He thinks his thoughts toward the mermaid, but there is no answer. He thinks, *help*. He tries to say it aloud, and water rushes in. The boat is right there, the shore, but there is nothing to grab onto. His body won't answer. He wonders which afterlife he'll go to, if Louise is right, or his mother, or the mermaid.

Then his jacket rises up around him, the fabric bunched at his ears, pinching under his arms. "Eric? Eric!" Eric allows himself to hope that the miraculous voice is his father. But when he opens his eyes he sees Osprey. His uncle leans over him, dripping on the stones, grabs an end of the rope that Eric left piled on the deck, and reties the boat. Eric watches the long stretch of Osprey's body and wishes he were grown. He wishes he were a man, able to simply reach out and bring two things together. He feels angry that his father is grown and can't seem to do the

same. Someone comes with a lantern, and in the light Eric can see that the woman with Osprey is not his wife. Osprey takes off his jacket, wraps it around Eric. The woman whispers something and disappears into the dark. Osprey takes Eric into his arms, thanks the man with the lantern.

"My school bag. It's still on the boat," Eric says, when he can breathe. His skin hurts.

"Later," Osprey says.

Eric sees the street sign for the Rue Haute above Osprey's shoulder, and realizes he's being carried back to his grandmother's house. "I'm supposed to be at school," Eric says. "She sent me back early." Then, after a pause, "She stole Louise. She sent her away."

Osprey comes to a stop and sighs. "I need to get you warm."

"I'll never see her again," Eric says.

"Don't be silly," Osprey says, but Eric can feel them change directions, feel Osprey walk even more swiftly back the way they came, through the town and then away from it, down a country road that feels to Eric like the end of the earth. Without apartment buildings rising up on either side, without even the little houses and shops of Honfleur, the fields spread in a menacing silence around them. At Osprey's home his wife builds the fire back up, wraps Eric in blankets, rinses his clothes in fresh water and spreads them to dry, because Osprey's children are all girls, and there are no boys' clothes in the house. She says nothing about why Osprey might have been out so late. Eric falls asleep on the floor, Osprey's arms around him, the fire roaring.

Eric tries to remember later what he dreamed that night, whether he was late to school the next morning, whether he had his satchel. He has no flu later, no pneumonia, nothing to remind him of the cold. He remembers Osprey telling him, as they lay curled on the floor together, that they would take the boat out, some weekend soon, and sail to Havre. He'd make Eric wear a cork vest for safety, but they'd wave to the ferries as the wind sped them past. He would teach Eric more knots, and Eric and Louise could spend their Sundays together.

But the boat stays moored, and Osprey gets along so poorly with Eulalie that he does not often come to the house. There is some trouble with his wife, and then Osprey emigrates, alone, the boat sold in secret to help pay for the passage. No one in the family ever sees Osprey again, nor knows where he ended up.

Fortin almost never leaves Havre, and when the children see each other Eric can feel Louise's anger, her monstrous, lonely hurt. To share the story of that night—the boat, the lantern, the bone-dissolving cold of the water—seems like a plea for sympathy, and Eric can tell Louise has none to spare. He tells himself that the next time they see each other, or the next, she will be less angry, easier to speak with. He begs the mermaid to soften his sister's heart. Louise speaks mostly to Eulalie, requesting tips on how to achieve custard's proper gelatinous quality. Eric curses the mermaid, pinches her nipples, hears her voice less often with every passing year.

When Alfred sends for him, six years later, their grandmother is six months away from drowning, her dark skirts weighted by a freak wave. Louise is ten years from marriage, to a man of Fortin's choosing, who will die before their child is born, a nephew Eric will never meet. Louise will never have been sent for, the adventure of the failed rescue never told. Eric writes her songs, instead. He doesn't have a publisher, but copies out the manuscript pages by hand. He sends her copies but does not know if she can look at the notes and translate the sound in her head. He does not know if she hears the apology inside them. He does not even know if she owns a piano.

How lovely, how tidy, if these were the songs to make him famous. Out of grief comes glory. Out of loss emerges something beautiful. But these are not his best work, merely his *juvenilia*, scholars will later decree; they are not songs you would recognize, not the ones you've heard in concert halls or movie soundtracks. Those songs are written for people with money, patrons who keep Eric supplied with wine and rent, who invite him to meals and look politely away when he slips bread into his pockets. His best work is done for money, and Louise has none to offer. Only her unhappiness, as inexhaustible as the ocean. *Tell her,* a voice sometimes nudges him, an echo that he still sometimes thinks of, although he is far too old for pretend, as the mermaid. *How you tried to sail to her. How you ended up half-drowned and frozen.*

She will only be angry that I did not try again, he answers.

Then send her something other than words.

I sent her music.

Not music, the voice urges. *Send her the knife.*

He still has it, wrapped in tissue paper in a dresser drawer. But what good would it do Louise now? It is so rusted he can no longer open the blade. A poor steward, he thinks himself, of both mermaid and knife. He pictures the vast empty gray ocean of his dream, and knows that he might try to explain for the rest of his life, every note of every song, but he's already lost his sister. There is no music like the maw of the sea, its limitless hunger. The Seine rolls out from Paris, the way Eric sends his songs sailing into the world. They do not return to him, cannot. There is no music that brings people back. He has known this, he thinks, since he was a boy.

Hafizah Geter

Fishhook

There was rain that December.
The same banners

for school dances. Soldiers came home
so suddenly we couldn't argue justification

over forgiveness.
Things got easier. Twice,

the story was, *yes*. Rain fell
like a man who couldn't stop

chasing after the wrong kind of woman.
You can wait so long

for a word to come,
it will fracture

at the hip. We welcomed soldiers
home with nowhere to say their names

in their own country. In some future, my sons
lob their belts in the air, as if the sun

were a branch they could rest
their nooses upon.

They mistake the whole weight
of the body as necessary.

Upon seeing the knife

in the closet, we wanted to see the stars,
to find where healing flaps over itself
like a language
without numerology.

We came here a long time ago,
songs in need of armor,
have been like animals
backing down a cheap mountain.

No, the house has always looked this way.

At the bottom of a well, our gods
try to claw their way out.
Whatever it is they wanted,
we have made them
sorry for it now.

Diana Khoi Nguyen

Tippi of Africa

Inside each child is a creature who's just crawled in—halfling,
otherling, an animal they try to usher out. There are plans

for evacuation in every contained space: bunker, closet, womb.
When fog lowers its hem on the Kalahari, I never know what

kisses me: pepper grass or the cub's dark mane. Papa, maman,
what perils exist among us? Isn't our tribe enough? I've claimed kinship

with wild ones around me—*brother, Linda, zèbre.* I've taken drink
from the Bushmen's hand-clenched roots. I know which arrows

touch poison. There is no other circadian. In France I am not
French. What they cannot remove remains at home, here,

kept like a tongue amid beasts, my thin tribe gathering eggs.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY EDWARD GAUVIN

Jean-Philippe Toussaint

The Ravanastron

A ravanastron hung, on the wall, from a nail, like a plover.

A what? A ravanastron. The word unexpectedly appeared to me one day at the bottom of page 71 in *Watt*. It was like a dizzying bedazzlement, a pang of pleasure, a riddle and a challenge; the mysterious word was instantly graven in my memory (erroneously, in fact—for a long time, quite lightly, I said zavanastron instead of ravanastron). A zavanastron, then, if you're not a particular stickler.

A ravanastron hung, on the wall, from a nail, like a plover.

Enamored of the sentence's admirable balance, I still wondered, sometimes, what it could mean. Any dictionary would, if needed, tell me what a plover was, but a ravanastron? No. I fine-toothed Larousse, exhausted Robert, leafed through Le Littré... nothing (it didn't help that I was always looking for a ravanstron under Z). Finally, I wound up opening my heart to Jérôme Lindon about it—how well I can still see the scene, at Le Sybarite, no doubt (we would lunch at that restaurant for all eternity, the only thing changing the *plat du jour*). After a moment's reflection, brought up short by the question (fairly loony, it's true), and even more confused by what I meant since I kept saying zavanastron instead of ravanastron, Jérôme Lindon, with a vexed pout and a vague wavelike flutter of his hand, as if to shoo an invisible mosquito pestering him, said he guessed Beckett had found the word in one of the countless encyclopedias he was so fond of, but I'll ask him, I'll ask him, he said, I'll ask Sam. I never heard a word about it again.

Truth to tell, I didn't really give a damn what a ravanastron was. I didn't even know what a plover was. I mean at the time, of course. A wall, sure, I could see that. A nail—no problem. After all, I'd written several books myself. But I confess the first time I read that sentence, from those two familiar words, wall and nail, hung those two fascinating words, delightful-sounding and vaguely insolent: plover and ravanastron. "And the single string of the tromba marina"—never really understood what that meant either, mind you (to stick with musical instruments). Besides, now that I know what the sentence means, can attest that it has a meaning and even, if need be, ruin that meaning with an explanation, I realize that it is the form of the sentence, and not its meaning at all, that dazzled me so. Back then, by reading attentively, I already could picture what the sentence was supposed to describe, picture a wall, picture a nail in the wall, but knowing neither what a plover nor a ravanstron was, the image that began gently taking shape in the cottony mists of my mind remained purely abstract, a pure giddiness of sound and rhythm, a mental rattle of colors and consonants—my lambkins, literature itself.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY EDWARD GAUVIN

Jean-Philippe Toussaint

How I Built Certain of My Hotels

I could close my eyes and conjure them up one by one, the hotels in my books, recall them, materialize them, recreate them; once more I see the little entrance of that hotel in Venice from *The Bathroom*, the dark, disquieting stairwells of the hotel in Sasuelo from *Reticence*; once more I see the long hallway on the sixteenth floor from *Making Love*, once more I see the corridor cluttered with tarps and paint cans in the hotel under construction from *Running Away*. Once more I see the empty lobbies and labyrinthine corridors. I barely close my eyes—I can close my eyes while keeping them open, maybe that's what writing is—and right away I find myself in the great empty lobby of the Tokyo hotel with its lighted crystal chandeliers.

There are hotels in almost all my books. I don't build them with the usual construction materials: no load-bearing walls, no beams, no scaffolding, hardly any bricks and cement, no glass, wood or aluminum. I make do with little, a few color adjectives for the rooms, the curtains, the coverlets ("The walls around me were humid and dirty, covered with old orange wallpaper that matched the dark flowers on the bedspread and curtains."). I don't draw up plans for my hotels before building them, but I almost always see them, as if in a dream; the hotels in my books are chimeras of images, memories, fantasies, and words.

There are always a few characters here and there in the hotels I've built, ghosts more or less inspired by real people I've run into in my travels: the receptionist from the hotel in Venice, invisible chambermaids, grooms in black livery and gold buttons with little black caps on their heads, made-up porters in official finery, frock coat and gray vest, who keep watch before the doors of imaginary hotels. Beside these barely sketched figures are the more solid lines of a few on the brink of being characters in the novel: my friend the bartender at the hotel in Venice, the owner (male) of the hotel in Sasuelo, the owner (female) of the hotel L'Ape Elbana

in Portoferraio. One might recall similarities between some of my hotels, between the lobby of the hotel in Venice and that of the Hotel Hansen in Shanghai; one might note ley lines, points in common, Oriental coincidences, Mediterranean convergences—perhaps a style might emerge, the rooms take on recurrent motifs, a little flight of steps might be shared by several books. I could have begun a sentence in Madrid in the early '90s and ended it in Corsica fifteen years later:

"A little flower-lined staircase led up to the hotel entrance with a double glass door. I walked up the steps at the entrance and crossed through an arbor under which white tableclothed tables had been set for breakfast."

The little flower-lined staircase would be the same, issued from an ageless imagination. But the first sentence is from *Reticence* (1991), depicting the hotel in Sasuelo, while the second is from *Running Away* (2005), and describes a hotel in Portoferraio.

In *The Bathroom*, for fifteen pages or so, I did my utmost to hide the fact that the hotel was in Venice. I never gave a thought to finding it a plausible site in the city, an *actual place* to build it in (the Zattere, for instance), nor even an *imaginary place* where it might be erected. The hotel had neither lobby nor façade nor sign, it was a purely mental hotel, a view from the mind; all that interested me was the room, the inside of the room where the narrator had locked himself. Beyond that room, I built a network of corridors, bends, landings, and floors ("it was a labyrinth, no signs indicating anything anywhere"). The other rooms only appeared in the book according to my novelistic needs, in successive layers, not so much to try and comprise a harmonious and functional architectural ensemble, but according to the rhythm of the scenes I was writing, each room being created only for its *fictional function*.

The founding image of *Making Love* was a brief conversation between the narrator and Marie in front of the great picture window of a hotel in Shinjuku,

Tokyo. The book was built on that image; it had forced itself on me as I was walking down the steep little path of the Tour d'Agnelo in Corsica. I knew right away that image would give birth to a book, not a film, for it was a literary image, made of words, of adjectives and verbs, not cloth, flesh, and light. The way I built that hotel in Tokyo is entirely representative of the way I build my hotels, which is to say the way I build my characters. For from a literary point of view, there is no difference between building a hotel and building a character. In both cases, details from reality merge with images that form in the imagination, fantasy, or reverie; sometimes a few sketches will be added, doodles, photos, more traditional documents, travel guides, a detailed map of Tokyo, brochures that help me locate hotels in space and copy out their exact address (2-7-2, Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku). I only ever make up a hotel from several existing hotels. I mix them up and melt them together to form one of my liking, feeding my imagination authentic details drawn from real life, which will graft themselves to my hotel-in-progress. This is as true of my hotels as it is of my characters—I make as if I'm talking about hotels, but I'm actually talking about Edmondsson or Marie.

In the same way that it takes several hundred pounds of aromatic shrubs to produce, by distillation, a vial of essence of rosemary, a great deal of real life must be extinguished to obtain the concentrate that is a single page of fiction. This network of multiple influences, various autobiographical sources, which merge, overlap, braid, and gather until you can't tell true from false, fiction from autobiography, lives as much on dreams as memories, as much on desire as reality. Such a mixture of influences is particularly striking in the case of the hotel in Tokyo, where the room was inspired by a hotel room where I'd lived in Osaka, and the outside by a hotel I knew in Tokyo, which makes at least two hotels that served as models to build this imaginary hotel, not counting more hotels still, in Sendai or Shinagawa, from which I borrowed, here and there, some final detail (the scene with the TV set that turns itself on to warn of an incoming fax was inspired by something that really happened to me in a hotel in Shinagawa). And so, as in film, where it is common to blend several places together to make a single setting, the interior and exterior of the hotel were from different sources, but made a new ensemble, a hybrid building, fanciful and literary, an immaterial construct of adjectives and stone, words and steel, marble, crystal, and tears.

Wang Ping

Writing in Two Tongues

Seventeen years ago, I walked into a creative writing class by accident and started writing. I wrote in two languages, Chinese, my mother tongue, and English, which I studied in my early twenties before I came to the USA. There was a huge gap between my Chinese poems and the English ones, and I couldn't see it until I tried to translate the English poems into Chinese and found the task nearly impossible. Putting them side-to-side, I realized when I wrote in Chinese, I automatically walked the line of five thousand years of poetic tradition: cultured, flowery, cluttered with historical allusions, images and metaphors; whereas my English poems were simple, bold, and straightforward, both in form and content, playful paintings by a child who knows no fear or inhibition, who never hesitates to point and shout, "The emperor has no clothes!"

I was a virgin till twenty-three, then always had more than one lover at the same time—all secret.

The most powerful curse: fuck your mother, fuck your grandmother, fuck your great-grandmother of eighteen generations.

We don't say "fall in love, but "talk love."

When I left home, my father told me: "Never talk love before you're twenty-five years old." I waited till twenty-three. Well, my first lover was a married coward. My first marriage lasted a week. My husband slept with me once, and I never saw him again.

—"Of Flesh and Spirit"

Such vulgar! Such horror! My mother tongue would never allow them to surface to my consciousness, let alone let them out in writing as a poem. It is simply unimaginable, unthinkable and the unspeakable, therefore, untranslatable.

The discovery shook me. True, mother tongue soothes and nurtures like a cradle, but it's also a pointing finger, telling me what to see, where to go, how to think and feel. It provides the ground for my imagination while setting the boundary. It works subtly, unconsciously, and ubiquitously. I speak, write and think in Chinese without a second thought, taking it for granted. It's like going home through a forest path so old and familiar that I can do it with my eyes closed. And I often do; therefore, I no longer see.

To write poetry in a second tongue, however, I do not have such luxury. I have to keep my eyes, ears and mouth open all the time for new sounds, new expressions, new meanings. I constantly stop a conversation and ask, "What does it mean?" or "What are you really trying to say?" Most of the time people laugh kind-heartedly, give me the definition of the word, then go on. Sometimes they get annoyed for being interrupted, or become condescending. My questions force them to reexamine the words they use, revealing unintentionally that they don't really know what they are saying, or don't mean what they are trying to say. Some

people would feel threatened, and start mocking my accent and my grammatical mistakes. But I don't care. Marked forever as a linguistic child by my foreign accent, I have a giant playground with endless toys to play with. I can break rules, challenge the authority of the language, and bypass the old ways of seeing and thinking. And I feel no shame to stumble and fall.

She walks to a table
She walk to table

She is walking to a table
She walk to table now

What difference does it make
What difference it make

In Nature, no completeness
No sentence really complete thought

Language, like woman
Look best when free, undressed
—"Syntax"

A word is not just a word, but a universe pulsing with the lives and histories of the people who speak it, write it, and live it. Yet it can also become stagnant from the forced rules, become grimy and clichéd from careless use. A poem must first of all yank us out of the familiar ground we stand on to make us see things in a new light. It must challenge the thinking patterns a mother tongue has ingrained in our brains so that we can think out of the box. A poem must bring words closer

to the origin of things, back to the fundamental reality of time and space, which is neither linear nor flat. It must make words speak at once with the vividness of painting and the mobility of sounds. In a poem, words must come alive, bloom, fruit, and every sound must echo and vibrate, summoning souls, stories, passions of the past and present and future from all directions.

Since my writing walks the tightrope between languages and cultures, there's no old word for me, be it English or Chinese. Every time I use a word, I enter a virgin forest. I cut and chop to open new paths. I sniff and taste each exotic plant, mushroom, flower, fruit.... I dig for roots, hidden treasure, forgotten history. I wander, look, poke. I trip, get lost, fall into traps. I encounter beasts and monsters that sometimes befriend me, other times tear me apart. But no matter, in the forest of language, I'm always Alice in Wonderland, the little Red Riding Hood who chats with the Big Wolf, enters his stomach, then tumbles out with double axes.

One axe is my Chinese sense of time, which is ruled by the moon instead of the sun, which doesn't always run a linear line of logic. Unlike English in which a word is spelled out horizontally with alphabetic order, which predetermines the linear quality of image, time, and thought process, a Chinese character is an ideogram, a direct and indirect copy of images from nature. Each word stands as a square unit built with straight vertical and horizontal lines, long and short curves, angles, hooks, dots, and so on, laid out with positions and movements of up and down, left and right, inside and out. And each unit is put together with different parts, with their own meanings and sounds, their own units of positions, directions and movements. The word bright 明 is made of two parts: the sun and the moon standing next to each. For wife 婦, it is a woman holding a broom. Forest森 comes into being when three trees grow together and on top of one another. Unlike a phonetic word, a Chinese character is not written as a single line along which image and thought are flattened into a neat, straight order. It is a compound with multiple units, with image within image, image upon image, a flowing, complex contour. Its roots, trunk, and branches are always visible and available to be taken apart and reassembled to form new meanings, new perspectives, new horizons.

Home—家—*Jia:* a roof under which animals live.
House—房—*fang:* a door over a square, a place, a direction.
Room—屋—*wu:* a body unnamed and homeless until it finds a destination.

—my tangled roots for home.
—"Mixed Blood"

Without my other axe of English, however, I'd be walking, like most native speakers, in the forest of three thousand years of Chinese tradition and poetics, my eyes closed and ears plugged. Home would just be a place where I eat, sleep, and grow old. I would not have seen the roots or searched for the secret doors. I would not have discovered the beasts under its roof, or seen the directions outside its door. I'd have remained an unnamed and homeless body without a destination.

A deconstructed kiss 親吻 goes like this:

Parents kiss mouth not.
Parents, do not kiss mouth.
Don't kiss parents' mouth.
Mouth kiss parents? Don't!
Kiss parents, not mouth.
"Do not kiss," mouthed the parents.
—"Oral"

As I make a new path in my virgin English forest, I also clear the old road in my Chinese one. When the two roads converge, I arrive at a new world of space and time, where the sun and moon shine together in the sky, and I swim in many rivers and run along many paths at the same time. Words, freed from grammar and clichés, become flexible and fluid. A noun is a verb is a preposition is an adjective is a conjunction at once and all times. Words are no

longer abstract signs or signifiers. They're concrete, alive, full of sap from nature and pregnant with possible meanings and nuances. And the poem becomes an electric field where motion leaks everywhere, charging and entangling until the ground is no longer a mere existence, but a forest bursting with the noise, drama and myth of life.

愛—*ai*—the hand comes first, then the roof, then the heart—心—xin. Its three dots spurt and drip like blood over a standing leg. For decades, the heart has been erased from books, papers, magazines. But its pulse has never stopped. It's been pulsing in my grandmas' stories, my sister's waiting for the reunion with her long lost daughter, in the shafts of sunlight, moon rise, fallen leaves, in the whip my mother carefully placed behind the bedroom door.

—"Ways to Ai"

I write in English, and Chinese always runs as the undercurrents in the process. The two tongues gnash and tear, often at each other's throat, but they feed on each other, expand, intensify and promote each other. They keep me on my toes, opening new doors and taking me to places I'd never have imagined otherwise.

A poetry critic told her Chinese daughter-in-law, "You can be a top lawyer, top essayist, even top fiction writer with English as a second language, but keep poetry to your mother tongue."

After twenty years in America, my English is still broken, full of holes, and I have fallen through them many times. But I've learned to fall with grace, and have turned each fall into an adventure. One never knows what lies at the bottom, what world awaits us when we come through the other end. That's the beauty of language and poetry: to see the invisible, to reach the unknown through our gracious fumble and tumble.

A poem must tear away from the mother tongue's zealous cling, must clear the overgrowth, debris, grime, dust, sometimes set a fire, in order to revitalize

the forest. A second language gives us new eyes and tools. A poem is not about completion, but process. It is an ocean with mammals and fish and plants, with islands and corals and volcanoes. In this living ocean, we swim and sail, by boat, raft, ship, life preserver currents of metaphors, between the continents of cultures and languages.

Poetry may indeed belong to the mother tongue, but it also belongs to the heart that no logic or rules can bind, to the myth of life that sings with multiple voices.

Billy Merrell

Bat House

One is a leather-bound book missing its pages,
or a broken umbrella, the nylon still taut.

Another, all dart and blacking...
Then only night again, holding

white oak, bluff oak, black gum, sumac;
magnolian constellations.

That odor of wet muslin—
Wait. Another appears, another.

A cloud swells, garish or hopeful
as love, or anything that dreams

of being rare. I waited and waited
for these angels to unhang.

Now, I can't see just one. Against the sky,
they scatter in every direction but mine.

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE BY MING DI

Lü De'an

Night at Ocean Corner and Women

Ocean Corner, Ocean Corner,
a fishing village
in the shape of a fisherman's footprint,
immerses in water like a fan spreading its spikes.
A black shirt with sparkling stars
blows across
when a small night falls. And here

people sleep early, with salty air outside
the windows. Nearby, evening lights
on fishing boats scatter, a sign of
nets down in the ocean—they've waited
a thousand years for the fish.
Night is dark. Children cry as if there're no parents
around—they're in deep dreams.
Children cry. But it's

time to go to sleep. Children get quiet. So does
the small night
at Ocean Corner. Everyone sinks into happiness
with a foaming smile
and this is the most beautiful moment—
no voices by the men's side gently elbowing
"Time to go to sea."

Philip Metres

Erotic Soyuz: 25 Propositions on Translating (Arseny Tarkovsky)

1.

Every essay on (the impossibility of) translation resembles every other, but this one is happy in its own way. Like a striptease that leads only to more clothing, let's begin with a contradiction: generalities are never interesting. The particular is the place of all the juice and joy, all the scald and sin. For example, what's an adequate translation for форточка (*fortochka*)—that little window that opens in a bigger window that does not open?

2.

Another generality masquerading as a particular: language is limestone, porous enough to let the world in and out again, always changed by the water's flow. If poetry is in fact "what is lost in translation," it is because our own words often fail to describe, inscribe, transcribe, or circumscribe our lives. The failures of translation, then, are not failures between languages as much as a property of language itself.

3.

Yet, the translator believes that different languages have enough open edges, even contact zones, like the human body, that they can near or even touch each other. The closer the worlds of those languages (for example, Romance languages or Slavic languages or Finno-Ugric languages), the more edges will fit (almost seamlessly) with other edges. What the translator sees is how many edges have no partner. When I first spent time in Russia, I was amazed how people used the term "на улице" to signify "outside." Literally, the term means "on the street." Another term that Russians use is "на дворе," which means "in the [court]yard." There are many words for outside—снаружи, or exterior—but people don't use it in quite the same way. Inscribed in our languages are slightly different conceptualizations of space. That's why I began the poem "Ashberries" about the time I spent living in Russia: "Outside, in a country with no word for outside,/ they cluster on trees, red bunches." Of course this country has a word for outside—it has many words for outside—but what I was gesturing toward was the gap between languages, the gap between different conceptions of space.

4.

Language dictionaries suggest otherwise, but the very fact that words have deep roots makes exact one-to-one word translation difficult, one step more difficult than seeking synonyms in Roget's *Thesaurus*. If you've done this before, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Have a word, then try to find an adequate synonym. Each possibility feels slightly off, like glasses with the wrong prescription. And each synonym for synonym leads you further and further from anything that approximates seeing. Every word, every word worth its salt, carries with it a kind of irreducible particularity—its primal sounds, its weight in the mouth, its richly layered conscious and unconscious connotations and associations, both public and private. Words are like people, only older and more idiosyncratic.

5.

During the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians often had to import English words to describe the new (economic) system that suddenly infiltrated their lives, words for "fun," "know-how," "businessman," "discount," "sale," etc. And, of course, the Russians have a whole bag of words associated with Soviet, peasant, and other cultural formations distant from our American experience: how to find a single term for колхоз ("kolkhoz," or "collective farm") or кулак ("kulak," meaning both "landowning peasant" and "fist") that would carry at least some of the connotations of those words? Or, more mundanely, how to find an American English word to describe the acidic reaction one gets from biting into something sour? The Russians have a single word for that: оскомина.

6.

The particular at hand, what we wish to touch, what we wish to touch us, is the work of Russian poet Arseny Tarkovsky, with which I've been wrestling (in tag-team with Dimitri Psurtsev) for the past five years, and whose work will appear as *I Burned at the Feast: Selected Poems of Arseny Tarkovsky* (Cleveland State Poetry Center). Tarkovsky, a lifelong poet and translator, the father of the great filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, knew himself all too well the miseries of translation, as he wrote in his poem "Translator":

For what did I spend
My best years on foreign words?
O, Eastern translations,
How you hurt my head.

Actually, of course, he wrote nothing of the kind. He wrote:

Для чего я лучшие годы
Продал за чужие слова?
Ах, восточные переводы,
Как болит от вас голова.

Or as an email once encoded it:

??????????????????????????????
??????????????????????????????
??????????????????????????????
??????????????????????????????

Somehow, this seems to be a most adequate representation of the poetics of translation.

7.

How can we get close to Tarkovsky? First, there is the fact of Russian poetry's acute and irreducible particularities, the most acute and irreducible its relationship to meter. The regularity of Russian conjugations and declensions, the flexibility of word order in sentence meaning, and the multisyllabic nature of Russian words all combine to create a seemingly endless wellspring of rhymes and metrical possibilities. In contrast to the poetries of the West, which inhaled modernism's breath of free verse and only rarely return to the formal rooms of strict meters, Russian poetry has, until only very recently, been almost entirely faithful to its highly organized and lush meters. In Tarkovsky's poetry alone, one can find poems not only in iambic, but also in dactylic, anapestic, amphibrachic, not to mention folksongs, unrhymed metrical poems, and, yes, even free verse. It's as if, in the United States, our poetry, metrically speaking, plays its tune within the limits of the pop form, while in Russia, whole symphonies continue to be produced.

8.

But that metaphor suggests a low culture/high culture distinction that distracts from the persistence of complex meters (and rhyme) in Russian poetry. During the twentieth century, when Anglo-American poetry confronted the brave new world of modernism and mass culture, free verse articulated a response to new conditions of production and reception, both to attempt to "make it new" and also resist the new advertising cooptation of the poetic "jingle." In the early

Soviet period, poets innovated mightily—from Velemir Khlebnikov's заумь (*zaum*) sound poems to Vladimir Mayakovsky's new brutalism in the 1910s and 1920s. But as Socialist Realism began to dominate, and many great poets faced repression, the great mnemonic capabilities of Russian poetry served, literally, to allow unpublished poems to persist in the minds of their readers. The story of Nadezhda Mandelstam's memorizing her husband Osip's poems, detailed in *Hope Against Hope*, is but one stunning example of how Russian poetry's aural commitments (and the Russian people's commitments to poetry) enabled a kind of secret history of the soul to continue.

9.

Even if the Russian literary tradition does delve deep into the darkness and misery and mystery of human existence, the music of Russian poetry is so undeniable, so playful, so often ecstatic, and has persisted for so long, it suggests the secret pleasures of a people who have been seen in the West as the stern patrons of unhappiness ("every unhappy family," etc.). It is, indeed, what makes translating Russian poetry most difficult, and why readers of Russian poetry in translation—say, the English poetry version of Anna Akhmatova or Osip Mandelstam—mainly receive a picture of a grim and absurd reality but not much of a sense of what it sounds like when a pure music collides with the grim or the absurd.

10.

Perhaps the translator is a traitor to the native. It's not for nothing that translators are said to use "native informants" to gather intelligence on these strange and dangerous poems. Translators, at times, are literal and figurative colonizers, threatening to domesticate or erase the other in the name of "cultural understanding" or "universal human values." When American translators brought Russian literature into English during the Cold War, it was often summoned to serve a specific political function—not to bring cultural understanding, but to bring down the Soviet Union. And when the Soviet Union fell, the government money that had poured into Slavic departments and presses disappeared overnight.

11.

Of course, what brought me to study Russian poetry may indeed have been Ronald Reagan, who in the 1980s referred to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire." I was immediately intrigued, believing that no people is evil. When I shared this story with poet Sergey Gandlevsky, he said, "you know, when I heard Reagan say that, I thought he was right."

12.

And equally, that the translator can be traitor to her own people, the way the peacebuilder or a lyric poet can seem a traitor to the tribe. In the words of Charles Simic: "Here is something we can all count on. Sooner or later our tribe always comes to ask us to agree to murder... The lyric poet is almost by definition a traitor to his own people. He is the stranger who speaks the harsh truth that only individual lives are unique and therefore sacred. He may be loved by his people, but his example is also the one to be warned against." The translator lingers in contested territory, where sectarianism compels us/them, ours/theirs. The translator is the one who reminds us that difference is not demonic, but daemonic. The translator, possessed by voices and visions that she can only dimly understand, cannot avoid speaking in this forked (and forked-over) tongue.

13.

Back to Tarkovsky. Tarkovsky's deft and diverse deployment of various meters and rhyme schemes presents an almost insurmountable translation problem: how to demonstrate his near-polyphonic facility for variable patterns of rhythm and sound over the course of many poems, without flattening that work to a dull iambic or free verse style with some half-hearted gesture toward off-rhyme? Dimitri Psurtsev and I considered various, sometimes radical, options. One option, briefly considered: if, in American poetry, the "normative" mode is intonational free verse, then why not make all the "normative" Russian poems with rhyme and meter into that intonational free verse, and all the experimental (free verse or unrhymed poems) into poems with meter and rhyme?

14.

Another, more rigidly systematic option would be simply to translate all the dactylic poems as dactylic poems, the iambics as iambic, and so on. This, frankly, seemed more possible but also literalist, since a poem in dactylic in Russian will mean something different than it will in American poetry. We decided against this rigid and misplaced conservatism, encouraged by the notion of the "semantic aura of meter." Kirill Taranovski (and later Mikhail Gasparov) argues that each meter in Russian poetry carries with it the themes and associations of previous poets' employment of those meters; the very idea that a poem's meters are embedded in a larger discourse of form complicates any simplistic application of meter from poetic tradition to poetic tradition.

15.

Our resolution of this interminable impasse between Russian metric and American poetry has been at once less systematic and more organic. Since Tarkovsky's poetry is driven by its music, propelled by rhythm and rhyme, then our translation should make every reasonable attempt to make a similar music. For example, in his war-era portrait, "Ехал из Брянска в теплушке слепой..." ("A blind man was riding"), Tarkovsky employs a dactylic trimeter (plus a final beat) in couplets that echo Nikolay Nekrasov's jaunty folk song meters, creating a dissonant effect with the grim picture of a blind man traveling in the provinces in a cargo train during the Nazi invasion. I began to find the translation in amphibrachs, a peculiar three-part beat of unstressed-stressed-unstressed. The translation begins:

A blind man was riding an unheated train,
From Bryansk he was traveling home with his fate.

Fate whispered to him so the whole car could hear:
And why should you care about blindness and war?

It's good, she was saying, you're sightless and poor.
If you were not blind, you'd never survive...

Without rhythm and rhyme, we would risk turning Tarkovsky into a standard Socialist Realist—losing precisely what makes him a great Russian poet.

16.

For a free verse poem like such as "Град на Первой Мещанской" ("Hail on First Petit-Bourgeois Street," published in *Asymptote*), we opted to remove all punctuation and create greater disjunction on the level of the line (even though normative punctuation exists in the original), in order to reproduce the astonishing effect of free verse to the Russian ear. Perhaps even this does not quite go as far as recreating the unusual feeling of a Russian reader encountering the poem:

tongues in the tower
pound the bells to sound
wind lifts everyone
rushes into entrances doors
slam along the sidewalk sandals
patter rain chasing
her heart pounds
her wet dress itches
& the roses are soaked

17.

Translating metrical richness, however, is not the only problem in translating Tarkovsky. The music of words—from the problem of rhyme to inner alliteration—also presents issues. For example, the war poem "Иванова Ива" (published in *Asymptote*) relies on the musical play in Russian between "iva" (willow) and the soldier's name "Ivan."

ИВАНОВА ИВА

Иван до войны проходил у ручья,
Где выросла ива неведомо чья.

Не знали, зачем на ручей налегла,
А это Иванова ива была.

В своей плащ-палатке, убитый в бою,
Иван возвратился под иву свою.

Иванова ива,
Иванова ива,
Как белая лодка, плывет по ручью.

To think: inside the name of the tree is the name of the man. The man inside the tree—as if anticipating the coffin, enclosed inside the wood. Ideally, one might translate this poem as "Will's Willow," which suggests the shared destiny of soldier and the tree of mourning—but such a choice could confuse readers about the place of the poem. We opted for "Valya"—the name of the poet's brother who was killed in the Civil War—which contains the "l" and vaguely echoes the "w" with the "v." Here's our translation, in its entirety:

VALYA'S WILLOW

Before the war Valya walked along the creek,
Where a willow grew for who knows who.

Though why it lay on the creek, no one knew
Valya owned that willow.

Killed in action, Valya came back
Under his willow, in his military cloak.

Valya's willow,
Valya's willow,
Like a white boat floating on the creek.

18.

Finally, there is the problem of translating Tarkovsky's own world—both his cultural-historical context and his own personal vision. In "К Стихам" ("To Poems"), Tarkovsky's characteristic quasi-Christian pantheism explores the origins of his poetry, addressing his own poems as if they were his children. It ends:

> I had long been the earth—
> Arid, ochre, forlorn since birth—
> But you fell on my chest by chance
> From beaks of birds, from eyes of grass.

These final lines presented a confusion that thankfully was clarified by the late poet and translator F.D. Reeve, who noted that the "eyes of grass" is a reference to how fields of grasses would contain wildflowers, whose "eyes" would seed the earth. In what is an all too typical problem in translation, what appeared to be pure abyssal surrealism—"eyes of grass"—was an associative leap from one place to another place, very much on (and in!) earth. How stunning that a poet of such great humility (from *humus*, earth) is able to pull off speaking as earth.

19.

Or this poem, "Бабочка в госпитальном саду" ("Butterfly in the Hospital Orchard"), about Tarkovsky's days on the edge between life and death after his gangrenous leg required multiple amputations. The lightness and beauty of the meter and rhyme, as if following the motions of the butterfly, hovers just outside all catching it. The word play at the end of the second stanza of the poem relates to the fact that the word for butterfly, "бабочка," has only two vowels—"a" and "o." It's as if this creature, at its center, produces only the vowels of awe: A! O! The English vowels "u" and "y" became a matrix of existential questioning, and while I like it, it lacks the utter wonder of the Russian:

BUTTERFLY IN THE HOSPITAL ORCHARD

Flying from shadow into the light,
She is herself both shadow and light.
Where did she come from, this being
Nearly naked of markings?
She hops in the air when she's flying.
She must be from Asia
There's no one quite like her here.
She must be from forgotten years,
Where the smallest drop of azure
Is like a blue sea in our eyes.

She swears it will be forever
But keeps the word "never."
She can hardly count to two,
Understands less than little,
And from the whole alphabet knows
Only a few vowels—
U
&
Y.
The butterfly's name is a picture
Impossible to pronounce. And why
Does she have to be so quiet?
She's like a simple mirror.

Don't fly off to the East, O
My lady! Don't chase the East,
Flying from shadows
Into the light. My soul, why
Do you long for a far-off place?
O my colorful beloved, my lady,
Don't fly away.

20.

It turns out that failure—the dominant metaphor in so much talk about translation—is not the right metaphor at all. How's this? Translation as erotic/asymptotic—about nearing, longing, stretching one's language toward what it might become. The original as sacred text toward which we long. If poetry is, as Allen Grossman has proposed, an Orphic attempt to reach the Beloved, then the translator is nothing if not Orpheus, at every moment longing to turn and be sure that the beloved still follows. Only a complete turn back will cause the beloved to fade forever. I'm reminded, suddenly, of the moment I learned that in polite written Russian, the addressed "you" is always capitalized, and the word "I" is not.

21.

Or this: translation as transformation. Translation as a co-creative, procreative act. Two languages come together and make a third thing. Robert Lowell's notorious *Imitations*, treat the original texts not as an impossibly-distant object of idealization, but a source of inspiration and invitation, something to meet and make love with. Fady Joudah recently said that he wished his translations of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish were not in English, but "Arabish." May these Tarkovsky poems be "Russianish."

22.

Translations are beautiful monsters. If all translators are Frankenstein, the main question then becomes: is the creature alive? Those grab bags of other organs and skin, stolen from the graveyards of other traditions whose sensibilities are not always our own, grafted into something that approximates a whole. Has the translator provided the lightning rod, gathered the electricity? Monstrous beauty, do you breathe?

23.

Since the 1960s, the Russians have flown a series of spacecraft called Союз Soyuz. We have heard it pronounced "Soy-use," emphasis on the "soy." I am, but only in Spanish. In Russian, it sounds like "sigh-use," the emphasis on "use." It means

"union." To think: all these Unions flying about the sky, hovering above and around our planet, into space.

24.

These Unions, in fact, have something called *translation thrusters*. Translation, in physics, describes the "motion of a body in which every point of the body moves parallel to and the same distance from every other point of the [other] body."[1]

25.

In the end, translators believe in the possibility of translation, as poets must believe in the impossibility of translation—even as they engage in that impossible process with every poem, even in their native tongue. But difference does not lead, necessarily, to irreconciliability. So this: that the two language-poems work on their relation, to find those points parallel, the edges that hold against other edges—providing a fit that each will wear, and will wear each, in its own way.

[1] *The American Heritage® Science Dictionary*. Houghton Mifflin, 2002. "translation." Also available at http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/translation.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY CARLOS RICHARD LARA

Aníbal Cristobo

Jonestown, 1978

They've all left, dressed
for love: in the photo, Alan
and Keasey and the
others in back are waiting, tickets

in hand—strange, like a
wavy shadow—and that
wind,

playing hockey
with the plastic cups: who

was that little boy sitting
on the stairs, drawing
a crab, a dead bug,

and smoking with a bandaged
arm?

Much later, all together
at the dock: *"Poetry isn't
everything; it's
an escape, it's an ice floe, it's
the trees on fire."*—

Two at the Edge of a Pool

Two seated
at the edge of a pool: one has clear
eyes—both have short hair.

One touches the water and says, says
to me: I am watching you, you,

you

hear me? But I cannot
see you. They can-

not see me: One has clear eyes, is
sitting at the edge of the pool, they both
have short hair.

And one touches the water, touches with one, with
two fingers barely—lifts
their head—saying beautifully:

I am watching you, you know?

You knew

I was watching you?—

Daughter of the Pasture (a Song)

She who scratched the record of fog
while everyone slept in their laughing
suits, was me.

She who dreamt of gums
until the fruit erased its memories
and records, in the
night of the palate—was me.

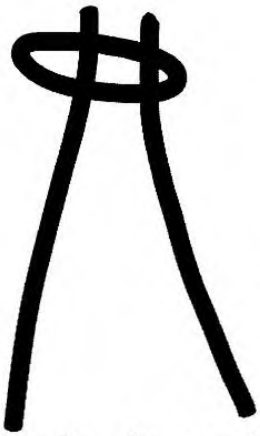
The moon does not rise, now
that I ask. The monkeys are walking
on their hands, in holiness.

By their lightning you'll recognize them. You'll see
what the enchanter does not say.

She who carved heroes with her nails, she who
cured the stones, was me.

And she who saw the koalas, fucking,
and the clover of Saturn, with its
ten shamanistic leaves, was me.

If stains are touched
in the scattering air—always me and
me
as I count my fingers in the shade.—



Antena as Language Lab: Processes and Materialities

Antena is an experiment. Antena is born out of moments when the materiality of language becomes eminently visible. These moments of language materiality happen when language snags, when we trip over language or it becomes unwieldy.

Antena is a laboratory. It is a space and the tools we use to create that space. It is a practice rather than an object, an ever-expanding set of processes rather than a product.

Antena is a language justice and language experimentation collaborative. We do writing, art- and book-making, translating, interpreting, and language justice.

What is language justice? What is language experimentation? These are the questions Antena asks and addresses and asks and addresses, constantly redefining and constantly refining and constantly roughening as we work.

Language justice is a set of concepts and tools we use to create well-functioning bilingual or multilingual spaces where no one language dominates over others, and people are free to participate fully in the language of their choice. Language experimentation is a set of concepts and tools we use to create new cartographies of meaning in language, and to unsettle the structures of power that discourage questioning, curiosity, imagination, and solidarity—in language and in social space.

Antena views aesthetic practice as part and parcel of language justice work. Antena explores how critical views on language can help us to reimagine and rearticulate the worlds we inhabit.

A little history: Antena came first out of a need to find collaborators for the kind of social justice interpreting work both of us were engaged in sporadically, in a less-than-coordinated way. We were interested in seeing what might happen if we centered our work on building multilingual spaces. Part of our initial foray involved purchasing simultaneous interpreting equipment together, the Babel Box—a pirate radio station in a briefcase. Part of it was also opening ourselves up to what it would mean to consciously collaborate together, to see what spaces and thinking might emerge with two brains and bodies at the wheel (or the handlebars).

In early 2012, Project Row Houses offered an opportunity to occupy a narrow shotgun house in Houston's Third Ward for three months. We began to imagine what it might mean to create a space reflective of Antena. We thought about numerous other examples: Eloísa Cartonera's storefront in a working-class neighborhood in Buenos Aires, the Highlander Research and Education Center in the mountains of Tennessee, the installations and community spaces created by Temporary Services, and many more small experimental art and activist spaces. We ended up building a bookspace and reading room with hundreds of small-press and DIY publications from autonomous presses in the Americas, focusing on innovative work by African American, Latino, and Latin American writers. We hosted a read/write club that met weekly for ten weeks to spend time with these books. We learned a lot about what our existence in a space might do.

After our first installation, we spent the next year and a half engaged in the work Antena has always done: social justice interpreting and language justice organizing, instigating bilingual literary events, and also, increasingly, collaborative translation projects—and working with intrepid curator Amy Powell on planning for the next incarnation of Antena-in-space at Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston.

Antena @ Blaffer included a bookspace similar to the one in the previous installation, now greatly expanded to include over two thousand small-press and DIY books from all over the U.S. and from six countries in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay). It also included text-based work by eleven artists who engage ideas about translation or about the relationship of textuality to visuality. Five of the artists were from Houston (Jamal Cyrus, María-

Fig. 1. (opposite) *Encuentro: Antena @ Blaffer*, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston. Participants, clockwise: Sandra Tapia (standing), Ayanna Jolivet-McCloud, María-Elisa Heg, John Pluecker, Jen Hofer, Nuria Montiel, Stalina Villarreal, Amy Powell, Kaia Sand, Efraín Velasco, Benvenuto Chavajay, and Sueyeun Juliette Lee. Photo: Pablo Giménez Zapiola.

Elisa Heg, Ayanna Jolivet McCloud, Autumn Knight, and Stalina Villarreal) and six were from other parts of the U.S. and Latin America (Benvenuto Chavajay from Guatemala City, Sueyeun Juliette Lee from Philadelphia, Nuria Montiel from Mexico City, Kaia Sand from Portland, Efraín Velasco from Oaxaca, and Cecilia Vicuña from Santiago and New York). Their work crosses borders of language and culture, and extends beyond the boundaries of genre; it includes video and audio pieces, photography, public practice, archival research, interventions into found objects, painting, sculpture, stencils, letter-press printing, bookmaking, mural-making, performance, and more. We asked these artists to work with us, to think with us and to imagine a different world with us. Their work created a context for our own thinking, a network of people who otherwise would never meet, with clear connections made visible in the space of the installation. A kind of map of affective and intellectual connections, with many roads branching toward elsewheres we cannot yet imagine.

Antena sees both of our installations, in part, as durational performances; during each, one or both members of Antena were present in the installation every afternoon the space was open, to engage in conversation with visitors, make book recommendations, answer questions, and—more than anything—remind visitors that the installation was an interactive space and that everything in it could and should be touched. Some of the pieces visitors might encounter in the *Antena @ Blaffer* space: a zoetrope where horses and words interact, a sequence of stereoscopic poems, a kite with a poem embedded in it, a sharply-angled cabinet conceived as a book, a video-poem nestled between books from Letter Machine Editions and Litmus Press, and so much more.

In February of 2014, Antena brought the eleven artists who participated in *Antena @ Blaffer* to Houston—ten in person and one via Skype— for a four-day Encuentro (gathering) that included panel discussions, open conversations, workshops, and performances. The Encuentro took place primarily at Blaffer Art Museum and the Fine Arts complex at the University of Houston, with one evening of performances at the Eldorado Ballroom at Project Row Houses. The Encuentro was an entirely bilingual space, with Spanish and English sharing equal footing and other languages present as well (Arabic and Tz'utujil, among others). Two

Fig. 2. *Antena @ Blaffer* exhibition installation view. Bookshelf F-K: Fence Books (Albany, NY) - Krupskaya (San Francisco, CA) Photo: Thomas DuBrock.

interpreters joined us for the entire Encuentro: Tony Macias, a language worker and scholar from Austin, whose reflections on interpreting and not-interpreting as acts of resistance are included in this issue of *Gulf Coast*, and two local interpreter-activists, Sandra Tapia and Elena Vega. The participating artists and members of the public had diverse language skills: some were monolingual in English or Spanish, some were bilingual Spanish-English speakers, and some were bilingual or trilingual (or more) in languages other than English and Spanish.

For many of the participants, the Encuentro was the first time they had experienced a space organized around language justice principles where they could have dynamic, often complex conversations in real time with people who do not share their language. In most professional settings, interpreters (and often our labor) are

invisible—we function as vehicles for communication, but do not have a presence as thinkers or bodies in the space of the event. For the Encuentro, however, Antena worked purposefully to make the labor and personhood of the interpreters visible. We invited Tony to speak on the opening panel of the Encuentro, underlining the importance of his thinking to our shared experience of aesthetic and intellectual exploration, and manifesting one of Antena's central concerns, the dismantling of the boundaries between art practice and political practice. Aside from the conversations that were made possible by the presence of the interpreters, language justice at the Encuentro had a number of reverberating effects. The interpreters ended up spending quite a bit of time in the Antena installation and began to think differently about the ways that poetic approaches to language might inform the politics of language justice work. At the same time, many of the participating artists gained new awareness of the thought processes, attention, and labor that go into creating a space where multiple languages have equal footing. As Kaia Sand noted in an email exchange, "I continue to think about language justice both as excitement about this leveling practice of listening, and as a concern for a more just economy that supports labor that makes this listening possible."

Fig. 4. Tony Marias interprets during *Encuentro: Antena @ Blaffer*, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston. Photo: Pablo Gimenez Zapiola.

And there were multiple and multitidinous moments when language became a palpable, material presence at the Encuentro. When language bubbled out of the ether or swelled up from our bodies and consciousnesses and became a presence in the room:

Autumn Knight leads a movement-based workshop; participants swarm around the room, improvising movement, improvising language and sounds and interactions. Someone begins to cuss loudly in Spanish. Others follow. A participant who doesn't speak Spanish improvises: "Something about mothers." It's a call from beyond the pale of understanding, a slight complaint audible in her voice. The mass

Fig. 3. Efraín Velasco during *Encuentro: Antena @ Blaffer*, looking at *Una pequeña visita al tranquilo postizal del fondo*, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston. Photo: Pablo Gimenez Zapiola

of people begins to repeat this phrase and then the improvisation morphs into repeated embraces, the phrase becomes a balm.

Cecilia Vicuña skypes from Lower Manhattan for a panel with a number of other artists and writers. Her face looms above the space in a huge projection across the entire wall. María-Elisa Heg speaks in a mix of Spanish and English. Juliette Lee speaks in English. Audience members speak a mix of both languages, freely jumping from one to the other. A connection made between the people in the room across the so-called language barrier, across barriers of space and time. A resistance to what Vicuña describes as U.S. democracy, in which no one participates, no one is informed. Our presence in that room, all of us actively participating and actively informing ourselves seems like a act of revenge against the empire.

Benvenuto Chavajay leads a workshop on the Tz'utujil language, the conversation darting constantly from English to Spanish and back to English, punctuated by speakers of many languages learning to put Tz'utujil words and concepts in our mouths. The concept of art doesn't exist in Tz'utujil, he says; neither does good or bad, heaven or hell. As Benvenuto walks the gathered public through the arrival of modernity to his town in Guatemala, he explains that the past is not something behind us, but rather ahead of us. We are all moving forward into that depth.

antena

p.201 Nuria Montiel
Custom-made mobile type for *Encuentro: Antena @ Blaffer*, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston.
Photo: Pablo Giménez Zapiola.

p.202-203 Nuria Montiel
Antena @ Blaffer, 2014
Exhibition installation view at Blaffer Art Museum, Houston
Photo: Thomas DuBrock.

p.204 Nuria Montiel
Antena (Jen Hofer and John Pluecker) and Jorge Galván Flores
AntenaMóvil, 2014.
Recycled cargo tricycle, wood, acrylic, aluminum, sheet metal, plastic, paint, foam board, nylon
Photo: Thomas DuBrock.

images made flesh and invitations to touch

p.205 La Pocha Nostra
Robo-Proletarian Warriors, 2012
Erica Mott & GP pose for photographer Wolfgang Silveri right before the international premiere of "Corpo Insurrecto', Steirischer Herbst Festival, Austria.

p.206-207 Kira O'Reily
Stair Falling, 15 October 2010 from 2–6pm
Durational performance
City of Women
Gruberjeva Palace, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Courtesy of the artist. Photos: © Nada Zgank.

p.208 Autumn Knight with John Pluecker
What Is Seen As It Is Seen, 2013
Performance at DiverseWorks, Houston in response to the exhibition *Tony Feher: Free Fall*
Courtesy of the artist. Installation image with permission from Sikkema Jenkins & Co.
Photo: Rachel Cook.

A collection of work by artists discussed in "Otherness and Empathy: Performing Affective Pedagogy


Antena @ Blaffer
JANUARY 18 – MAY 10, 2014
18 DE ENERO – 10 DE MAYO DE 2014


TROUBLING THE LINE


MOUTH OF HELL
Aufgabe

Emily Wolahan

Hard Soft Bodies

after Kiki Smith

To face it best no face.

Universe the universe
imagined red and luminous.

It needs to turn.

A line corded in braid ever of flesh,
rinse and tether,
    ever curved,

both rest and kick
rest and not;

built from inside
to outside covered

and then individual.

It needs a face.

Its sides
spatulaed.

    The face
first exits misshapen
    misplaced.

Exuant

A rehearsal

as far as you can see. Diminishing rows

of chimneys, telephone poles,

naked arms reaching

past the frost to the sky utterly clear.

Steam rises from a distant boiler. Unfinished jigsaw,

pine silhouette. The frost removes all shadows;

roofs are cleaned to angled

planes, light's second lattice

over garden—over grove—over garden.

An overgrown soft wood that has yet to flower yellow.

Jessica Santone

Fig. 1. Autumn Knight. *WALL*, 2014. Live performance at Galveston Artist Residency. Courtesy of the artist

Otherness and Empathy: Performing Affective Pedagogy

In recent years there has been a resurgence of critical and artistic interest in lecture-performances, artist-run schools, and other pedagogical experiments ranging from makeshift reading rooms to moderated conversations. On the one hand, projects like Tania Bruguera's *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002–09), a temporary school formed and run by the artist in her native Cuba, or the Bruce High Quality Foundation's *Explaining Pictures to a Dead Bull* (2009–10), an irreverent slide-lecture about the history of modern art education, may respond to a crisis of neoliberal Euro-American states, which implore their creative classes to solve social problems including educational reform, as Claire Bishop and others have suggested.[1] In turn, these artists and many others have taken it upon themselves to choreograph situations for effective community building amongst participant-spectators or to craft new anti-institutional frameworks.

[1] Claire Bishop, "The New Masters of the Liberal Arts: Artists Rewrite the Rules of Pedagogy," *Modern Painters* (September 2007): 89. See also Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012): 241-74; and Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *e-flux journal* 0 (November 2008), which tackles the pedagogical turn in performance art from a curatorial perspective.

Their approaches fall in line with a broader trend of curatorial and managerial strategies of art making, strategies of practice that are well supported by art institutions striving to meet the demands of our current experience economy. On the other hand, performance and pedagogy have long gone hand in hand—Dada artists of the 1910s developed the lecture-performance, later perfected in the 1960s by Joseph Beuys; American Fluxus artists of the 1960s were inspired by John Dewey's philosophy of education; and Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed emerges from Paolo Freire's important text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[2] Such a rich history of experimentation with teaching in performance art shows that the latest efforts are, at least in part, a continued recuperation of the genre's traditions, connected in this way to the fashion for reenactments in the past decade.

Despite these elements of continuity amongst pedagogically inclined performance practices, something distinctive has emerged within some of the more subtle experiments of the past decade. An examination of several of these will offer insights about the renewed importance of teaching and learning through performance and how this has shifted from a concern for liberation of the participant to an exploration of the participant's affective response. Such works do not critique institutions, but put new pedagogical models to work as an aspect of an affective turn in the humanities and social sciences. Affect Studies concern knowledges and effects that are not cognitive, but embodied, emotional, or felt—including cognitive forms that cannot be divorced from the materiality of bodies who think.[3] In this essay, I look briefly at works by La Pocha Nostra, Kira O'Reilly, and Autumn Knight as evidence of a turn to pedagogical strategies—tableaux vivants and documentary lecture-performances in these cases—to address the complex circumstances of our encounters with cultural difference and otherness. Teaching, I argue, as practiced in performance by these artists, opens a space apart from straightforward, polemical

[2] Patricia Milder, "Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance," *PAJ* 97 (2011): 13-27; Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 187-209; Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

[3] See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Derek P. McCormack, *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

Fig. 2. Autumn Knight. *Auditive Chamber*, 2013. Live performance. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Robert Pruitt

critique of social ills to instead solicit or model empathy. That is, pedagogy is understood as a process of learning (and encouraging the capacity for learning) how the other feels.

Images Made Flesh and Invitations to Touch

Last February, set against the dark, smoky, crowded backdrop of notsuoH's second-floor performance space in downtown Houston, two artists from the performance collective La Pocha Nostra (LPN) enclosed the audience between a pair of cinematic tableaux vivants in *Corpo Insurrecto* (2012-). LPN was formed in 1993 by Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes, and Nola Mariano with the objective of sharing icons and gestures of cultural exchange as aesthetic-political praxis. In the version of the piece that was performed in Houston in 2014 by Sifuentes and LPN member Erica Mott, each assisted by young, local artists as part of the Lone Star Explosion Houston International Performance Art Biennale. On one side of the room Sifuentes played on xenophobic stereotypes of Mexican-American identity, often contorting or suspending parts of his body painfully as he did so. At one point, he held his feet outstretched and suspended over a tray of

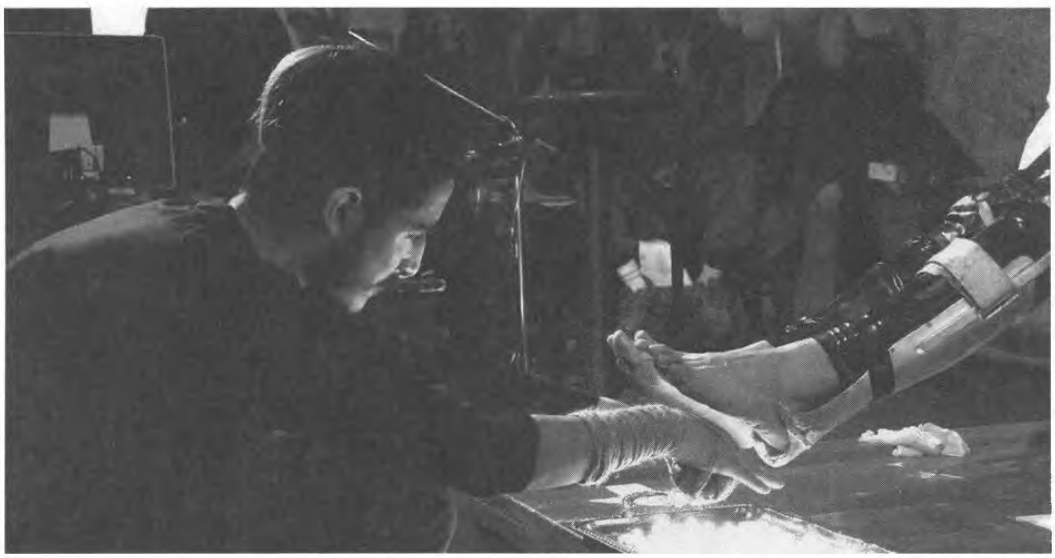


Fig. 3. La Pocha Nostra featuring Roberto Sifuentes and Erica Mott, Corpo Insurrecto, February 15, 2014. Detail: Roberto Sifuentes and audience member Emilio Rojas. Live Performance at Rotsuoff, Lone Star Explosion Houston International Performance Art Biennale. Courtesy of the artists. Photo by Jet Liam

votive candles for over five minutes—to the point where an empathetic audience member intervened to briefly place his own hands between the flames and the burning feet. Kitschy pop anthems of the 1990s blared from large speakers holding the audience entranced. On the other side of the room, Mott began the ninety-minute performance wearing a red evening gown and a mask of an old man while a miniature hand capped her tongue as she reached it out to kiss participants who had been called to stage one by one. She seduced spectators with a series of costumes that imaged a grotesque burlesque whiteness and a playful blending of genders, sexualities, and technologies of self.

Although once a form of gentrified parlor room entertainment, tableaux vivants have historically provided a way to develop appreciation of canonical and culturally resonant images. In part, this is due to participants' somatic connections to such images rendered through live bodies. As Jennifer Fisher writes, tableaux vivants "engaged not only the visual sense but other aspects of the sensorium as well. In particular, the foregrounding of 'presence' implicates the haptic sense. Haptic awareness engages the ontology of a performative situation through a kind of 'distal touch,' which perceives the ways energies are galvanized to generate experience."[4] To witness tableaux vivants is to experience the performers' self-conscious embodiment of characters or other elements of an image. One notices variations of spatial depth, difficult postures, and tensions between certain figures in the composition.

[4] Jennifer Fisher, "The Live Tableaux of Suzanne Lacy, Janine Antoni, and Marina Abramovic," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 29.

In the case of Corpo Insurrecto, one notices as well the pain of the other's body enduring the image—as exemplified by Roberto Sifuentes's straining muscles. This slowness was visibly contrasted to the continuously shifting forms on the other side of the room, where Mott was assisted by a number of other performers—her professional accomplices and participants invited from the crowd. The body in pain and the body in transition solicited affective responses from the audience. Like other performances by the collective, LPN's *Corpo Insurrecto* planned to stage a "cross-cultural poltergeist" through the juxtaposition of Sifuentes's and Mott's personas.[5] Much of La Pocha Nostra's work has been invested in pedagogy as performance—from international workshops and training new members to developing the format of performance/installation as synthesis of living museum, tableau vivant, and relational project.[6] The tableau vivant format works well for the group's purposes because it holds the performers to passive roles and allows them to work as screens for audiences' projections of desire, disgust, comfort, and fear in the context of global spectacle.

Even in moments of stability, the animation, changeability, and interactiveness of tableaux vivants are factors in their effectiveness at soliciting empathy. This is also evident in the work of UK-based artist Kira O'Reilly, whose private performance *inthewrongplaceness* (2005–09) engages with questions of a completely different form of cultural difference, but in a similarly empathetic pedagogical mode. O'Reilly's performance invited spectators to individually witness her naked body manipulating a large, recently slaughtered pig around a room in a labored series of movements. Limbs overlap and skin folds on top of skin. Visitors were each allotted ten minutes and given written instructions permitting them to touch, with surgical gloves, the skin of the artist and the skin of the pig. In a later performance-installation *Falling Asleep with a Pig* (2009), a performance that echoes Beuys's *I Like America and America Likes Me*, the artist negotiates dwelling with a live pig in a hay-filled pen for thirty-six hours, first installed in Cornerhouse Gallery in Manchester, England.

Unlike *Corpo Insurrecto* with its emphasis on soliciting empathy from audiences, O'Reilly's performances show her modeling empathy for animals to her audiences. Invitations to touch or to be co-present in the room with

[5] See pochanostra.com/about.

[6] Guillermo Gómez Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, *Exercises for Rebel Artists. Radical Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

the artist and her pig in either of these performances demand that audiences follow O'Reilly's lead in mediating the distance between human and non-human animal. Creating unique "living museum" situations, these artists offer lessons that depend upon the emotional involvement of their audiences, each soliciting or modeling empathy with different forms of otherness.

Bringing Many Voices into Conversation

Like the tableau vivant, the performance lecture has typically offered a singular viewpoint. One way of opening this form to a more empathic mode then is to refuse the singular voice of the lecturer. Houston performance artist Autumn Knight approaches in her work the question of our capacity to know and connect with others, often by examining difficult emotions or exploring fraught intimacies.[7] In *Auditive Chamber* (2013) performed at Alabama Song, Knight embodies the voices of six Houston-based female artists and curators from around the world, putting their different accents into conversation within her own body. The result is a lecture-performance that refuses the authority of one voice and takes the form of a panel conversation. During the performance, the artist sits behind a laptop controlling a slideshow projection featuring photographs of the women whose voices she animates. As the work unfolds, each image is described from the point of view of the woman pictured, the artist shuffling between accents and personalities to produce this effect. With her head covered by a techno-futuristic mask, Knight's body is practically concealed. Her objective is to take on those other voices, but as she speaks, her own voice slips in occasionally and she argues with herself trying to suppress these failures.

The work recalls Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (1994–2000), a docudrama in which the artist alternates rapidly between more than twenty characters with dramatic voice changes and quick prop additions in the story of the Rodney King trial of 1992. Smith had interviewed 200 participants in the trial—witnesses, police officers, gang members, and lawyers—to assemble the script. A range of skin tones, body types, and postures float in quick succession across

[7] Conversation with the author, April 1, 2014.

Fig. 4 (opposite). Kira O'Reilly. *inthewrongplaceness*, 2005-2009. Live performance. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Steve Tanner.

Fig. 5. Autumn Knight from Encuentro: Antena @ Blaffer, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston. Courtesy of Blaffer Art Museum. Photo: Pablo Gimenez Zapiola.

Smith's own adaptable body and illegible skin tone. Like Smith, Autumn Knight mines ethnic and socioeconomic differences for the commonalities that they illuminate, but unlike Smith she does not presume to pass these differences over her own body; instead Knight presents the other only as representation. As art historian Cherise Smith points out, the stabilizing effects of Anna Deavere Smith's caricatures and her own privilege in taking those voices on compromised the artist's objective to attain a universal humanism through her technique of "other-oriented" performance.[8] Smith's work aspires to produce an ideal democratic public sphere, modeling this for the audience. Meanwhile, Autumn Knight's *Auditive Chamber* proposes no such democratic ideal, nor does it make much use of the women's own words. Rather than focus on her subjects' thoughts or analyses of social circumstances as Smith had, Knight projects intersectional differences among the women. As she puts it, she is interested in the different voices and identities we each carry in our own bodies—an intrapersonal conversation between our multiple internal selves.[9] In this way, her performance emphasizes shared affects that cross their bodies and her own. Like Kira O'Reilly, her work first models and then perhaps more implicitly solicits empathy as the artist turns to these other voices in order to train herself to listen more attentively to their stories.

It is not surprising to discover that Knight's performance practice emerges from her training in drama therapy. Her approach to performance is unequivocally psychological and affective. While *Auditive Chamber* does challenge the singularity of the speaker's authority, unlike other strategies in the genre of lecture-performance that stage critiques of knowledge-production and structures of learning, Knight's work

[8] Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 158-59.

[9] Conversation with the author, April 1, 2014. Another recent work explores the complex intra-subjectivity of conjoined twins, *La Querelle Des Monstres* (2012), performed with Megan Jackson.

offers feelings as its principal content. The women speak—through the artist's shifting voice—to describe how they feel about their bodies, talk about their lives in Houston, and discuss art, identity, and the nature of the voice. The pedagogy of this work comes from a place of listening to others' embodied and culturally specific knowledges and our inevitable struggle to bridge what is heard and the body who is seen.

Pedagogy and Empathy

While I am proposing that an affective or empathetic pedagogy is novel to performance art practice, empathy is not new to either pedagogy or art. Nevertheless, recent emphasis on empathy in both disciplines compels us to consider what contemporary circumstances motivate such attention.[10] One could see a desire to comprehend empathy as connected to current research on (and popular interest in) the function of mirror neurons in facilitating empathic responses or the limited capacities for empathy by those on the autism spectrum. There are significant political stakes as well, with respect to mutual understanding in diverse societies. As Jennifer Doyle writes, "explicit turns to emotion [in art] may in fact signal the politicization, the historicization of that self and the feelings through which that self takes shape in relation to others."[11] Her suggestion that the very presence of emotion reveals an underlying politics of identity—something which motivates in varying degrees each of the artists discussed here—shows us that a turn to affective pedagogy might offer political critique by other means. What the pedagogical performances discussed here propose in the end is that, even though the other will be forever unknowable, empathy might help us learn how to see, touch, and listen more generously.

[10] While it is beyond the scope of this essay, recent work on empathy in pedagogy includes: Roslyn Arnold, *Empathic Intelligence: teaching, learning, relating* (Sydney, N.S.W: University of New South Wales, 2005); Michalinos Zembylas, "Pedagogies of Strategic Empathy: navigating through the emotional complexities of anti-racism in higher education," *Teaching In Higher Education* 17, no. 2 (April 2012): 113-125; and Douglas W. Yacek, "Learning to See with Different Eyes: A Nietzschean Challenge to Multicultural Dialogue," *Educational Theory* 64, no. 2 (April 2014): 99-121.

[11] Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013): 72.

V. Penelope Pelizzon

Sentimental Education

The hormones built my sense of smell
3-D, architectural.

I measured rooms' volumes
by the density of perfumes
curdling in the air.

Down the hall behind three doors
(all shut), my lover's showers
left me faint, pink jelly soap
slicking down to sugar
the biscuit of his nape.

Cheese scraps pared and scraped into the sink
baited complex traps of stink
set to spring in the apartment's heat.

Strange Ovidian creature,
half mutt nose half mouse terror,
at whom the least reek
bared its teeth.

A lick of margarine
barked and bit, metallic.

Even bread wasn't innocent.

Its yeasts were waiting
till I started sniffing,
then they'd ferment.

I'm a dog, I thought.

But some part of me couldn't stop
tugging far as my sense's
leash would allow.

And it was almost worth the nausea's swallow
to leave my body there
below the sheet and follow
a draft out through the screen—
past the porch, the yard,
the rot-spiced knot-pine
fence hunched over
its hibiscus crutch;
past the live oaks'
mushroom-musk
nets of moss;
past the on-ramp to the overpass,
the freeway's scorched
oils and vinyls, chlorides and smokes,
the airport's kerosene;
out beyond the shrimp boats
rocking toylike on the swells,
to where the salt
skirts of a rainstorm
still far out above the gulf
dragged in the sea and grew
stiff with a clean ozone ruffle.

I asked to stay awake through the procedure.

And for a week or so after
as the hormones faded,
was visited by ghostly odors.

Water drying.

The iron in stones.

Barchan

For my student G.S.

When the wind is right,
if you climb along the barchan's crest
your steps shiver and send

rivulets of sand
trickling slowly down the leeward slope.
These streams will soon dry up,

you think. But the grains'
slithering gathers steam and gains
momentum as it pulls

more sand into its wake until
the dune's flank ripples with its surge
and, from the top, looks like a ridge

sluiced by a river.
Meanwhile, a watcher on a lower
pitch sees each footfall avalanche

spilling down the steep slip-face to catch
a slightly different angle of the light
then stop, appearing wet,

but really only shadowed dark.
You're turning desert into water as you walk,
it seems. Intrigued, despite

heat that crisps your skin with your own salt,
    you kneel to test how wave effects will vary
    when a smaller quantity

of sand's displaced. Two drizzled handfuls
spread double ripples
    racing down the dune till they collide,

    kicking back an undertow of secondary slide
that flaunts gravity by flowing up
toward you on the lip

    (a mirage your eyes
    fall prey to, since their meshes aren't fine
-gauged enough

to net the gecko-dandruff
    particles cascade-
    ing to the point where they accumulate).

Sand's a kind of flintish liquid or fluid
stone: faint pressures on it accrue
    until a sinuosity rules the skyline,

    showing where the barchan
slinched below the wind's finger.
Of course, wind is not the only shaper.

    I know this, having seen
    how you, stepping curiously
through it,

moved the desert.

Lois Taylor

Lucky You

She is wakened by the silence. The power's out again. She leaves Rafe sleeping and makes her way by touch to the concrete porch, cool and solid. The night outside is warm.

Down the alley, through the backs of backyards, the moon tiny and white as a blister. The air smells of earth, and of gasoline from patches of dried oil. When she can't get back to sleep, walking sometimes helps.

Passing the Schultzes', who squabbled outside her window with other neighbors about property lines last spring when she was recovering. Next, the guy with the roses. Ferguson. She heard that his wife died, but she and Rafe moved in during the third trimester and barely know a soul. She's still waiting for one of them to ask, *What have you people done with that baby?*

The Ferguson yard is thick with dark flowers and shrubs and beyond them, the porch. Someone wearing white shoes is sitting on the Ferguson porch.

"Hello?"

Without a sound, the figure rises and disappears around the side of the house, into a jungle of rhododendrons and sword ferns.

Nobody on the porch now. Only a folded lawn chair.

Back down the alley to her own porch, where Rafe waits, holding a candle in a saucer. Conduits are crumbling under the streets and sometimes their street is in the dark, sometimes the next one over.

"I called the City and they're on it. You maintaining?" His eyes without the new Clark Kent glasses are bottomless black.

"I woke up when they went off. So I took a moonlight stroll."

"Nice."

She's suddenly drained. The exhaustion comes like this now.

Rafe, my husband, she thinks as they go down the narrow hall to the bedroom, managing not to touch at any point along the way. *Why is it we can't comfort each other?*

Rafe leaves early next morning. She's on official medical leave, pulled together by her boss, who seemed terrified of her, as did half the office.

She dresses and heads down the alley to the Ferguson porch. It's the first thing she thought of when she woke this morning. That figure on the porch in white shoes.

The porch is empty, except for the lawn chair. The back door opens. Ferguson, white hair sticking up, white eyebrows bristling. Big man jeans, though his lower half seems shrunken, and a black tee, inside-out. Newspaper under his arm, like a man heading for the bathroom.

"Good morning. What can I do you for?"

"Good morning. There was someone on your porch last night. Right where you're standing. Did you know? Sorry."

"What are you sorry about?" He squints, tugging at his nose. "You look familiar."

"We live down the alley. The Camaro?" Men seem to recognize each other by their cars. "The power went off and when I went outside to check, someone was on your porch."

"That so. Well. Nobody I know. Anything else?"

"No."

"Not so fast. You want some roses? This summer, I can't give them away."

"No thanks. Allergies." Not even the truth. "Sorry if I disturbed you."

"Ah," running fingers through his hair. "Do I seem disturbed? Drop by anytime. I'll be out here. Except when I'm not." He opens the lawn chair with a flick of the wrist. And then he sits in it and unfolds his paper. It's as if she's disappeared.

She walks home. Laundry day. There's something. Everybody deserves clean underwear. She's sorting, which has its own hypnotic charm—match this with that, order restored—when her eye finds her bike. She hasn't touched it in months.

She's wobbly at first. Riding around the cellar, weaving between posts. Then she sees the helmet hanging on its nail and is reaching for it when something moves in the basement window.

Shoes. A figure in white shoes, cut off by the window frame. She raps on the glass. The shoes do not move. She bumps the bike up the stairs, to the back porch, panting.

Nobody in any direction. She rides down the alley all the way to the arterial. Pumping harder, traffic everywhere, but nobody in white shoes.

Then back to the alley, where Ferguson startles her as he stands up in his garden.

"Hi. Did you see someone go by just now?"

"I saw you. I was hoping you'd stop."

A cat appears in the doorway behind him. "Ah. There she is. You have some time? I have to weigh my cat. I'm moving into one of those elder hostels, last stop before the abattoir, but it seems there's a weight limit."

His house is tidy, unlike him. Linen finger towels in a row, with embroidered flowers. "Somebody embroiders," she says.

"That would be my Marty. She passed. Here's what we'll do. We'll weigh me first and then you hand her to me."

"You couldn't do this?"

"I tried. She slips away."

The cat's too heavy at fifteen pounds. "I feed her too much. Mea culpa," he says.

He talks about the cat as they walk back through the house. Its diet and habits, how clean it is. He is still talking when she stops dead.

"Where is it?" she says.

"Where's what?"

"My bike. My bike. It's gone."

They search the yard as if it might've wandered off.

"Well that's too bad, isn't it," he says.

It's all your fault, you talk too much, she thinks, heading back down the alley, minus the bike. Nothing has changed at home except the laundry cycle. She sits in the basement while the socks go around with the tees. She's more awake than she has been in months. Alert. Eyes on the window. Fear feels like hope and hope feels like fear.

The new woman is telling about her child gone missing on a summer morning and never found. How could that even happen? And to such an ordinary person? No outward signs, except it looks like she's wearing someone else's clothes.

The grief group falls silent. The moderator suggests a break.

"I am so sorry about what happened to you," she says to the new woman at the coffee urn.

The woman says, "It actually happened to my little girl. But. Thank you. And you, too."

Driving home, she thinks about the woman and her child. She overheard one of the others whisper, "Not to know, that's the worst."

Something, maybe, to talk about with Rafe? *There are worse things, Rafe, than even a deformed child born dead.*

But Rafe has spent the afternoon with the malpractice lawyers who are going to make them rich, and he will tell her what the lawyers said, then get up and go do something with his hands.

As she listens, she imagines the move to the nicer house with the settlement money. The faster cars. The Gibson he's got his eye on.

Thursday morning she's at the kitchen table when her bike flashes by the window.

She is certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that that was her bike, and takes off after it on foot.

The neighbor is sitting in the lawn chair, newly watered roses dripping, newspaper open on his lap.

"Did you see my bike go by?"

"Bike? I thought you lost it."

"I didn't lose it, it was stolen. Someone was on your porch the other night. And then my bike, stolen from almost the same spot? Doesn't that seem weird to you?"

He stands, newspaper sloughing to the porch. "Look. Nobody was on my porch. And I'm sorry about your bike."

"You're not sorry at all." She's begun to hiccup.

"It's just a bike. There are other bikes in the world."

"No there aren't." The hiccups shudder through her like contractions. A film breaks across her upper lip.

"Hey, hey, it can't be as bad as all that. Let me get something for those," he says.

She sits at his kitchen table while he gets a jug of tea from the refrigerator.

"There we go."

She sips between hiccups. He crunches ice with his teeth and watches her.

Then he begins to talk about a dog named Blarney, now passed like his Marty. One story opens into another, all about Blarney. She closes her eyes, just to rest them.

"You look a little sleepy."

She opens her eyes again and the sun has come in, dazzling the ice cubes melting in her glass.

Each morning she expects to see her bike returned, no questions asked, and then she's disappointed, but not as much as the day before.

Today she's on her way to get some towels. Days need lists of things to do or they run together.

She corkscrews Rafe's wide Camaro slowly up the Target ramp, the driver behind her flashing his high beams. Then he roars around her and up the ramp. "Asshole," she calls.

The towels on the shelf are not like the ones in her head which, she now realizes, are the ones in Ferguson's bathroom. She moves on to an aisle titled SEASONAL. Through the gaps in the bottom shelf, she sees them. Rows of white shoes.

She abandons her cart, runs down the aisle, to the next aisle over.

An entire table of white shoes lashed into pairs and all marching in the same direction.

Back down the aisle, past the check stand, through the door, she tries not to run all the way to the car. Tires squealing, she drives towel-less into the day.

There was a nurse who'd said, *Can you live with what happened to you?*

She can. How sad is that.

Someone is honking. The light has changed. A bicycle speeds past and as soon as she sees it, she changes direction. East, not west, straight to Velo Bike Shop.

The salesman at Velo is named Kirby and he is amazed. The bike and helmet, a pair of gloves, a fancy lock, all in thirty minutes. Kirby helps secure the trunk with bungees and then wishes her happy trails.

The bike thuds in the trunk like a body when she turns corners. Tomorrow she'll get up early, ride so long that she'll be bicycling in her dreams.

But as she approaches the house, she wonders, what has she changed by spending this money? Nothing. Just another distraction, like Rafe's Camaro. The guitars.

She goes right past their house, and parks in the alley.

By the time she's released the bungees and hauled the bike out, Ferguson is standing on his porch with hands on hips and a Mariners cap on his head.

She walks the new bike to the porch. The cat swarms his legs.

"How much that set you back?"

"I don't know—I forget."

"Lucky you. Looks to have all the bells and whistles."

"And I got a lock."

"So you're not thinking a ghost stole the other one from my porch? Given up on that view, have you?"

She stands blinking. She's lost her place.

He says, "Lunch time. Have you eaten?"

"I'm not hungry."

"That wasn't the question. Come watch me eat mine."

But once she's inside with the bike locked to the porch railing, he begins fixing two pimento cheese sandwiches as he tells her about his childhood friend Bob, who came to grief from bad habits.

"Don't make one for me."

He doesn't stop, either the sandwiches or the talk, which has turned to advice, mainly, *Don't get old, and don't lose people.*

"Not an entire sandwich, please," she says. And watches as he takes wax paper and wraps the other half for later, very slow and very thorough.

Dorothea Lasky

Georg Trakl in the Green Sun

Georg Trakl, in the sun
I am in love with you
I want you to come back to this earth
So that we can be lovers
I will wash your hallucinatory sheets
With bleach
And give birth to your Austrian kin
It took a while
Now I am me
You were always you
Come back to this earth
I will wash you in a bath of violet milk
I will take all of your cares away
I will be your mother father
I will be your sister, little bunny
I will birth you in the ocean
And when your head disconnects from your body
I will scoop up the black water
Until I find it
And put it in a pail of blue
And sail the ocean back to land
To put your eyelids in a jar
A tiny capsule
To take with me, everything
Yes I will eat
I will swallow your eyelashes
And if you don't think I'm serious
And if you don't think I am serious this time, poetry
I am

The Minotaur

The moon in the house is Room 237
Room No. 42
On 2/21 when my dreams became real
The moon smashed into the light
I spread my life like cards in front of me

If I die and all I have are these fucking poems
At least I will have the Moon Room
And the smooth black bedspread
Where I can sleep with a corpse
Who laughs at me, but still loves me after all

In this life I have had to go straight into hell
And no one gave me spring
Except you, but you were not real
Just like my family
Just like the moon

No the big bull has led me into this house
And I will have to kill him in order to get out of here
And after I do
What will I have but the morning that brings me no relief
And the day which brings no love at all

No I really would
Rather sleep in a bed with a corpse
And meet the horrendous spirits in the house
Than be here alone
In the middle hour

Waiting to find my destiny
Just waiting to go to the moon
When I have already traveled past it
Into the vast landscape
Where the dead are already dying

The yellow-striped cave
Kelly green and white rocks with fabricated craters
Where the mint bathroom
Is not to wash the soul clean, but to wash these trappings
Over and over again

Lynn Melnick

Landscape with Citrus and Centuries

Bodies clamber while the smudge burns and chokes
even some of our best guesses

so don't sink your teeth into the shrinking peel and call it victory
amid the downthrow.

Farmland and farmland and splendor and yet
I was never the type to wonder

what was sprouting from the fertile soil
when the soil itself was mystery enough.

Doomful orange garden!

Crop hangs over gates into dumpsters
though time was a girl could do anything with the right flora:

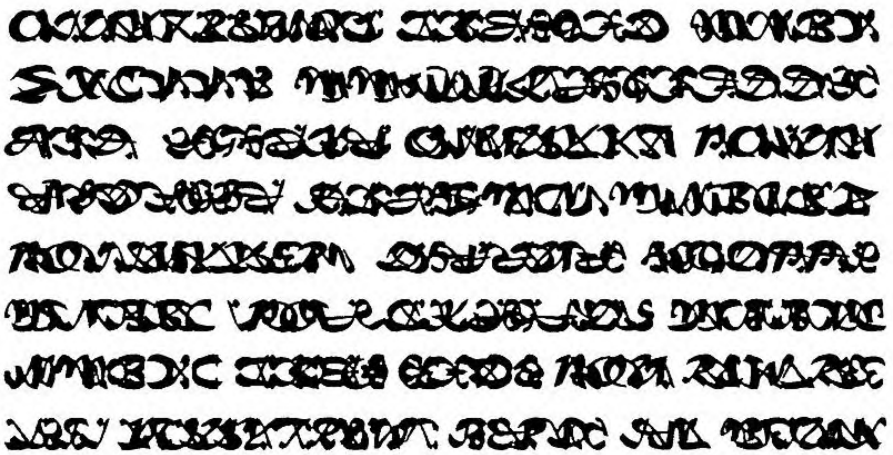
once, I used half a citrus to demonstrate
what you could do to my cunt.

I was born in what they call the heartland
but I've fretted the freehold length of California across centuries

enunciated through traffic groves
and whole orchards of dying fruit

hustling to raze each square of land
I will never call my own.

Tony Macias



Interpreting and the Refusal of Violent Speech

Some years ago, my great aunt Lupe told me a story from her childhood in New Mexico, where her family had recently immigrated. Her parents took her to the movies, and as they left, a white man approached and said to her father, "You're a stupid son of a bitch." Her father answered "sí, sí, sí." Because he was Mexican and couldn't answer in English, she said, the man repeatedly called him stupid. No one could translate the verbal violence that stranger directed at my great-grandfather. And yet the violence was still there: my Aunt Lupe knew what the man was saying and what it looked like for her immigrant father to nod and agree with a man who was mocking him. In a testament to the stickiness of violent memories, she carried that bitter experience with her for eighty years.

In many moments when interlanguage communication is unsuccessful, it is because there is no interpreter on hand to act as a bridge. It is an avoidable incomprehension; in language justice circles we offer the solution of comprehension, of ensuring the message is relayed so people can decide for themselves what action to take. What would have happened if someone interpreted that day? Would my

great-grandfather have spoken or acted in his own defense? Would my great-grandmother have remained silent? Would the man have dared to repeat himself, now that he was understood? Would Aunt Lupe have carried the story with her, and the pain of watching her father mocked? Perhaps if people understood when the powerful spoke to them, and knew they could speak back and be understood, then we'd be on one more path to a different and better world.

I'm down with that, but I also think creating transparency is not a categorical imperative for language workers, and that it is worth considering those moments when refusing transmission and comprehension is also an act of justice. When speech is more a form of violence than an attempt at communication, to transmit it is first to be harmed by it, and then to serve as a means of harm to others. This is because language is potent, and can destroy as easily as it can build. As profoundly embodied and affective labor, language work temporarily places the interpreter and the interpreted-for into a direct overlap of ideas and sensibilities. If this is true, then it is important to be judicious about when, where, and with whom we open those intimate channels.

I love language work, especially simultaneous interpreting—at the end of a long day of interpreting, after hours of constant speech, intense listening, close watching, and borrowed emotions, I'm left wide open. In those moments of total focus or total exhaustion I appreciate an immanence of mind, body, and soul. I use the term immanence in the sense that Gilles Deleuze did in his final essay: it's where internal and external life merge into one another.[1] This is similar to what Freud called an *oceanic feeling* that infants may feel before they learn where they end and the rest of the world begins.[2] Language work, in this case interpreting, reminds me that consciousness and experience are inseparable, and what we comfortably think of as subjects (ourselves) and objects (everything/everyone else) are actually bound through a very real oceanic and collective existence. My thinking about immanence and its connections to activist work are informed by Colectivo Situaciones as well.[3] In their understanding of immanence, we become,

[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2001).

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2005).

[3] Colectivo Situaciones, "On the Researcher-Militant," in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberalglobalization,* Richard J. F. Day, Greig De Peuter, and Mark Coté eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

and are always becoming, through a "co-belonging" that has both thrilling and terrifying implications. If subjects and objects are no longer neat categories, then our idea of immanence places action in the foreground. It means that what we *do*, what is done to us, and what we create collectively is as real, sometimes more real, than our individual and subjective selves.

Language work is an excellent illustration of this ontology of action: it immerses us in experience and perturbs the boundaries we perceive between ourselves and others. It can teach us that what we do is as real as what we *are*. Mindfulness meditation is like this, too, teaching us to focus on the present moment, watching our thoughts and feelings come and go. This is vastly accelerated in interpreting, but if we slow it down enough we can see it has an essential similarity to mindfulness. As a live conduit for the symbols of language, an interpreter observes and produces new symbols in real time. Unlike meditation, the task isn't to watch symbols go by, but to interact with them in a continual chain—as long as the chain continues, so does this connection. I perceive a symbol, and words bubble up in response. I can't say where these equivalents come from. As a phenomenon, the symbols I hear and the symbols I produce in response aren't any different in terms of how I experience them—they spring into view and in conscious awareness I decide what to do with them. Normally, I'd say I'm the source of my own thoughts, and find it easy to differentiate them from external stimuli. The altered state of interpreting breaks down the comfortable boundaries I've set up around the self—in that ecstasy of immanence I recognize a potential for deep transformations.

The internal process of interpreting is a thrilling and rigorous education in the metaphysics of the self, but it only describes the midpoint of language work—the phenomenon actually begins when someone produces a series of concepts, and ends with someone receiving them in a new set of symbols. Language work doesn't exist without these two poles of interaction. The message must move from one pole to the next through a bridge. The producing pole can be a human speaking or signing, a video, a written document, or a road sign, while the receiving pole is always a human or group of humans.

Another way to understand this bridging is as a type of *mimetic work*. Anthropologist Michael Taussig called mimesis "the faculty to copy, imitate,

make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power."[4] Language is already a representation of reality—it's a system of symbols and meanings used to describe what is, what happens, what was, and what could be. Language work is second order, a copy of a copy. This is not to say, as many think, that language work produces exact replicas; rather, this loose copying through the search for equivalencies is simultaneously *lossy*[5] and productive: meaning is always lost and reproduced in language work.

For Taussig, mimesis isn't only copying, but rather a way to "yield into and become the Other," to gain the "character and power of the original." For language work, this implies that the interpreter momentarily overlaps with producer and receiver. Performing mimesis, acting to become Other, requires the interpreter to fade out of focus as a discrete individual. But beyond just messing with the notion of individual self, mimesis shows interpreting as an intersubjective process. This process radiates outward: immersion first makes interpreters collapse in on themselves through a confusion of interior/exterior worlds. Then interpreters go spectral, partially disappearing into the action of bridging between two poles of communication. After merging into themselves, interpreters then merge with the speaker and the listener, and thus out of focus altogether.

Immanence through mimesis is what makes language work a channel for constructive or destructive transformations. Like many, I believe interpreting between the languages of the powerful and those of the disempowered can disturb the balance of that power. I think of it as restoring the Tower of Babel as a form of instigation—in this version, though, we'd have language workers dedicated to leveling the playing field between dominant and subordinate languages. In our world, the possibility of redistributing power through language is why we must

[4] Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993): xiii.

[5] In computer science, the term lossy refers to types of data compression that remove information from the original file in order to save space. Language work also compresses information contained in one set of symbols (the rich meanings coded in a source language), only to later expand it again by applying a new set of symbols (with all new meanings coded in a target language). The nature of language work necessitates this loss and subsequent gain in meanings.

be heard and understood in our many languages. It's why we deserve to hear and understand when others speak. But the fact that power operates through violence is also why at times, we must refuse to listen.

While I believe my great-grandfather deserved vindication that day, I don't think justice could have been served by language work. There are other ways to do justice than by acting as a bridge, and exposing the interpreter and the interpreted-for to an even deeper channel for the transmission of violence. Those in power never listen until they must; they don't have to. What are the consequences of mimetic practice with someone who uses violence to maintain their power? The work of building power horizontally is arduous enough, is its own form of questioning and experimentation. If it is successful, then we have the strength to speak to those in power and make them communicate with us. Often enough in our interactions with those in power, though, we do not bring our strength with us. To attempt communication when we cannot obligate the powerful to listen, cannot prevent them from using words as blunt instruments, cannot either silence or transform power in that moment, is only to experience frustration and harm.

My friends Jen and Catalina were part of a team asked to interpret between Mexican peace activists and the infamous anti-immigrant Sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona, Joe Arpaio. They protested that the Sheriff would probably not concede to being interpreted for, and was unlikely to participate in dialog in any form. They understood that, while it took the outward appearance of communication, his speech would actually be a form of violence. True to form, he refused to make space for the interpretation to occur, he questioned and interrupted both interpreters, and he used the venue he'd been given by the peace activists to perpetrate hate speech. Even worse was this irony: the interpreters were responsible for embodying and transmitting his verbal violence, which they attempted to do, painfully, in spite of his protestations. They understood that once they agreed to make the attempt, they had the ethical obligation to bridge language as accurately and fully as possible, even at the expense of their own well-being and against their beliefs. The interpreters were made into participants, human vehicles for violence—a tragic misuse of the transformative possibility of language.

Ultimately, language justice can train us to recognize the bonds that form when we work horizontally. It helps us form those bonds with those who don't share our language. It doesn't, however, require us to transmit violence. To do so exposes the interpreter and the recipient to becoming victims of a unique and intimate violence of language. After taking the responsibility to bridge language, the interpreter has little choice in the matter of this transmission; what I am advocating is a more careful selection of those scenarios, a recognition of their potential for harm and wasted energy, and of the need to focus that transformative potential elsewhere.

What worlds does language practice help us envision? It can teach us to recognize our mutual composition, our oceanic life, and the power of action to define the actor. If violence is the action of a subject that wishes to determine, dominate, and destroy an object, when action takes the stage and the self becomes spectral, subjects and objects lose some of their meaning as signifiers. Here is an opening, a crack in the framework of power: language work blurs the boundaries between languages themselves, troubling the strict relationship between symbols and meanings, and the worlds they create. In the confusion and ecstasy of polyphony, nonviolent multilingual spaces increase our ability to co-create our languages, ourselves, and our worlds.

K.A. Hays

Bicycling Ice Cream Man

When the dunes spool down
to shoreline his shaken bell's call,
and kids run toward him, fisting
damp bills, feet seared
by the hot-sand dash,

a gull picks up
from their path, hovers
and rises, its gray shade-shape
gone smaller and going
like an unnamed dread—

just so, grief can be startled away
by a stranger's raised arm, or the idea
of a cooler stocked with ice.
Some stranger is always holding a bell.
Some idea keeps ringing.

Radishes and Any Small Thing

Red seeds, pinched in
to ashed-over land,
then patted down,
put out
no wisdom—
just an emotionless tick
I can hear, a kind of
I am I am,
the being of which
mine could be part
(some days),
along with water, worm,
wind, the dust of minds
like mine, fattening up
the radishes
and any small thing
unmeant to be and meaning.

Corey Zeller

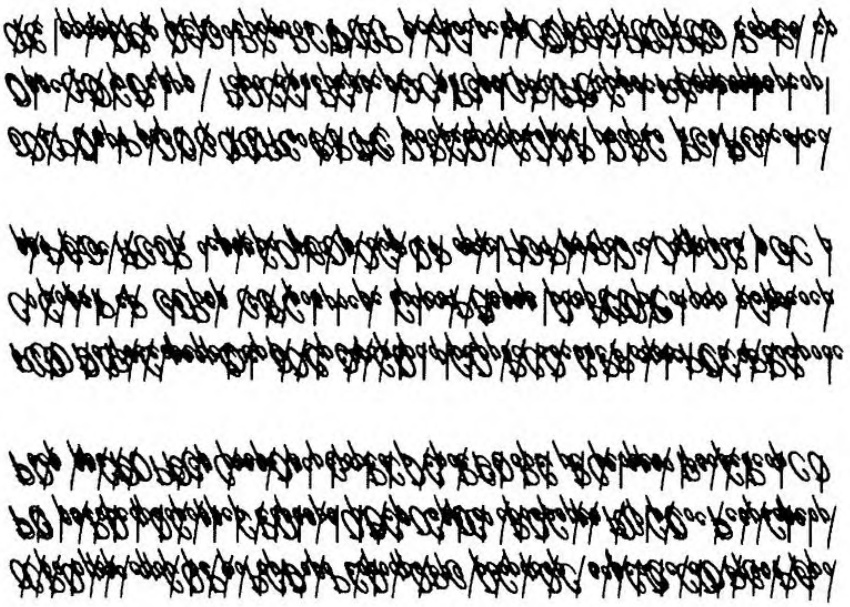
If Country Music was People: Interior

I am affectionately slung to the opal-colored clamor. I am the country music of peoples, the kidney of animals. I fathom sad water. I encourage the mangy rainbow that lives in your lazy father's mouth. Count your blessings that I rotate and boil around the tense grass. Count your lucky stars that I say *you*; evoke you even in the blurriest of songs. There is a pain in my left shoulder that I talk to like a daughter. It is a wing that dreads wings, hates itself. It is a wing that carries many wings away to die.

Some Girl I Know, Late One Friday Night: Interior

You are washing dishes on a Friday night. You are beyond the lives you could have led. You are only some of what you used to be. You scratch away and handle. You stare into the cleanliness of clean things. You cannot relate. What is a life anyway but stripping ourselves of what we lived? Stripping ourselves down to some kind of truth in the dark? Steam rises, you, rubbing, clanking, and again and again. The plates reflect you perfectly: in halves, in small rings of light, malformed blues.

Rachel Yoder



Hidden Cartographies

I could always locate my mother by looking for the bright red spot on the pale curve of her foot. Here, I said as I pressed it with a fingertip. Here.

Other towns populated the fields and rises of her body. These are the places to which I could travel when I grew up and left. Here, she said as she touched a black dot on her stomach. Here, again, as she pointed to her forearm. The names of these places were not yet assigned.

She taught me the red spot on her foot had been there since the beginning of time. It meant she had been born and was alive. I had no such marks on my body and feared growing one as I slept. If I were to do such a thing, this meant I would be like my mother: incalculable. I did not want be like my mother. I wanted only to be like her daughter and to remain this way.

I owned my mother as she owned me. See, this hair was mine, its blackness and its curls, the ends still dark and wet from the bath. This skin beading oils. See her high cheeks and neck to touch, how cool her neck is, the strange quietness of her breasts. Her flat white stomach and then the thicket of hair. Her calves tapered down to tiny ankles. Her bare, bare feet. I turned her hands over in mine and rubbed the smoothness of her nails. Oh how I loved her fingers. I thought her hands were beautiful but she told me they were ugly. This was when I learned we could be different instead of what I had always known to be true, that we were exactly the same.

At some point, I left my mother or else she left me. Her body was somewhere else and instead I found things in her wake. A bottle of pink lotion she rubbed on her face. Her brown stockings hung from the shower rod like dead fowl. Small squares of paper covered in writing knotted up into lace. Here was the silent weight of a piano. Here was a peach washcloth, damp. If I stood long enough in her closet, here was her smell.

Her body had not mapped the woods, so that's where I went. In her absence, I had wanted to find my own place. Still, she was there, in the green sunlight. The leaves moved as if she were singing faraway. I found small ivory fossils in the stone of the creek bed and recognized these as other points on the same map. What I mean is the creek bed was a place my mother had left behind, or else an extension of her body. I knew to memorize the shapes of the bones so one day I would recognize them elsewhere, in the outline of a cloud or desert or lake.

Before I was born, my mother ran fast. After, she remained in the bathtub and cleansed her skins into maps. I saw these when I was young, but I knew as I grew,

they too changed. I was sure she was making these for me, although, after the later cartography, the maps remained hidden. We walked beside each other, clothed. When I opened my palms to her, she touched each with a cold fingertip. This felt like a prediction. After, she hummed into a bowl and then gave this to me, to eat.

Once, the backs of her hands had mapped the path to the trilliums so that's where I went. I looked at them but dared not touch. They bloomed only once every seven years, and I was fourteen. This meant they had flowered once when I was a small child, and again when I was born. These were the most precious flowers of the valley, my mother taught, similar to children. I bent to watch the flowers and, at their centers, they bled. When my mother returned, she told me I was now grown, but I did not believe.

Her maps have faded from her skin. She now carries them in the dark waters of her eyes. She has no words by which to transmit the coordinates but no matter because I've already traveled away. I theorize our maps chart similar territories but have no way of proving this. Instead, I think: my mother once moved like a cloud of birds that turns and breaks.

When I turn to the sky and see sheet music stretched across in white cloud signatures, whole symphonies in the tatted coalescence of weather, I say to myself, that is my mother. My mother is the sky. Once she was a map. On another day, she will be another place, or perhaps a swiftly moving system of wind and light, a kind of music you cannot hear in the customary way.

My mother no longer is my mother but, instead, a memory of her shape. I want to tell her how it feels to be her child but I cannot navigate to this place.

Instead, I leave her and then tell stories of how she was once the breath that moved through a silver flute. She was the sandy places and also the rocks in my hands. She was the cool air moving through a field of green hay. My mother was a constellation into which I pressed my body, in order to imprint her points and lines. My mother was as far back as I can remember and then before remembered time. She was a white pair of shoes I wore and then carried after they wore away.

Sometimes I see the shape of my mother at the horizon, the curve of her waist and thigh outlined in hills against the orange sky, her green shoulders canted down toward the valley. Other times I could trace her form easily for you on a piece of paper, or on a scroll. When I close my eyes, I can still see the outline of her white body as it moves up from the water. She stands in the cold bathroom, steaming, the shape of a mother. I do not know how else to say this.

I could distinguish her from a thousand other mothers, a million. I could look down from where God looks and see her face.

Leslie Harrison

[Poisoning the Birds]

The day the starling flock tumbles twists whirls through
dusk their scissor beaks clattering like rattled bones
the day they rain down deafening and feathered as if
smoke knows knives as if blades grow voices that day
was the day he flensed his chest and neck cut every speck
into oven loaves and it hurt but in comparison not all
that much and then he fed the flock from pans his skin
and when it was gone and they rose hungry still hungry
anew with their terrible plural intent their swerve plummet
and climb now all they wanted was to come to her to come
to her touch they wanted her to just this once choose
this tiny myriad devotion of feathered back beak and wing
they fell around her house as rain as keratin as a clatter
of wind through pinions as if all his tears had finally found
voices as if they'd grown black and bladed and done
with waiting

[Was it ice]

The season settles in strips the trees of leaves the heart

of the matter is weather I have been wind sheared storm

wracked thrown off course and down I have been

all river no shore what drowns you is not the water but

the ice this strict difficult surface refusing to let you go

let you grow replacement parts for what's been cut away

glaciers planted boulders huge stones that bubble up

from the soil I mean the soul from which you make

the walls high and thick from which you fill the holes

till the soil for some semblance of hope your role

in all of this is dimly understood the ways that safety

arises or has passed you by you are neither glacier

nor ground nor harbor breakwater shelter siren

or cave is it comfort or touch that you crave

was it ice that held you down or was it love

Kathleen Winter

Colorado Flats

yesterday we passed a wolf who lives outside a rental
in Glen Haven faded grey lanky as a pole

imagine a pack of him chasing
you over snow
poor folks sure keep tough animals

on the road to Marble a rock
invisible in sunset sacrificed
two tires

the guy who came for us in the wrecker
brought a pit without a collar laid his head

in my lap as Travis drove us up and down the pass
at speeds a rabid man would choose too punk to hold

what he has to lose the lab
rode the wrecker's bed in the trashed sedan

glaucous and confused his eyes on ours as we stepped

away into the cab we were scared to ask him
to slow down

this blond kid we were paying

you in the front seat me in back wondering

if we'd make it till supper

it was the second Father's Day
without our father

changed by the diving
sun the air turned uncomfortable
in color who knows what

fatherlessness drove our driver

the universe has a horizon
beyond which we cannot see

Marie-Helene Bertino

Edna in Rain

I was walking to Higher Grounds when the first one fell from the sky. A whirring sound preceded him so I was able to side-step to avoid a direct blow. He hit the ground at a distressing angle.

Kevin Groutmeyer, I said. Are you ok?

He was more than ok; living with his partner and their twin boys in Harrisburg, and I said, Amazing! Harrisburg!

Kevin Groutmeyer was the one who could do the thing where you flip the girl from the top to the bottom without letting go. This necessitates the upper body strength of a wrestler and the focus of a physicist. I demonstrated it to several girlfriends, using a saltshaker for the girl and a peppershaker for the boy.

Now Kevin had what you would call liquid brown eyes and shoulders as wide as a meadow. For once, I thought, the right person turned out handsome.

We beamed and held hands as if we were about to gallop through a line of dancers.

Look at you, I said.

He said, Look at you!

My town's chief bragging point is: *a short drive to everything!* but me, I like to walk. Arms akimbo. Toes out. Let the whole world come as far as I'm concerned. I continued my walk to town, akimbo. No sooner had I turned onto Orange Street than BLAM. Marisa O'Donnell landed in a bush!

She and her husband live in Pittsburgh. No kids but not from lack of trying. You know how things can be.

I really do, I said.

Show me anyone who ended up where they thought they would. She smiled in a wooden way, as if her manager was watching. Help me, her eyes seemed to say.

I remembered that when she was close to climax she'd yell, *Hoo boy, isn't that something?*

How do you answer that?

I kept my voice bright. Sing it, I said.

I told her I was happy for her then said goodbye. It shook me seeing her, to tell you the truth. I quickened my pace. A whirring sound, and Brent Winegarten hit the lamppost and performed a controlled roll. Rico Denera butt-slid into the mailbox. He was the one who begged me to help him not hit me. I kept my face pleasant but I didn't stop.

No ignoring Bernie Greene! He ricocheted against a few trees and the side of Higher Grounds before landing in a heap near the door.

Quite an entrance, I said.

He expressed no happiness to see me: this is the prerogative of ex-husbands. Being married to an English professor is another way of getting pummeled. He spent much of our short marriage correcting my grammar.

He and his wife live in Philadelphia with their two...yawns.

You've done great, I said.

Well...he said.

Well what?

He said, I've done well.

Bernie, I said, I'm just trying to get some fucking coffee.

My best friend Betty Sue owns Higher Grounds. It's raining my ex-boyfriends, I told her.

I noticed, she said, handing me a Mud Latte.

I told her about my morning and she told me her carrot plants were finally responding to fertilizer.

Kevin Groutmeyer? She leaned in. Isn't he the one who can do that thing?

In the flesh, I said. The Mud Latte was lighting up my mood.

Her eyes grew wide. You don't think you'll see Mike?

Mike? I said. No. Mike? No.

I breathed in and out. A woman at the condiment table shook sugar into her espresso. A hard knot formed in my gut.

When I was leaving Betty Sue called out, if you see Nick Fredericks tell him I said go scratch. She gave me a *be strong* fist-cheer that I answered with a *here goes nothing* grimace. I pushed through the door to the outside.

What had been a drizzle had become a steady rain. One-night stands were falling now, along with boys I'd stared at in school who'd preferred girls the

heft of paper clips. Whirrs and grunts as so many freckled shinbones I had forgotten met with ground.

Sometimes I feel like God's favorite sitcom. I shouldered through this intimate precipitation, clutching my latte. A few collected on a bench near the library. I recognized that guy (Marcus? Mario?) who didn't believe in driver's licenses, and Gregory, who broke up with me because he was "tired." There, rubbing a welt on his ankle, was Nick Fredericks, who dumped Betty Sue before asking me to the prom. He was her only boyfriend before she got married. Her exes wouldn't make a decent sun shower if you want to know the truth.

I saluted them from across the street but at me, they glowered. A cold front. I remembered their phone messages, the flecks of hope in their voices.

I was the opposite of akimbo. I no longer wanted the world to come to me.

Let that be all, I hoped, reaching the woods near my house. I stepped into a clearing I didn't recognize. A large stone jutted out from the grass. I turned and walked in the other direction. After a few minutes I stumbled into the same clearing. I ran. The clearing again. I couldn't avoid it.

I knew he was buried in his family's plot several states away but believe me when I say this grave too was real. I placed my palms against the cold stone—into it was chiseled the name Mike Radish, my second grade boyfriend.

His parents divorced that year, then conducted a mean-spirited custody battle over his sister and him. Yet Mike had remained unaffected by the fighting. Every Sunday he sang in church, his gaze fixed somewhere over the heads of our unworthy congregation. His mouth, arranged in a careful o, made every *Ave* perfect, as if lowering each one down on a delicate thread.

One afternoon in the rain, our soggy lunches bunched in our fists, we achieved a quick, harrowing kiss.

During the first few weeks of chemotherapy he still looked like Mike but gradually he began to swell. His blunt nose and heavily fringed eyes held their shapes but the terrain of his skin expanded as the chemicals pulled him taut. Then he stopped coming to school. I was certain he wouldn't die because he was a kid.

There was really no getting to me after that.

I left the only thing I had, my coffee cup, on his grave and found the path.

That, I thought with relief, is the tippy-top of Ex Mountain. I knew how a balloon must feel, fretless and buoyed from within. I wanted to get to my house, where the woods relent and there is nothing but sky. Maybe the sky would be a certain shade of green, or contain a cloud formation that might set me on a line of thinking that could turn out to be important. This idea put a crackle of energy into my elbows and knees. I removed outer layers: my parka, my hat, my cardigan. When I reached it, I wanted there to be nothing between it and me.

That's when I saw the man sitting on my front step.

I live on a long road and it's just my house at the end of it so I was able to consider him for a long time as I walked. Slim hands. Delicate knees in pressed grey pants. Had I forgotten someone? He gave me an *isn't it so like you to be late* look but I had never met this man before this day. He was relentlessly smiling, if there is such a thing. Like those days when you can't get away from the sun, even when you are inside negotiating a dry cleaning bill, it shines and shines.

Hajara Quinn

Unthank Park, Portland Ore.

Everywhere we step
we step into the ejaculate

of the sun. Splurge
of daisies, spree of plums.

I am not ungrateful
for what I have not been given.

I do not begrudge
the rolling hills

their bouquets, unbridled
and at large, manifold

as marigolds.
The sun did not stand

us up. It was a standing
ovation. We lay

two abreast in its slow
boat, we lolled there

simultaneous with the zinnias
and chrysanthemums.

The breeze
was our anthem.

I am thankful
for what I do not have.

The sun, when it went down
made a salmon

lavender dipthong that
pronounced itself in us, our eyes.

We were two letters.
We made one sound.

Parade

A five of spades of geese
is spreading itself thin
above the lake, and higher
overhead, the clouds move
like continental drift, nations unmoored
from their states, slow and athletic.
A wind goes through
a royal flush of foliage
and when the maples clap their hands
their hands go flying off.
They scuttle, exoskeleton-like, on the path ahead.
Like a glove my gloved hand
fits to your ungloved hand, our major
to minor keys, and all the pines
and all the pianos in the woods
hold sway over our one held note.
We walk swiftly, *two to make*
a larger wake, you once said.
One to notice the geese, I think
and one to take note of the leaves.
And with a sense of our own
burgeoning we paraded on, one float
soberly passing alongside of
another buoyant float.

Leaving What You Had Wanted to Sow

The train's familiar whistle
and the foghorn's bass note under it

make a chord as I drive
along the river, my windows down

under a low, cut on the bias moon
as it moves like a slug

keeping the time
in the late August sky.

I had tried to sow what I wanted
to reap: carrot, turnip, beet

rat-tailing into their rows,
but one rule is you may not enhance

the lie and I had tried to enhance the lie.
A couple of mallards lift off

the surface of the slug trail
river into their flight

of fancy. In the deepest
décolletage of the mind I know

that this is right.
I take my exit too fast, and think

of a worm, its slow exit wound out of
the apple it is done boring through.

Ross Gay

Weeping

I'm thinking here of the proto-Indo-European root
which means the precise sound of a flower bud

unwrapping, and the tiny racket a seed makes
cracking open in the dark, which has evolved

in a handful of Latinate languages to mean the sound
of lovers exiting each other, implying as well the space

between them which usage is seen first in Dante
in the fourteenth century, elbowing it for good into our mouths

and minds, and of course the sweet bead of sugar
imperceptibly moseying from the fig's tiny eye precisely

unlike sorrow which the assembly of insects sipping there
will tell you, when I tell you my niece, without fit or wail,

knowing her friend Emma had left and not said goodbye,
having spent the better part of the day resting on her finger,

sometimes opening her wings, which were lustrous brown
with gold spots, to steady herself at the child-made

gale, or when she was tossed into the air while my niece
took her turn at pick-up sticks until calling Emma

by holding her finger in the air to which Emma would wobble down,
and Mikayla said *Deal us in* when we broke out the dominoes

at which they made a formidable duo, whispering to each other
instructions, and while the adults babbled our various dooms

Mikayla and Emma went into the bedroom where they sang
and danced and I think I heard Mikayla reading Emma

her favorite book, both of them slapping their thighs, leaning
into each other, and at bedtime Mikayla put on her PJs

carefully, first the left arm through while Emma teetered
on the right, then the other, and in the dark Mikayla whispered to Emma,

who had threaded her many legs into the band of Mikayla's sleeve,
while she drifted, watching Emma's wings slowly open

and close, and Emma must have flown away for good, judging
from the not brutal silence at breakfast, as Mikayla chewed

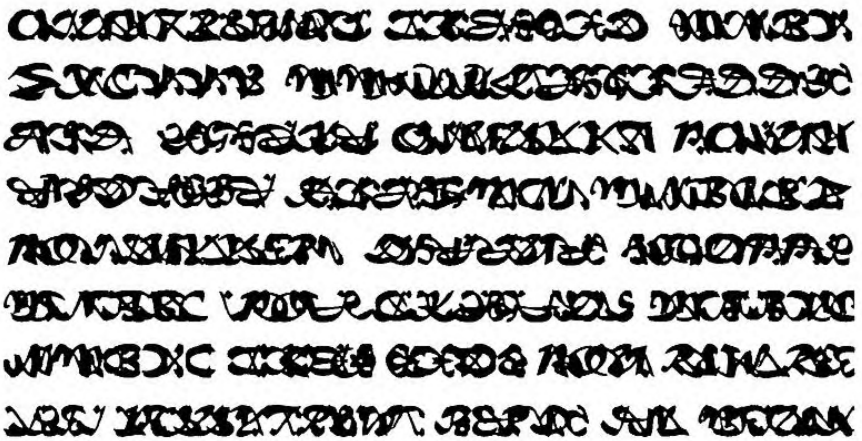
the waffle goofily with her one front tooth gone, and weakly smiled,
looking into the corners of the room for her friend, for Emma,

who had left without saying goodbye, the tears easily
rolling from her eyes, when I say she was weeping,

when I say she wept.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY SARAH POLLACK

Juan Villoro



The Phantom Wing

"Here, only the heat is real." Uribe slid the envelope across the desk. "You imagined too much, had a shitty dream." The asthmatic voice joined forces with the other things driving Irigoyen from the room: the salt efflorescence on the wall, el patrón's shady shirt, the burnt-out cigar, the ashes that smelled different somehow in that plate with the Rayados' ridiculous crest.

Hours later Irigoyen was walking toward the pier. The suitcase weighed so much it felt like he was carrying a corpse to throw into the sea. For some reason, the idea of a man carved into pieces (175 pounds-worth of a defender or Uribe's 260) entertained him until he reached the bank. The motionless river, earthy in color even in the moonlight, blended into the waveless sea. Gas flares from the oil rigs and the red lights of a tanker glowed in the distance. Irigoyen turned to the right; it was like having that last drink whose only purpose is to ruin the previous ones, to divert them toward a predetermined tragedy. He saw the stadium's tiered shadow, El Vasco Uribe's powerful delirium.

The moon disappeared a moment, erasing the path that descended between weeds and Sunday litter. Irigoyen took a seat on his suitcase. He breathed in the night, a deep smell of distant gasoline and plants rotting by the sea.

He was carrying the weight on his right side, and his ankle began to bother him. He wished he could be done with that tingling feeling forever, erase it like he'd erased his childhood with the woman who'd opened herself to him in exchange for a few pesos. It was always that way with injuries; they returned whenever they wanted to. He saw himself at fourteen, his nose broken by a right midfielder who'd elbowed him, lying in bed with that woman who smelled like wet plants; he saw himself crying afterwards on a park bench, like a coward who nevertheless dares to cry with a broken nose. While he continued down the path, minor injuries came back to him, the detached nail from the time the Uruguayan, whose name he forgot, stomped on his foot, the stretcher carrying him out of the Torreón stadium under a rain of beer cups and urine, the two teeth he lost on the field in Tegulcigalpa; he couldn't complain too much, occupational hazards, but his ankle injury represented something else. He left the operating room only to hear the doctor with the singsong voice say: "Soria was going for the ball." Horrified, he found himself in Guadalajara still, with a pin in his ankle rammed inside him by a Chivas fan ready to justify Soria, the most efficient shredder in first division. "Just like what happened to Onofre," the doctor added.

Leaving his childhood behind and with a broken nose, Irigoyen first heard of those strange bones: Alberto Onofre fractured his tibia and fibula a few weeks before the 1970 World Cup. He was never the same again, and went down in history as a bitter hypothesis, for the smooth and calculated diagonal shots he never delivered in the Cup.

"At least you're as old as the coaches," El Zorri Mendieta told him as he signed his cast in his awful handwriting, that of a goalie whose hands have been kicked one too many times.

It was staring at Mendieta's fingers that he decided to retire. Thirty-six-years-old and no chance to play until next season. He could imagine the broadcasters' kind words when announcing his return: "Methuselah returns to the field!" El Sordo Fernández, his coach, spoke in a voice hardened in five countries, all of which had given him the boot: "Learn to recover the ball."

He couldn't stand the idea of becoming a useful obstacle in the crowded midfield, running against his own history as a left wing. Ever since he learned to

play with old man Scopelli, he could never move any other way: the phantom wing who dozes off throughout the game and suddenly appears in a deserted corner.

He chose to leave with no fanfare, pursuant to his discreet records: two national championships, thirty-two games with the national team, a good player with no magic nickname nor famed plays, but he'd been there, in the thick of it, so that some showoff could score with a bicycle kick.

He caught a whiff of tar and ropes on the breeze, as if the water before him were busy with ships. The old ferry only made two trips; the dockside smell probably came from the tanker and the platforms, to which the operators had already returned, fired up after the match. He thought about Olivia, about her confounding smile, which seemed to mean two things at once: "If you win, we'll meet at the ferry." Olivia entered others people's lives as if climbing through a window. Perhaps he withstood the astonishment of having her close because the heat mitigated surprises there.

El Zorri Mendieta was the first to tell him about Punta Fermín, an enclave of the oil industry that only appeared on recent maps. A businessman had bought a third division franchise; now the Rayados were in second division and needed a young coach.

"He liked your name," El Zorri said, as if Irigoyen were part of the lineup of those mythological Vascos —Lángara, the Regueiro brothers, Cilauren, Zubieta— men from the Basque Country who had stayed in Mexico and whose names were still on the lips of those who really knew the sport.

After a token course (the vague explanations typical of any night class), Irigoyen got his coaching certificate. But it was at Brindisi, a pasta restaurant close to Atlante Stadium, where his second half really began. He was eating with El Zorri and El Sordo Fernández when he saw someone straight from the pages of a newspaper. The man sat down at the table, and Irigoyen had a strange impression: the gaunt face, famous nose, ashy locks, seemed purposely exaggerated; the fourth diner resembled César Luis Menotti *in excess*; there was something unreal in the sudden proximity of that legendary coach. One way or another, everyone said, things always went wrong for Menotti. His glory days as world champion were slowly being spent in the twilight of teams that played magnificently and never won a damn thing. Sitting at that table, overwhelmed by El Sordo's introduction

("our new colleague"), Irigoyen listened to the Argentine coach. He had taken over the national team and thought he'd play the outsider card in a country where Cruz Azul had snatched the championship from Atlético Español with three goals offside; he would defend his decision to play the goalie outside of the box on fields where the opponent's strategy consisted of letting the grass grow and flooding it half an hour before the game. He realized that Menotti was in Mexico to get fucked; he also realized that his fervor was contagious.

He was surprised that everything fit so easily in his suitcase. He had few belongings, which, for some reason, seemed to him the hallmark of childless divorcés. He imagined Punta Fermín as a wasteland, much like his recent past. Without a surname, the place proclaimed its lack of history. Nothing there had had the chance to endure the test of time. The team, the stadium, the very city were younger than he was.

El Vasco sent a driver to pick him up at the Cancún airport and for three hours Irigoyen gazed at a flat plateau with squat trees, unlike anything he'd seen before, or, in any case, like something out of a movie about Africa.

The chauffeur slowed down upon entering the town. "I'll show you around." The heat grew more intense.

They drove down a long street full of contraband goods for sale. One store displayed a live alligator, in a cage made of sticks. A little further ahead, a pig almost ran under the jeep. They passed some girls eating cones of blue ice.

"What do you think of the chicks?" the driver asked. Irigoyen looked at their scrawny legs, the clear plastic sandals on their feet. "They're waiting for the workers from the rigs. The men come to Punta every two weeks. They say that being close to oil makes you horny. You think?"

Irigoyen inquired about the blue ice.

"They use a syrup that comes from Panama. Here, everything is imported. Even we are imported goods. Who would be born in this place?"

There was no church, no plaza with a bandstand, no basketball court. The town hall was a rectangle that was almost indistinguishable from the stores selling contraband electronics.

They drove through a neighborhood that looked recently built and recently abandoned. Then they took a highway that crossed the stone mesa. To the right, the placid sea only added to the heat.

Irigoyen saw a flock of parrots; the ribbon of green in the sky accompanied them a while and then descended toward a spot where there must have been some trees. A little later they spied the first fronds.

"There are plants here because of the cenote," the driver explained.

Two underground rivers surfaced in a pool of water. El Vasco had purchased all of the damp lands around the cenote to build the stadium, the clubhouse and a mansion with a commanding view of the Caribbean.

They drove under an arch with green and white lettering: Rayados Soccer Club. The team was named after a tribe that had inhabited the area, nomads who painted stripes—rayas—on their body with lime, and who had disappeared, leaving no pyramids or offerings behind. The only thing commemorating their faint presence in the peninsula was the team's jersey.

"A team from Monterrey has the same name," Irigoyen said.

"It doesn't matter," said the chauffeur. "They're far away. Now take a look at this hottie!"

They had entered Uribe's properties. The driver pointed out what seemed to be the entrance to the cenote, surrounded by rocks, the impeccable lawn, the house festooned with balconies.

Irigoyen got out of the jeep. A giant man was awaiting him. His cigar, of an opulent thickness, looked svelte between his fingers.

He shook Uribe's hand, a rough hand that seemed to be made of the same stone as the mesa.

"You're going to be happy here," El Vasco addressed him informally, not expecting to be reciprocated; like other soccer tycoons, he had the look of a cattle rancher.

They went to the house. They crossed a spacious living room with marble floors. A profusion of Arabian carpets overwhelmed the space. Fortunately, they did not pause there; they walked to a balcony on the other side. Irigoyen realized that the house's design was justified because of the view; from the wicker armchairs one commanded over the stadium and even the field (the stands formed a horseshoe

around the field, opening up to the owner's mansion at the head). Irigoyen could make out the soft nets of the southern goal.

"How about a cocktail?" Uribe had difficulty breathing and his tongue made a raspy noise; he seemed in desperate need of a drink.

Irigoyen turned. A girl had arrived without making a sound. She was barefoot; her eyes were slanted and her hair straight, like the girls he had seen licking the blue ice.

"Olivia," breathed El Vasco.

It was the first time Irigoyen saw her ambiguous smile, as if she were in the presence of something repugnant but that she nevertheless enjoyed.

They drank a liqueur that was green, cool and thick. The journey, the heat and the drink placed Irigoyen on some alternative plane of reality. At dusk, the lawn took on a strange glow, as if absorbing the last reserves of light.

"I'm beat," Irigoyen said.

"Show him the way, my child." Uribe addressed the girl with imposing affection, as if his authority weren't derived from the salary he paid her.

The bungalow reserved for the coach proved to be pleasant. A television with channels from Miami, a ceiling fan, a shower massager.

He found a lineup of five veteran first-division players, a dozen rookies and Marcelo Casanueva, the loan from Cruz Azul that he'd negotiated in his contract. Overpowering the locker rooms was the smell of mud, sweat, and worn leather common to all fields, a reminder that soccer is always born of the same poverty. Perhaps because it had been a while since they had seen anyone, the players listened to him too intently, as if he spoke of things from across the sea.

After the semi-deserted impression he had of Punta Fermín, he was surprised that the stadium filled every other Sunday. Despite the hellish bus trips for their away games, the team ran smoothly, and Marcelo Casanueva soon topped the scoring charts. The season before, Marcelo had made his debut with Cruz Azul, but he had ratted on his coach for taking cuts of transfer fees, and he was sent to warm the bench. He wanted to play so badly that he accepted the invitation to

move to the far ends of the earth. He was the type of player that Irigoyen admired and detested: self-righteous and with slicked-back hair, full of superstitions, the kind who stayed after practice to work on free kicks without anyone asking him to. Although his goals were clearly a triumph of the will, he couldn't answer a reporter's question without invoking God. In his gaze and style as a player, which was one of Puritan efficiency, there was an utter lack of enjoyment that laid bare the pleasures sought by the rest. Even when eating, he seemed governed by a higher power; he chewed his food fastidiously, he never reached for the salsa or salt. After ten games, it was obvious that second division was child's play for him; however, he refused to meet with the scouts from Atlas that came to see him play. Irigoyen thanked him for his loyalty, and Marcelo stared irritatingly up at the sky, as if God were his coach.

During the weekdays, the plants and sea isolated Irigoyen and his players from the rest of the world. A soccer team is made of infinite hours lost playing cards or jogging aimlessly. Sometimes, overcoming the tedium of so much concentration and training is harder than beating the pressure on Sundays. The Rayados had left their families behind, in cities where there were schools and where rooms didn't have to be shared with other players. The only one who had the right to bring his wife and children was the coach. The bungalow was a little too spacious for Irigoyen alone; he began to leave towels and clothes around to give it a more lived-in feeling. He tried not to think about the effect this permanent confinement would have on him and his men after a year. In soccer, the future was next Sunday.

The Rayados rode their bus to Cancún on their Mondays off. His players went out looking for gringas (real and imaginary), video arcades, Internet cafés to write misspelled messages, a carnival, from which they returned with absurd stuffed toucans. He preferred to remain at the team's deserted facilities. He killed time reading old magazines, tossing pebbles into the cenote, wandering the meadows whose verdure intensified the sensation of being in an oasis surrounded by barrenness, staying up late watching movies, because the best ones were always on during the wee hours of the morning.

One Monday when his team was away, he walked through an area of low-growing palms. He came to a clearing and suddenly had a strange feeling, like when he was running the left wing and a shadow out of nowhere would make

the ball disappear. He turned to the right and discovered Olivia, leaning against a palm tree. A dog was licking her feet.

"He loves to. It's because of the salt in my sweat. Dogs need salt," the girl said.

Irigoyen saw the tongue lapping her toes. Olivia closed her eyes to concentrate on the moist caresses, or so he could observe her freely. Then she raised her hands and embraced the trunk that was her backrest. Irigoyen crept away.

What was Olivia doing in Punta Fermín? The chauffeur had told him that she was from Veracruz, where el patrón had coffee plantations and a chain of hotels. Irigoyen remembered his glistening eyes, a man obsessed with the link between oil and sexual cravings. He saw him rubbing his two index fingers together as a way to illustrate Uribe's relationship to Olivia. It was hard to trust the driver, who had spent too much time lost on the coast. There were other pieces that helped him make out Olivia's still hazy figure; he had seen her getting out of the stretch cars that the bosses of the oil union used; he had seen her step into El Vasco's box seat, wearing shiny, flowery dresses that were considered elegant there; he had seen her cross the meadows at night, with no discernable destination.

After the first match, Irigoyen understood the stadium's secret function: the oil workers met women on the bleachers, who arrived in canoes and rafts from nearby hamlets and didn't pay to get into the games. At five in the afternoon, the random cheers, the enthusiasm that was independent of the shots taken on the field, revealed that the spectators had given into their own rites in the stands. The Rayados' stadium was the town's missing plaza. On occasion there were blows and someone was stabbed, rows that had nothing to do with the game. At seven in the evening, it helped to lower the stadium lights; campfires would appear on the steps, and radios playing guitar and accordion music. "When the rigs were built, women had to be brought in from Chetumal; the men were going crazy in the heat," Uribe commented to him over a glass of green liqueur. From his terrace, the fires in the stadium stands were reminiscent of a barbarian celebration.

On Monday morning the ferry filled with single women. Olivia was different; she had come from further away, and she stayed on land.

In the clearing of short palm trees, Irigoyen felt that for the first time she had looked at him in an unequivocal way.

He returned to the bungalow; he got in the shower and the torture of the freezing water put distance between him and her shining eyes, her bronzed legs, the greedy licking of her feet. He dried off in a rage.

Upon removing his towel, he discovered Olivia:

"I wanted to see you."

From that moment on, Punta Fermín was Olivia's narrow waist in his hands, her dark nipples, the vegetative smell that exuded from her throat, her grass-stained feet, the dog's occasional swoons while waiting for her outside the bungalow.

Olivia rarely spoke; in contrast, her smile said too much, as if contradicting her motives. Amused, Irigoyen likened her gesture to a penalty kick: a fake to one side, a shot to the other.

When taking leave of him, she'd say, "El señor is expecting me," in the same voice that Marcelo Casanueva used for his encounters with God in the goal area.

It was hard to keep secrets given the Rayados' confinement. El Vasco surely knew, and in some complicated way accepted, his arrangement with Olivia. Irigoyen had ample time to ponder this by the smooth rocks of the cenote, watching swallows turning in the sky, and he arrived at a hypothesis that would have unsettled him elsewhere, but that in this suspended setting acquired a gentle normalcy: Uribe had hired him because he was a loner that Olivia could keep tabs on, a reason that was ultimately as capricious as the one El Zorri Mendieta had given him: "He liked your name." Irigoyen resigned himself to the irony: he, who despised man-to-man marking, was being guarded even in his intimacy.

Perhaps the scorching sun and the distance from the cities had something to do with his calm acceptance of a life full of pauses, extreme schedules (insomnia during the tropical storms, a stone's slumber on the interminable highways), the din of Sundays, deserted Mondays, Olivia split between the bungalow, Uribe's house, the local union, the dances she sometimes spoke to him about and that, depending on his mood, he imagined either as small-town fiestas where an iguana was raffled or orgies with a fantastical backdrop: palm trees in gold flowerpots, immense lounge chairs befitting of a Central American dictator.

In these surroundings, he was gradually assimilated into a new logic. Besides, Irigoyen was slow to worry about what was happening in his immediate proximity.

He knew this too well, and was reminded of it again, each time he found one of his ex-wife's bobby pins in the last fold of a suitcase. He imagined things from the perspective of his position on the field; his job was to run close to the chalk line, fill a sudden opening on the far left, anticipate the ball's movements, never be the man who is there but rather the man who will be, stay a little to the margins, as if he knew even then that his destiny was to continue life off the field, on the coach's bench, on this Caribbean coast where the country, strangely, still existed.

At the end of May the sky burst in showers and steamy mists overpowered the nights. Olivia's hair curled more in this weather; it always looked damp, like an omen of what was happening outside. One day when it rained early and she couldn't visit him, the television brought news of Menotti. His team had played like never before, but there were changes in the Federation and the coach resigned amidst a wave of aspersions. Irigoyen recalled El Sordo's voice, heavy with failure: "In this business, he who thinks loses. Be careful. That's the danger of goalies and strikers: they have the time to have ideas." The goalie tended to be the team eccentric; his good luck charms at the foot of the goal post, flashy sweatshirts and kneeled prayers in the goal box set him apart from the rest. With the left wing, something similar happened; the team ended there, everything was left-handed and acquired a sense of urgent finality. Even he was suspicious of that zone and stepped onto the field with his right foot, although it had never worked that well for him when kicking the ball. "The worst thing is to think about things outside of the stadium; the managers never forgive you if you have a life somewhere else; there was a time when I considered myself an individual, and I got fucked." El Sordo Fernández dallied in the dregs of soccer, as if the horrors were mitigated by detailing them; he spoke as if the number eleven did not represent a position on the field, but rather a mode of conduct.

Irigoyen turned up the TV: "He's not from here, he took advantage of us," declared a sportscaster on the payroll of the Federation's new leadership. He was referring to Menotti. Would he get kicked out of Punta Fermín, too? The world had become an impatient place, and a coach had better pack his bags if he lost three consecutive games. The Rayados played well, but the senselessness shown on

the television made him remember that El Vasco prided himself on his arbitrary outbursts ("I had this wall built seven times"), spectacles that buttressed his authority. One Sunday he would fill the stadium with tambora groups, and two weeks later he'd bar entry to musicians. He could fire Irigoyen for whatever reason, and even if he didn't, how long could he last on this forsaken shore, where potable water had to be brought in by boat and nobody had a clear reason to support the team?

Uribe, el patrón, had business to attend to in Veracruz and the capital, and he would leave his mansion for long weeks at a time. Upon arrival, he'd complain about the plants invading the rooms and scold with theatrical contempt the Mayan gardeners who barely understood him.

Once, upon his return, he went to Irigoyen's bungalow and confronted the coach, as if he were responsible for the vines that had gained ground during his absence:

"What do you think of the team?" His tone of voice revealed that he thought they were not doing well.

They were in fourth place; what more could he ask of a new team?

"The highest-scoring teams don't always make it to the finals, there's a lot of wear at the top, a lot of pressure. The way things are going, we could make it to the playoffs and surprise them all."

El Vasco studied him for a few seconds. Then he said, "I like that bullshit of yours: 'There's a lot of wear at the top'... Take care of the boys. Take care of yourself. You have a hell of a team." He patted him on the shoulder and left the way he came.

Irigoyen didn't understand the scene, nor did he try to; since his time as a player, he had given up trying to figure out the moguls' logic. They only made sense when they paid.

Uribe stopped making sense one Friday; the players didn't receive their biweekly pay. El Vasco blamed the falling gas prices. The union had to limit expenses. Weeks went by in a tangle of talk about the Persian Gulf, barrels that no one had seen but that nevertheless affected them. When salaries were normalized again, nobody had the courage to protest the bad news el patrón delivered while lighting his cigar: there would be no bonuses if they made it to the playoffs.

"There's no money. The oil business is a bitch."

No one dared to contradict him.

Irigoyen started growing weary of this faraway place where everything ended up happening some other way. The flames that marked the horizon became an irrational and definite limit for him. Even if gas prices rose, he would leave soon.

One night, while Olivia drew on his sweaty back with her finger, Irigoyen asked if she'd go away with him after the championship. She folded her legs, hugging her knees:

"Only if you win," she said, as if that were impossible.

The sports press heralded them as the revelation from second division, but Olivia followed other clues. She blew the hair from her face; her eyes shone in an unmistakable way when she said, "You're better off leaving beforehand. I spend a lot of time with el señor."

It took Irigoyen a moment to understand the relationship between the two sentences.

"What did he tell you?"

"First division teams travel by plane."

Irigoyen remembered the empty sky above him all these months. You had to travel to Cancún to see the contrails of a jet. They were too far away; big teams would never accept such a costly and exhausting trip.

"Besides, it's cheaper for the union to have a second-division team." Olivia completed the play; they wouldn't let him win. "Leave beforehand."

Irigoyen insisted that they would go together. She repeated, with her smile that could mean just about anything, that first he'd have to win. There was a depressing somberness in the way she said "victory." Perhaps because this meant that he would be fired. In her mouth the word "championship" sounded like a disgrace that implied taking her with him, being chained to her misfortune.

Sunday was the future until making it into the playoffs. They handily won against teams that relied on man-to-man marking and didn't aspire for more than a lucky goal, preferably with a free kick. Marcelo Casanueva played as if he were already on his next team. It disgusted Irigoyen to see him leave the field as if

unaware of his own feats, but he knew that this was his advantage: a striker who was cold, unshakeable.

The television suddenly couldn't get enough of the Rayados; the team was remarkable, not so much because of their games as because of their nerve to win in that faraway place where no one expected anything to happen.

The logical pick to win the championship was Hidalgo. Irigoyen had a faulty memory when it came to the endless rises and falls of Mexican soccer teams and players. He was unable to recall how many clubs El Zorri Mendieta had played for. Had Tecnológico Hidalgo made it to first division twice or three times? In any case, it was a bad team but with a long history, the kind of dumping and training ground that big teams need for their geezers and rookies.

During the first playoff matches, Irigoyen spoke to countless sweaty reporters. All of them dropped the word "surprise" in their first question. Soccer only exists if it's televised, and he resigned himself to the sportscasters' monotonous descriptions of the wonders of Punta Fermín. For years he had detested announcers who "got" a game after each goal (if the ball goes in the net, the moron on the job comments that the team is coached well). But with time, and perhaps Punta Fermín's distance, he began to enjoy the commentators' uninspired plaudits. The long tournament had served a purpose: to fuck with those idiots, who were now stuck raving about the Rayados. Before the stunned TV cameras, the team made the extraordinary their ordinary, qualifying for the finals against, predictably, Tecnológico Hidalgo.

They had a week off and on Monday the clubhouse filled with reporters who arrived by helicopter and in rented jeeps. Irigoyen expected—although he understood this later, when it was already humiliating—asinine congratulations for the Rayados' "magic." But after the first question he knew that there had been a change of weather in the commentators' foggy minds. What did it feel like to be facing an unbeatable team? Did he believe in miracles, perhaps? Which virgin did he pray to?

El Vasco Uribe presided over the table, behind a cloud of tobacco smoke, and allowed a barrage of comments in which the Rayados' unexpected participation in the finals seemed, instead of an achievement, a petulant challenge or an act of

naïve immoderation. Suddenly, Tecnológico, with its stadium in Pachuca, an hour away from the capital, represented a powerful symbolic center, unconquerable from the margins.

Irigoyen loathed the press conference, not so much because they spoke about Tecnológico as if they had already won the championship, but because he had gotten carried away with their earlier comments.

On Tuesday, *Esto* announced that Tec would receive backup players from América, Atlante, and Guadalajara. The message was clear: three powerful franchises were sacrificing their reserves to support a team from the center. Irigoyen thought about the impossible airplanes Olivia had mentioned.

Uribe had gone to the capital to discuss the conditions of the championship game with the Federation. After learning of the last-minute loans that Tecnológico would receive, Irigoyen tried to speak with him. He dialed one cell phone after another, but never heard el patrón's asthmatic voice.

On the eve of the away game, the disaster was compounded. The bus they always used, with fantastical palm trees painted on the sides, was switched for another specimen with metallic seats. The Rayados arrived in Pachuca two hours before the game, mere shadows of themselves.

The referee made it his job to bring them back to reality: he swallowed his whistle whenever he felt like it, he called a strict penalty, and he only remembered that he carried a yellow card in his pocket when the Rayados' right defender fractured a bone. The 0-2 loss was almost a gift. El Vasco came to greet them in the locker rooms. After not having seen him for so long, Irigoyen thought he looked strangely rejuvenated.

"Oh well, boys, you did what you could." Although he tried to sound resigned, he seemed nervous. Irigoyen understood his fears: he still thought they were capable of an upset in Punta Fermín.

He spent the twenty-six-hour return trip convincing himself that the best thing for Uribe would be for them to lose the championship. He was scarcely surprised when el patrón called him into his office a day before the home game. He recognized the air of the place, even though he rarely set foot inside; the cigar had burnt out hours earlier, but El Vasco still held it between his lips, unable to think about anything besides the jumble of ideas he was going to say:

"Here, only the heat is real." He slid him the envelope; Irigoyen could make out the green edges of the dollar bills. "Let's see if you wake up: you had a shitty dream. El Zorri told me about you, and I bet on you like those idiots who risk their money on horses based strictly on their names. You're green and you had delusions of grandeur, which always sinks a team. I thought that with a little luck you would have a decent run, nothing more. I should have told you to get the fuck out of here midseason. Sometimes a man is too generous. You put together an excessively good team. Did it never occur to you that you can't play like that in a swamp? Substitute wingers in this shithole! Do you know how I acquired my franchise? People at the top, whom you've never even dreamed of, needed an outlet for the oilmen besides the local whores. Do you think they would let us get to first division? Have you seen a plane in the fucking sky? Do you know how much it costs to broadcast from here? There will never be teams at the borders. It's not just the field that ends here, it's the country."

Irigoyen took the envelope with the money and stared at Uribe, as if trying to perfect his disdain. He felt a pain in his sternum and nausea deep down when looking at that plate with cold ashes. He thought about winning. Absurdly, this also meant attaining Olivia.

His head ached sharply when he entered the locker room before the game. He figured his players had also been given money to lose. Some of them, the veterans who were about to retire, had no great incentive to turn down a substantial payment. Others (for the first time he saw Marcelo as an ally) simply couldn't accept one; sooner or later news of the bribe would reach a reporter; it wasn't hard to imagine an excessive and exemplary punishment, lifetime suspensions for various players and a heavy but ultimately manageable fine for the execs.

He gave a long pep talk. When he finished, they all looked at him with respect, mostly because he had strung so many words together with so little breath. They exited the locker rooms as if leaving the inner crypt of some pyramid. The Punta Fermín field had never seemed so fresh. "Don't play for El Vasco, don't look up at the VIP box..." What else had he said? He once again breathed in those primal

soccer smells; he spoke about money without glory, childhood idols, how they'd be held accountable. It was all very vague, very passionate, not very convincing.

Irigoyen was the first to betray his own words; with the air burning hot once again, he searched for Olivia's bronzed skin and dark locks in the box Uribe shared with the union leaders.

If they won, the team was done for; it was easy to guess the end of the story. El Vasco would be forced to negotiate with the Federation and sell off his franchise to tycoons with a team in the center of the country. The Rayados' fate was sealed; on the other hand, the afternoon would hold mysterious consequences for Irigoyen. A murky, insistent idea played over and over in his mind: that because Olivia's decision depended on the score, that was motive enough to lose. "I'm also risking it all," she had told him while he gazed at the mark on her thigh. For months he had fervently kissed that bit of wounded skin, as if trying to discover some other key to Olivia. "Some acid spilled on me," she said, by way of explaining her scar. It was hard to believe her; that scar made him think of the oilmen, of the punishment she'd receive if she tried to disobey them. Yes, Olivia faced other dangers. The nights sponsored by Uribe had culminated in a gamble. Irigoyen knew now, better than ever before, that he was outside the field of play.

The match was one long tragedy of errors: the veterans, who were slow to make the plays, were hardly distinguishable from the anxious younger ones, who slid for the ball too soon. For the first time, Marcelo played emotionally; he missed easy passes and took shots with such force that they landed in the stands. Slowly, while his clothes drenched with sweat on the bench, Irigoyen realized his mistake. His speech had upset everyone: it was offensive to those who'd been bribed and a source of tension for the others.

At halftime, with the score 0-1 and the aggregate score 0-3, he tried to calm their nerves: they were playing against themselves, not against Tecnológico and their backups; they had to handle the ball more, show their love of the game, because in soccer, after all, a team that has no fun never wins. He read the disillusionment in their eyes; his players didn't believe him, or at least they believed that Uribe had paid him a visit on the bench with a check in hand to change his mind. The young ones stared at him as if his composure were a bribe, and the veterans with irksome

sympathy. He added some suggestion about opening up the field and guarding the elusive number nine. Nobody listened.

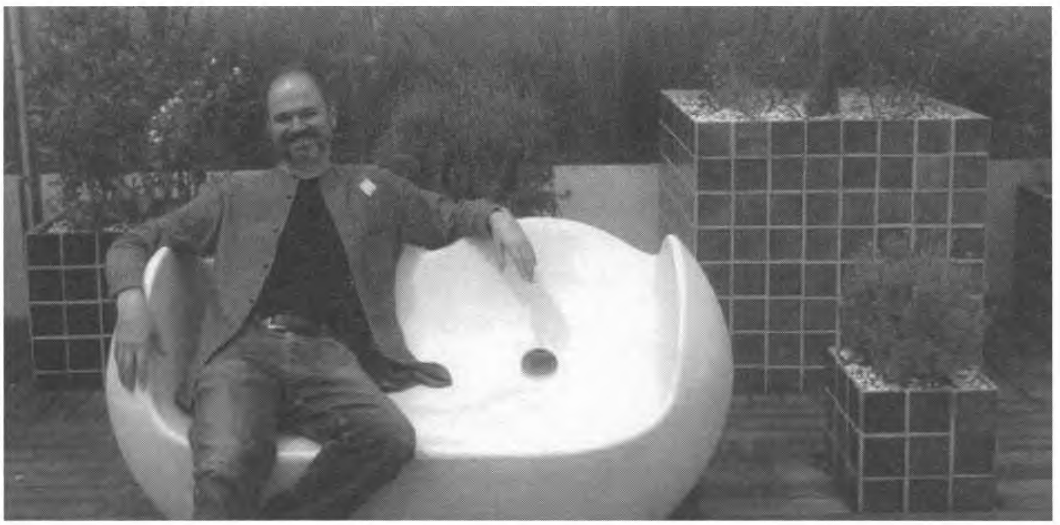
There were twenty minutes left on the clock when Marcelo was mowed down in the box. Even that referee, who considered violence essential to sports, had to call the penalty. The designated shooter was Marcelo himself. Irigoyen knew too well the effect adrenaline has on a recently fouled player; nevertheless, the sub might miss on purpose. He let him take the shot. Just watching him run, flying down the field, he knew that the ball would land far from the goal. Marcelo had so many reasons to score that not a single one would land in the net.

Dawn had broken. The tanker jutted out against the yellow sky. Irigoyen saw the rust that covered the sides of the bow. The envelope bulged under his shirt; he still had one last shot at grandeur: destroying the bills. Nevertheless, after packing his things, he knew he wouldn't go through with it; little by little he came to terms with the idea of a severance payment, perhaps an exaggerated one, but everything had been a little confusing with the heat; he chose the minor tragedy, a negotiated defeat.

On the pier, he felt a pull in his ankle again from his old fracture. He waited until he heard distant laughter. After a few seconds he saw the tired faces of the girls who were returning from their night in Punta Fermín. The coach's presence silenced them. One of them offered him a cone with blue ice. It was the first time he tasted the syrup, fragrant with the scent of strange petals. Almost all of the girls were barefoot. He saw them yawn, shielding themselves from the sun with their arms. Not one of them seemed older than twenty. A little while later the motor of the ferry started up. Irigoyen stepped up onto the rotten wood with his right foot, feeling the boat's thrust carrying him away from the coast.

He searched for the stadium behind the mangroves. Only then did he realize that he still thought Olivia might accompany him. Irigoyen had lost the bet; the team would remain there, and she had no pressing reason to leave, but perhaps it was some other feint: with her one never knew. Several minutes later, he thought he heard someone calling him. He was mistaken; the wind brought shards of sound from somewhere.

He traveled downriver, surrounded by drowsy women, gaining an unrivaled view of the stadium. An enclave of happiness, plants, perfect meadows. All at once he made out a silhouette by the water. The dog was licking her feet. Olivia did not wave her hand in goodbye; she watched the boat in the hot river, as if he had come only to leave again, to cast off toward a deserted place, that point that meant the end of the game.



Sixty-Three Original Languages

A conversation with Juan Villoro, José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra, and Manuel Gutiérrez

Juan Villoro is Mexico's foremost writer and arguably its most important public intellectual. A significant presence in contemporary Latin American literature and culture, Villoro's work spans several genres, including journalism, short fiction, novels and, more recently, theatre. Among his better-known works are El testigo *(2004)* (The Witness), *a novel for which he was awarded the prestigious Premio Herralde for fiction, and* La Casa Pierde *(1999)* (The House is Dealt the Losing Hand), *a collection of short stories. His work has been anthologized in many collections including* The Best of Contemporary Mexican Fiction *(2009). His first play,* Conferencia sobre la lluvia (A lecture about the Rain), *premiered at the Teatro de la Biblioteca de México in 2013. A prolific journalist who frequently publishes in the Mexican, Spanish and Latin American press, Villoro has written memorable pieces of reportage about contemporary Mexican life: from a trip to the town of Tequila with Salman Rushdie, to an opening at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City with Yoko Ono, to several pieces about narco-violence and reactions to this violence from the art world. His writing covers everything from children's fiction, to teenage novels that adults secretly (or not so secretly) read and love, to essays about fútbol and music. In collaboration with the Consulate General of Mexico, Rice University, and the University of Houston,* Gulf Coast *invited Juan Villoro to Houston in April 2014 for a series of public events, and we are proud to publish a transcription of a roundtable with this remarkable author alongside Sarah Pollack's exclusive translation of his short story, "The Phantom Wing."*

—José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra and Manuel Gutiérrez

Manuel Gutiérrez: Given that your work has only recently begun being translated into English: How does it feel to read yourself in another language?

Juan Villoro: Well…it's quite strange. It's like reading another author, a foreign author. But at a certain point you realize that a story works when it becomes strange to you. I used to discuss this with a very good friend of mine, who died some years ago: Roberto Bolaño. Once while we were discussing the difficulty of analyzing our own works, he told me that the only proof you have that you're writing well is when you re-read something and have the impression that somebody else wrote it. This *strangeness* of your own stuff makes you feel that the story lives by itself. And that's one of the fortunes of translation, because suddenly you read it as if someone else has written it. That can be rewarding. Sometimes it can be depressing. The main thing is that you can step back from your own perspective and look at your own work as if it belongs to another writer. I think that's excellent.

José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra: Is that what you look for as a translator? You have translated—Goethe, Schnitzler, Capote, Graham Greene. Is this *strangeness* the reaction you would look for from the authors you translate? For instance, Capote saying, "No that's something else. That's not what I wrote"?

JV: Well, most of them are dead. It would be difficult to deal with a living author. And I don't know what their reaction would be because I mainly translate from German into Spanish. It's very difficult to find a German author who speaks Spanish well, so it would be hard for them to realize what I'm doing with their work, aside from them being dead. Nonetheless, I think one of the most generous aspects of translations is the introduction into one's own language and into one's own cultural repertoire a voice that doesn't belong there but that is inevitably enriching. That is one of the most interesting things about translation.

Consider, for example, that we can, every twenty, thirty, or forty years, have a new version of *Hamlet*. We can renew our *Hamlet*. That's impossible for the English speaker because, of course, they always have the original. Alternately, the

English speaker can renew Cervantes, and that's of course impossible for us. This possibility to enhance the richness of a language through a foreign voice is one of the main assets of translation.

That's why I keep on translating. It is also a wonderful exercise for writers, like shadowboxing: the only way to know a book from inside is to translate all the words. Sometimes you have this strange feeling. You're looking at all the decisions the author took, and you're trying to follow every single decision. It's like going inside another's mind.

MG: It's fascinating that you work as a translator, especially given that, at least in the United States, only three percent of the books published are translations; translation does not receive the recognition it deserves. And this is despite the promises of globalization—that we would communicate more frequently, and more effortlessly, between countries. What has been your experience as a Mexican writer trying to communicate to a different audience, in the U.S. or elsewhere?

"In Mexico today, we have some sixty-three original languages. We are aware of a multitude of languages living there right now—and all these languages preceded the Spanish. "

JV: We have a different reaction toward languages; I think it has to do with our knowledge that before the Spaniards came to the so-called "New World" there were many languages being spoken. In Mexico today, we have some sixty-three original languages. We are aware of a multitude of languages living there right now—and all these languages preceded the Spanish.

On the other hand, because we belong to the so-called "Third World," we have always had the sensation of being outcasts of progress who live on the shore of culture, who are far away from the real cultural decisions in the world. Many Mexican writers and academics tend to learn languages in order to build bridges to other cultures. So it is only natural for us to think that our language is just one of many different possibilities of speech. This is different than, for example, in Spain. When I speak with Spanish colleagues they tend to have a stronger authority

toward their language because they know they are the founding fathers of the language. If they speak in a particular way, that's the way we should speak. The use of the language is a sign of authority for them.

In Mexico, we have a weaker relationship toward the language because we know that Spanish is only one of many Mexican languages, and so we also have a more tentative and experimental relationship toward speech. I think this is better for literature because if you are too certain in your use of language it becomes much more difficult to find original ways of escaping from common speech. I think it's better to have this weak sensation of the language.

"When I was four years old I was sent to the German school. My father was an admirer of European schools and I am the oldest son, so I was the first one to go."

JRRS: In several of your works, you talk about two forms of happiness. You discuss this both in your chronicles and in *Conferencia sobre la lluvia.* When you try to choose both forms of happiness you achieve neither. I love that idea because you practice a genre, the chronicle, that tries to partake in different forms of happiness, so to speak. How did you come up with this idea of two forms of happiness, that impossible state that literature strives for?

JV: Well, going back to the issue of language, it's interesting to recall that I studied at a German school. When I was four years old I was sent to the German school. My father was an admirer of European schools and I am the oldest son, so I was the first one to go. At the time there were two groups at the school: the German group and the Mexican group.

Our Ministry of Culture decided that both groups should mix, in order to avoid certain Teutonic fantasies by the Germans. This was in the 1960s—a time not so far away from the Second World War. The Ministry of Culture wanted to avoid Pan-Germanism and so on. They said there should be at least some Mexicans in the German group, so I was one of those Mexicans. I was a token Mexican.

I was sent there and from age four, I studied everything in German. I spent nine years studying all academic subjects in German, aside from Spanish. This was

the only language and the only subject in which my grades were reliable because it was my mother tongue. And this strange education fostered in me a passion for the Spanish language.

So what I learned at the German school was to love Spanish. At home nobody could help me with homework. All my friends were either German kids or the sons of Germans. And there I was with two other token Mexicans. It was really a strange and difficult education for me, but the contrast to my own language was so important that I decided to use this language, no matter how. I couldn't have fathomed then that I was going to be a writer; I just wanted to say something in my own language because it was the language of exception. It was the language of freedom.

"I couldn't have fathomed then that I was going to be a writer; I just wanted to say something in my own language because it was the language of exception. It was the language of freedom."

This leads me to your question of "two happinesses." I could have been happy in German and sometimes I have been happy in German, strangely enough. Many years later, I lived in Berlin and, of course, I understood I had a wonderful opportunity to speak in a marvelous language and to translate books. What had been a punishment became an extraordinary pleasure.

I really cherish and admire the German language, but it was difficult to get to that point. So I have been happy in German, but it's easier for me to be happy in Spanish, and there are some situations in which you have to choose between two different forms of happiness. Let's take an artificial happiness, a happiness that's not meant for you but in which you can take part for a small time. And another kind of happiness, the happiness that has to do with essences, with the things you believe in, with your sense of being part of a whole that's richer than yourself.

In daily life we always have these kinds of choices. There's a kind of happiness that is proposed to us through advertisements, propaganda, new tendencies, fashion, and so on. And we can be happy for a while, but there's another kind of happiness that has only to do with yourself. Sometimes it's difficult to know which kind of happiness this is, because you're not sure of who you are.

MG: Juan, in your novel *El testigo*, you narrate the return of a Mexican national who's been away from his country for about ten years or so. He returns to find a different country, one very much transformed and still going through a process of change. The protagonist becomes interested in the life of Ramon López Velarde and he searches for some connection to this poet as he tries to understand the changes that are occurring in Mexico. Since the publication of *El testigo*, Mexico has changed drastically. How would you rewrite the life of that character now?

JV: I wanted to tell a story of someone who returns to his country and, to a certain extent, he no longer belongs because everything has changed. He has changed as well, of course. He has an Italian wife. His daughters have been born abroad. He doesn't relate to his reality in the same way. This is why the novel is called "The Witness," because he's not a character; he is a witness. It's difficult for him to participate in the life that used to be his.

I wanted to tell the story through this strangeness, and at the same time explore some characteristics of Mexican life. I wrote it over the course of four years, from 2000 to 2004. Those were the first years we spoke a lot about narco-violence and about the new power of TV and public figures. We spoke a lot about the return of Catholic influence in Mexico's daily life because, for the first time in seventy-one years, the PRI, our official party, lost the elections.

We had a new government that was a right-wing government, close to the Catholic priests and the Catholic Church. For the first time the church was not in the background of our political scenario but was an actual player making important decisions. That was the country I was writing about from a journalistic point of view. The story has to do with many other things—religious beliefs, a love story, memories, the story of a family, and so on—but that was the journalistic backdrop for the story.

"This is why the novel is called 'The Witness,' because he's not a character; he is a witness. It's difficult for him to participate in the life that used to be his."

Over the next eight years, the Mexican landscape came close to this projection, which at that time was more like a guesstimation. Mexico has become such a country in the last eight years. Now the PRI is back in power so we're back into the past.

JRRS: I wanted to reinvestigate this figure of the "witness" and how I find it to be crucial in much of your writing, not only in fiction, and not only inyour novel *El testigo,* but also when you write nonfiction, when you write chronicles, you become a witness. You're not the main character but, then again, the witness is by definition an ancillary speaker that needs to survive to tell the stories of those who didn't. I would like you to elaborate a little more about this distance. You spoke recently about the distance you have to choose when you're writing a chronicle, when you're writing nonfiction. How does the witness choose his distance from the events he's talking about?

JV: Whenever you write either fiction or nonfiction you're always serving witness to some situation. The plot has to do with the knowledge you have of this situation and the distance you provide from it. It's very important to gain a certain perspective and there are some stories for which you need a special distance. Others are better told if you're nearer to the action.

I've written nonfiction about events to which I was an actual witness, for example at the earthquake in Chile in 2010. It was, at that time, the fifth strongest earthquake in history. It was a real challenge for all of us, especially for Mexicans because we are familiar with earthquakes. I was in Mexico City in 1985 when our city was devastated. We know about the perilous circumstances and the danger of being part of this cataclysm.

"You can devote an ode to the nightingale or to the air or to the tomato. The building doesn't seem to be so holy, but after the earthquake I knew the building was a kind of miracle."

At the same time we weren't aware that Chile, as a nation, is prepared for this kind of situation. Otherwise there couldn't be cities there. I was always flabbergasted by Pablo Neruda when he devoted an ode to the building. That's not very poetic, no? You can devote an ode to the nightingale or to the air or to the tomato. The building doesn't seem to be so holy, but after the earthquake I knew the building was a kind of miracle.

I wrote this chronicle because I was stuck there in Chile—the only building that had major damage after the quake was the airport. So we weren't able to leave

Santiago de Chile and we stayed there for a week. And what do survivors do after a quake? They talk and talk and talk. Surviving is a narrative experience. Nobody survives in silence. Everyone was saying, "Oh, I had a premonition," or "I knew this was going to happen but I have this special amulet," or "My girl gave me this token and she told me, 'If something happens to you....'"

Everyone was telling their own story, before the quake, during the quake, and after the quake. I was there, not taking notes, just hearing these people and I was part of it. When I returned to Mexico a friend asked me if I was going to write about it and I said, jokingly, "When my hands stop trembling." But my hands kept on trembling for two more weeks.

"Surviving is a narrative experience. Nobody survives in silence."

The only thing I was thinking about, the only thing I could write about, was this experience. So it was like an exorcism. One of the reasons was the other earthquake, the one we survived in Mexico in 1985. Since most of us were shaken, in a spiritual way, by this experience, it seemed egotistical to write about it. There are very few testimonies about the 1985 quake. Everybody wanted to do something, to help others, to be part of a brigade. That was what I was doing at the time. It seemed almost immoral to write in a personal way about that experience, but that desire was inside me, like a guilty pleasure. It was like a hidden secret and the Chilean opportunity gave me the chance to analyze two different kinds of fear: the one I felt in Chile and the old one that was inside me, an unexpressed fear.

But I have written about many other things, and in different circumstances you have to choose a different perspective because you need distance to understand the moment. I was, for example, at the Zapatista upheaval in 1994 in Chiapas. It's very difficult to be objective in an absolute way. Objectivity just relates to the perspective you have and to what you tell your readers. I was going there to understand this strange upheaval and at the same time I was trying to protect my objectivity. It was very important for me not think I was part of that movement. Although, in some emotional way, I had been involved with the struggle of the Zapatista and their claim of justice, you have to protect yourself from being too near to things. The best commentary I have on the subject is what rearview mirrors say: "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear." The reality is always closer to you than you think.

MG: In addition to the Chilean earthquake and the Zapatista uprising, you're also—and I'm sorry to touch a very delicate subject—a fan of soccer. I know that Barcelona lost today.

JV: (Laughing) I thought we were going to avoid this.

MG: Would you share with us how writing about sports and music—which are subjects you've covered extensively—has impacted your experience as an author of novels and essays. What connects you to soccer? What connects you to music?

"When I write about soccer, my main interest is to write about the passion of the game. I am a fan of the fans. I'm interested in why people forget everything but know by heart the names of the fútbol players from the 1986 World Cup."

JV: Well, I'm not a sportswriter. I'm a sports fan. I've followed soccer for many, many years. My parents got divorced and, for divorced fathers, it's not always easy to find something do with their kids. My father used to take us to the zoo, but how many times can you go to the zoo? Then we were interested in cinema but there were not always good films, especially films for children, being shown, so he decided on soccer as a way of being with his child and that's why I became a soccer fan.

When I write about soccer, my main interest is to write about the passion of the game. I am a fan of the fans. I'm interested in why people forget everything but know by heart the names of the fútbol players from the 1986 World Cup. Why do people paint their faces to go to a stadium, but behave very differently the rest of the week? Why does somebody forget his wedding anniversary but can remember that on that same date Hugo Sánchez scored twice.

This way of understanding life through sports is what I write about—not only the world of the fans, but also the story of the players themselves. One of the most fascinating aspects of life is that public deeds have a private story. So the private story of a goal can be fascinating, involving the psychology of the players, their mental state, their superstitions—many things that don't belong to the world of athletics, that belong more to the mental composition of the game.

If you are to understand an age, you have to understand how people have fun in that age. If you want to understand the Roman Empire you need to know how Romans had fun, and the most extensive and organized "fun industry" in the world today is soccer. It's a way of understanding our time.

Audience Question: What do you think of writers of rock music, like Bob Dylan, Nick Drake, Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger, David Bowie? You've written about all of them. What do you think about them as writers?

JV: They belong to my emotional soundtrack. I think it's poetry but you have to take into account that it's a different kind of poetry. I would say that Bob Dylan is a writer as William Faulkner is a writer. He's extraordinary and his memoirs are extremely rich and moving and full of detail. The miracle of the lyrics is this combination of words and music, and the origin of literature has to do with this as well. The first poets didn't write, they just recited what they were thinking or were recovering the words of other people.

I think that has to do with this ancient form of poetry, which is almost a ritual kind of poetry, in which the rhythm of the music explains the words in another way and the words give meaning to the music: they are intermingled in a very special way. I cherish all the songwriters you mentioned. Rock music is art.

"I would say that Bob Dylan is a writer as William Faulkner is a writer. He's extraordinary and his memoirs are extremely rich and moving and full of detail."

I will say I translated an anthology of rock lyrics and the title of the anthology was *Rock in Silence*. In the foreword, I wrote that there is no rock in silence. It was like taking something apart to understand it, but the actual *stuff* needed music.

Audience Question: I have fresh in my mind some moments from your story "Mariachi." There are some connections to Spain in that story, and I know you've lived there. Could you talk about how that story draws on your life experience?

JV: My father was born in Spain. My grandfather was also born in Spain. I've lived there and I have both Mexican and Spanish nationality. I have a strong connection

with Spain and I've always been fascinated with the way one country sees another country. Some things one country sees as kitsch in our daily life can receive a lot of attention abroad. There are some Spanish artists and filmmakers who are interested in this folky, kitschy Mexico. I was thinking of this kind of Almodóvar-type of filmmaker who is interested in these distortions or exaggerations of Mexican life, like this Mariachi who is becoming a gay hero.

JRRS: And you've also had experience as a scriptwriter.

JV: A very bad one. Writing film scripts is like cooking for a cannibal. You're making dishes for him and they need a little more salt, a bit more pepper, jalapeño, and so on. You're preparing stuff and he refuses to eat and refuses to eat and, suddenly, he eats you. That's what the producer does and that's what the director does.

Audience Question: You originally studied to be a sociologist. How do you mix that training with your work as a writer?

"Writing film scripts is like cooking for a cannibal.... You're preparing stuff and he refuses to eat and refuses to eat and, suddenly, he eats you. That's what the producer does and that's what the director does."

JV: I actually wanted to study medicine, but it seemed too hard to combine with my desire to write. It's difficult not to be totally devoted to medicine if you become a doctor. So I needed something to combine with writing. I had a very innocent prejudice against literature as a degree because I felt that my passion would become like a marriage. I thought a literature degree was going to kill my passion for the subject. I decided to study sociology because I was interested in different aspects of society, and there I discovered a very interesting world.

At first I thought it was just going to be a university experience, but I was really taken by many books on sociology and anthropology. I think that's very useful for writers, especially when writing nonfiction—you have this historical and sociological background. At the same time, it can be dangerous, can lead

to artificial stories in which your characters are not speaking like actual human beings but are speaking like informants for an anthropologist or sociologist. As a writer you have to take into account that you're dealing with an illusion of life and that life is always contradictory and mysterious.

A writer writes about things he ignores, and that's very important for me. You don't write because you know a thing. You write to discover a thing. You have to be the first one to be surprised by the mystery of the life you are trying to convey in your work. I try to make use of my background as a sociologist, but to keep it at bay a little bit so that I'm not going to write a mechanical interpretation of reality.

Antena is a language justice and literary experimentation collaborative founded by Jen Hofer and John Pluecker, both writers, artists, literary translators, bookmakers, and activist interpreters. Antena has exhibited, published, performed, organized, advocated, translated, curated, interpreted, and/or instigated with, among others: &Now Festival, Blaffer Art Museum, Clockshop, CounterCurrent Festival, Democracy Now!, Fe y Justicia Workers' Center, Floor Journal, Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics, La Colmena Domestic Workers' Collective, National Immigration Law Center, Project Row Houses, Project South, The Capilano Review, and The Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity. More info: http://antenaantena.org/.

Marie-Helene Bertino's debut novel *2 A.M. at the Cat's Pajamas*, a Barnes & Noble Fall '14 Discover Great New Writers pick, will be published in August 2014 by Crown Publishing. Her debut collection of short stories *Safe as Houses* received The 2012 Iowa Short Fiction Award and The Pushcart Prize. She was an Emerging Writers Fellow at New York City's Center for Fiction and lives in Brooklyn, where she was the Associate Editor for *One Story*. She teaches at NYU, The Center for Fiction, and The Sackett Street Workshops. For more information, visit www.mariehelenebertino.com.

Rachel Linnea Brown will earn her MFA in poetry from Colorado State University in May 2014. Her poems have previously appeared in or are forthcoming from *Subtropics, Midwest Quarterly, South Dakota Review,* and *Baltimore Review. Black Warrior Review* will soon publish her lyric essay "Suspension." Baby, chocolate Labrador extraordinaire, is Rachel Linnea's companion in all adventures great and small.

Amy Butcher is an essayist and author of the forthcoming memoir *Visitor Hours* (Blue Rider Press/ Penguin, forthcoming April 2015). Her additional essays have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine, The Paris Review Online, Tin House Online, Fourth Genre* and *Brevity*, among others. Most recently, she is the recipient of the 2014 Iowa Review Award in nonfiction as judged by David Shields. She earned her MFA from the University of Iowa and teaches courses on the essay at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Jonathan Callard is working on a memoir about faith, identity, and the body, portions of which have appeared in *Image, Arts & Letters,* and *Gulf Stream.* He has written for *The Dallas Morning News, The Witness, Fellowship, Explorefaith.org,* and *The Lion Speaks: An Anthology for Hurricane Katrina*, and has earned fellowships with the Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts, the Ragdale Foundation, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Cyrus Cassells' *The Crossed-Out Swastika* was named a finalist for the Balcones Prize for Best Poetry Book of 2012. His sixth book, *The Gospel According to Wild Indigo*, is forthcoming. Among his honors are a Lannan Literary Award, the William Carlos Williams Award, and a Lambda Literary Award.

Aníbal Cristobo was born in Lanús, Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1971. He is the author of four books of poetry which include *Test de la Iguana* (1997), *Krill* (2002), *Jet-lag* (2002), and *Miniaturas kinéticas* (2005). Since 2002 he has lived in Barcelona, Spain.

Ryan N. Dennis joined Project Row Houses in Houston as the Public Art Director in October 2012. Her interests include American and international contemporary art, with a particular focus on site-specific projects, public interventions, and socially engaged practices in all media. At Project Row Houses, she has organized the exhibitions and programs Round 40: *Monuments: Right Beyond the Site* (2014), Social Practice. Social Justice Symposium (2014), and Round 39: *Looking Back, Moving Forward* (2013). She has written for the Prospect.3: New Orleans exhibition catalogue (forthcoming) and the Studio Museum in Harlem Magazine. As traveling exhibition manager at the Museum for African Art in New York, she worked on the exhibitions *El Anatsui: When I Last Wrote to You about Africa, Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria,* and *Jane Alexander: Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*. Dennis completed an MA in Arts and Cultural Management from Pratt Institute, where her research focused on the role of the artist as administrator and cultural producer. Prior to moving to New York City, Dennis was a community organizer and a curatorial assistant at the Menil Collection in Houston, TX.

Noam Dorr's work has appeared in *Seneca Review, Wag's Revue*, and *WorkingUSA*, among other places. He recently joined *Construction Magazine* as their nonfiction editor. He is from Kibbutz Givat Haim Ichud, Israel, and currently lives in Philadelphia, PA.

CJ Evans is the author of *A Penance* (New Issues Press, 2012) and *The Category of Outcast*, selected by Terrance Hayes for the Poetry Society of America's Chapbook Fellowship. He co-edited, with Brenda Shaughnessy, *Satellite Convulsion: Poems from Tin House*, and is the editor of *Two Lines Press*. The recipient of the 2013 Amy Lowell Traveling Scholarship, he lives in Aix, France.

Two-time winner of the John Dryden Translation prize, **Edward Gauvin** has received fellowships and residencies from PEN America, the NEA, the Fulbright program, the Lannan Foundation, the French Embassy, and Ledig House. His translations include Georges-Olivier Châteaureynaud's selected stories, *A Life on Paper* (Small Beer, 2010) winner of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Translation Award, and Jean Ferry's *The Conductor and Other Tales* (Wakefield, 2013). His work has been nominated for the French-American Foundation Translation Prize, the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize, and the Best Translated Book Award. Other translations have appeared in *The New York Times, Subtropics, Tin House, Conjunctions,* and *The Southern Review*. The translator of more than 150 graphic novels, he is the contributing editor for Francophone comics at *Words Without Borders*, and a regular columnist on the Francophone fantastic for *Weird Fiction Review*.

Ross Gay is the author of *Against Which, Bringing the Shovel Down*, and the forthcoming *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*. He teaches at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Hafizah Geter is a South Carolina native currently living in Brooklyn, New York and a Cave Canem Fellow. The recipient of a 2012 Amy Award from *Poets & Writers*, her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *RHINO, Drunken Boat, Vinyl, Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art, Linebreak*, and *Narrative Magazine*, among others. She is a poetry editor at *Phantom Limb Press*.

Kelle Groom's memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), is a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice, *Library Journal* Best Memoir, Oprah *O Magazine* selection, and Oxford American Editor's Pick. The author

of three poetry collections, most recently, *Five Kingdoms* (Anhinga), her work has appeared in *AGNI, The New Yorker, New York Times, Ploughshares,* and *Best American Poetry.* A 2014 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellow in Prose, Groom is on the faculty of the low-residency MFA Program at Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe. "Antibody" is from the manuscript of her second memoir, *The Cartographer's Assistant.*

Leslie Harrison's first book is *Displacement*, published in 2009 by Mariner Books. Recent poems appear or are forthcoming in *The New Republic, The Kenyon Review, Water~Stone Review, West Branch* and elsewhere. She holds a recent NEA fellowship in literature and has been awarded a scholarship and fellowship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference, a fellowship from the Breadloaf Writers' Conference, and an individual artist's award from the Maryland State Arts Council. She divides her time between the Berkshires and Baltimore, where she is on the faculty at Towson University. Her website is www.leslie-harrison.com.

K. A. Hays is the author of two books of poems: *Early Creatures, Native Gods* (2012) and *Dear Apocalypse* (2009). Her work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *American Poetry Review, jubilat, The Kenyon Review,* and *Best American Poetry.* Hays teaches at Bucknell and lives in Lewisburg, PA.

Daisy Hernández is the author of *A Cup of Water Under My Bed: A Memoir* coming out this year from Beacon Press. The coeditor of *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism* (Seal Press), she's the former editor of *ColorLines magazine* and regularly speaks at colleges and conferences about feminism, race, and media representations. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times, NPR's All Things Considered, Ms. Magazine, CultureStrike, In These Times, Fourth Genre, Bellingham Review* and *Hunger Mountain.* She's the Kenan Visiting Writer at UNC-Chapel Hill for 2014–2015. To see more of her work, go to www.daisyhernandez.com.

Tony Hoagland's poetry collections include *What Narcissism Means to Me* and *Donkey Gospel.* He teaches creative writing at the University of Houston and runs Five Powers of Poetry seminars for teachers. A new full-length collection of craft essays, *Twenty Poems That Could Save America and Other Essays,* will be released from Graywolf later this year.

Caitlin Horrocks is author of the story collection *This Is Not Your City.* Her stories appear in *The New Yorker, The Best American Short Stories, The PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories, The Pushcart Prize, The Paris Review, Tin House, One Story* and elsewhere. She is fiction editor of *The Kenyon Review* and teaches at Grand Valley State University and the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.

Melissa Kwasny is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *The Nine Senses* and *Reading Novalis in Montana*, both from Milkweed Editions. Her next book, *Pictograph*, will appear from Milkweed in 2015. She is also the author of *Earth Recitals: Essays on Image and Vision*, from Lynx House Press.

Carlos Richard Lara was born in San Diego, California. His poetry and translations have appeared in *Lana Turner* (issues 4 and 6), *Caketrain, Paul Revere's Horse, BlazeVox, Aufgabe, Dusie, RealPoetik, 'comma, poetry', NOÖ Weekly,* and elsewhere. Other pieces forthcoming in other places. For the time being, he is living in Brooklyn.

Dorothea Lasky is the author of four books of poetry, most recently the forthcoming *ROME* (W.W. Norton/Liveright, 2014), as well as *Thunderbird, Black Life,* and *AWE,* all out from Wave Books. She is the co-editor of *Open the Door: How to Excite Young People About Poetry* (McSweeney's, 2013) and several chapbooks, including *Poetry is Not a Project* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010). Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of Poetry in Columbia University's School of the Arts and lives in New York City.

Lü De'an was born in a small town in Fujian province, on the southeast coast of China. He went to an art school in 1978 and started writing poetry in the same year. He migrated to USA in 1991 and stayed in New York City for three years as an artist making portraits on the street. In 1994 he returned to China to build a cabin in the mountain area of his hometown to use as a base for writing and painting. Also in 1994 he won the first literary prize of the then influential independent journal *Them* for his extraordinary poetry. He then became a hermit in the mountains until he published his second collection of poetry, *Rocks.* While his friends from the 1980s were becoming internationally known, he kept a low profile for three decades until his third collection of poetry, *In the Right Place,* came out in 2010. He gained national acclaim that year and subsequently won the Gaoligong Literary Award in 2011. In 2013, he moved to Beijing and received Henry Luce Foundation Fellowship.

Tony Macias was born and raised in the South, but has found home in many places in the U.S. and beyond. He has participated for the past 14+ years in farmworker, labor, trade, anti-war, and immigrant rights movements in the U.S. and Mexico. He worked with Witness for Peace in Oaxaca, Mexico, leading delegations of U.S. citizens to explore the impacts of U.S.-led structural violence and learn about creative alternatives to neoliberalism. He completed a Master's Degree in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas in Austin, focused on social memory of struggle within a Oaxacan anti-mining movement. For the last six years, he's been involved in the language justice movement, a broad effort that understands language work as an important tool for building horizontal power as both resistance and alternative to structural oppression. Through that work, he's interpreted, translated, and led interpreter workshops in the U.S. and Mexico, and currently organizes with the Austin Language Justice Collective.

Jessica McCaughey earned her MA in English and MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University in Virginia. Her nonfiction has appeared in *The Colorado Review, Phoebe, The Boston Globe Sunday Magazine, Best American Travel Essays 2011, The Rumpus,* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* among other publications. She teaches first-year and professional writing at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and is currently working on a novel.

Eric McMillan commanded an infantry company during the Surge from 2007 to 2008 in Baghdad and Diyala. After ten years on active duty, including tours in Bosnia, Korea, and Iraq, he received his MA from the University of Chicago. He's been a Made Fellow at the Richard Hugo House in Seattle, and his writing has appeared on *TheAtlantic.com.* This short story is his debut in fiction.

Edward McPherson is the author of two books: *Buster Keaton: Tempest in a Flat Hat* and *The Backwash Squeeze and Other Improbable Feats*. He has written for *The New York Times Magazine, Salon, the Paris Review, Tin House, The American Scholar, The Gettysburg Review, the New York Observer, I.D., Esopus, Epoch,* and *Talk*, among others. He teaches in the creative writing program at Washington University in St. Louis.

Lynn Melnick is author of *If I Should Say I Have Hope* (YesYes Books, 2012) and co-editor, with Brett Fletcher Lauer, of *Please Excuse This Poem: 100 New Poets for the Next Generation* (Viking, 2015). She teaches at 92Y in NYC and is the social media & outreach director for VIDA: Women in Literary Arts.

Billy Merrell is the author of *Talking in the Dark*, a poetry memoir (Scholastic, 2003), and co-editor of *The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing about GLBTQ, and Other Identities* (Knopf, 2006), which received a Lambda Literary Award. He recently served as Content Strategist for *Poets.org*, the website of the Academy of American Poets.

Philip Metres is the author of numerous books, including the forthcoming *Sand Opera* (Alice James 2015), *I Burned at the Feast: Selected Poems of Arseny Tarkovsky* (Cleveland State 2014), *A Concordance of Leaves* (Diode 2013), *abu ghraib arias* (Flying Guillotine 2011), and is a Creative Workforce Fellow in 2014, thanks to the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture. www.philipmetres.com.

Ming Di is a Chinese poet and translator with six books of original poetry and four books of translation published. Her own poetry has also been translated into English: *River Merchant's Wife*, (Marick Press, 2012) and *Spanish* (Luna Partida, Valparaíso Ediciones, 2014). She has edited and co-translated *New Cathay—Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (Tupelo Press, 2013), and received Henry Luce Foundation Fellowships in 2013 and 2014.

Alicia Rebecca Myers is the author of the chapbook *Greener* (Finishing Line Press, 2009). Most recently, her work has appeared in *jubilat, Cream City Review,* and *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Georgia* (Texas A&M). In February, she was awarded a poetry residency at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center in Nebraska City. She holds an MFA from NYU and now lives in King Ferry, NY, where she's at work on a first full length manuscript. She and her husband welcomed a son born in August.

A native of California, **Diana Khoi Nguyen's** poems and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *Poetry, Lana Turner, Kenyon Review Online,* and *West Branch*, among others. She has also received the Fred and Edith B. Herman Award from the Academy of American Poets and Scotti Merrill Award from the Key West Literary Seminars, as well as three Bread Loaf Writers Conference scholarships, an Archie D. and Bertha H. Walker Scholarship from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and the Lucille Clifton Scholarship from the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley. She earned her MFA from Columbia University, and is currently at work on her first book.

Matthew Olzmann's first book of poems, *Mezzanines*, was selected for the 2011 Kundiman Prize and was published by Alice James Books. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *New England Review, Kenyon Review, Poetry Northwest, The Southern Review, Forklift, Ohio* and elsewhere. He's currently a Visiting Professor of Creative Writing in the undergraduate writing program at Warren Wilson College.

Otabenga Jones & Associates is a Houston-based artist collective founded in 2002 by artist and educator Otabenga Jones in collaboration with members Dawolu Jabari Anderson, Jamal Cyrus, Kenya Evans, and Robert A. Pruitt, among others. The group's pedagogical mission, manifested in actions, writings, DJ sets, and installations, is divided into four parts: to underscore the challenging intricacies of representation across the African Diaspora, to maintain and promote the core principles of the Black radical tradition, to (in the words of the late O'Shea Jackson) "OPEN THE EYES OF EACH!!!", and, as they write in their mission statement, quoting from Sam Greenlee's 1969 classic satirical novel *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, "to mess wit' whitey." Work by Otabenga Jones & Associates has appeared in exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City; the High Museum in Atlanta, the Menil Collection and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, among others.

V. Penelope Pelizzon's most recent book is *Whose Flesh Is Flame, Whose Bone Is Time* (2014). Her writing has received awards including an Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholarship and a "Discovery"/ *The Nation* Award.

Sarah Pollack is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York. Her research focuses on translation studies and contemporary Latin American poetry. Her translations include *Reason Enough* (Host Publications) by Ida Vitale and *Eloise* (Unicorn Press) by Silvia Eugenia Castillero.

Hajara Quinn lives in Portland, Ore. and is a second-year MFA candidate at Cornell University. She is an assistant editor for *Octopus Books* and the author of the chapbook *Unnaysayer* (Flying Object 2013). Her poems have appeared in *Sixth Finch, Ilk,* and *The Volta.*

Camille Rankine's first book of poetry, *Incorrect Merciful Impulses*, is forthcoming from Copper Canyon Press. She is the author of the chapbook *Slow Dance with Trip Wire*, selected by Cornelius Eady for the Poetry Society of America's 2010 New York Chapbook Fellowship, and the recipient of a 2010 "Discovery"/*Boston Review* Poetry Prize. Her poetry has appeared in *Atlas Review, American Poet, The Baffler, Boston Review, Denver Quarterly, Octopus Magazine, Phantom Limb, Paper Darts, Tin House,* and elsewhere. She is Assistant Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Manhattanville College, Editorial Director of *The Manhattanville Review,* and lives in New York City.

Jessica Santone is an art historian specializing in contemporary art and performance. She is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Kentucky and has previously taught at the University of Houston and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her writing on archives, documents, and audiences of contemporary performance art has appeared or is forthcoming in *Leonardo, DPI: Studio XX Electronic Review, In Circulation, Art Journal,* as well as several edited volumes and exhibition catalogues.

Raena Shirali is from Charleston, SC, and currently lives in Columbus, OH, where she is earning her MFA in poetry at The Ohio State University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Banango Street, The Boiler, Boston Review, Fogged Clarity, Four Way Review, Muzzle Magazine, Ostrich Review, Pleiades, Quarterly West,* and *The Nervous Breakdown.* She recently won a 2013 "Discovery"/*Boston Review* Poetry Prize. She currently serves as the Reviews Editor for *The Journal.*

Clare Sullivan directs the Graduate Certificate in Translation at the University of Louisville where she serves as Associate Professor of Spanish. Her poetry translations have appeared in the *Two Lines World Writing in Translation Series, World Literature Today, KrN, Asheville Poetry Review,* and *The Iowa Review.* In 2010, she received a NEA Translation Fellowship to translate Natalia Toledo's *Guie' yaase'/Olivo negro.*

Lois Taylor was born in Vancouver, B.C. and now lives in Seattle. She has worked as a poet in the schools and received a Masters in Literature/Writing from the University of Washington. She has taught in Detroit at Wayne State University, as well in Seattle. Her fiction is upcoming in the *Kenyon Review, Quiddity,* and *Natural Bridge.* Other stories have appeared in *The Bellevue Literary Review, Nimrod, StoryQuarterly, Crab Orchard Review, American Short Fiction, Del Sol Review, Glimmer Train, Ontario Review,* and others. She was nominated for a Pushcart prize, and has received fiction awards from *Passages North* and *The Missouri Review.*

Natalia Toledo, born in Juchitán, Mexico, was the first woman to write and publish in the indigenous language of Zapotec. She has published four volumes of poetry in bilingual form (Isthmus Zapotec and Spanish). Her poetry has been translated into English, French, German, Vietnamese, and Italian. In 2004 she received the Premio Nacional de Literatura Nezahualcoyotl for her book of poetry, *Guie' yaase'/Olivo negro.*

Jean-Philippe Toussaint is a Belgian writer and filmmaker whose books have been translated into more than twenty languages. The author of nine novels, he is the winner of numerous literary prizes, including the Prix Médicis in 2005 for his novel *Running Away*, and the Prix Décembre in 2009 for *The Truth about Marie*, the two middle books of the Marie tetralogy. These essays are taken from the collection *Urgency and Patience*, forthcoming next spring from Dalkey Archive Press.

Juan Villoro was born in Mexico City and is the author of many works including the collection of short stories, *La casa pierde* (1999) (*The House Is Dealt the Losing Hand*). His novel *El testigo* (2004) (*The Witness*) was awarded the prestigious Premio Herralde for fiction and his first play, *Conferencia sobre la lluvia* (*A Lecture about the Rain*), premiered at the Teatro de la Biblioteca de México in 2013. His work has been anthologized in many collections including *The Best of Contemporary Mexican Fiction* (2009).

Wang Ping was born in China and came to the U.S. in 1986. Her publications of poetry and prose include *American Visa, Foreign Devil, Of Flesh and Spirit, New Generation: Poetry from China Today, Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China, The Magic Whip, The Dragon Emperor, The Last Communist Virgin,* and *Flashcards: Poems by Yu Jian.* She won the Eugene Kayden Award for the Best Book in Humanities and is the recipient of a grant from the NEA, the Bush Artist Fellowship for poetry, the McKnight Fellowship for nonfiction, and many others. She is also a photographer

and an installation artist. Her multimedia exhibitions include "Behind the Gate: After the Flood of the Three Gorges," "Kinship of Rivers" and have been presented at schools, colleges, galleries, museums, lock and dams, and confluences along the Mississippi River. She is professor of English at Macalester College, and founder and director of Kinship of Rivers project.

Kathleen Winter's collection *Nostalgia for the Criminal Past* (Elixir Press 2012) won the Antivenom Poetry Prize and 2013 Texas Institute of Letters Bob Bush Memorial Award. She has received fellowships from the Brown Foundation at the Dora Maar House, Vermont Studio Center, and Prague Summer Program. In January 2015 she'll be the writer in residence at the James Merrill House. Winter's poems have appeared in *Tin House, Poetry London, AGNI, Field, The New Republic* and *The Cincinnati Review*. She teaches at Napa Valley College.

Emily Wolahan's first collection of poems, *HINGE*, is forthcoming in 2014 from National Poetry Review Press. Her work has appeared in *Omniverse, Mom Egg, Boston Review, DIAGRAM, New Linear Perspectives, Drunken Boat* and other journals. She co-edits *JERRY Magazine* and lives in San Francisco.

Rachel Yoder is a founding editor of *draft: the journal of process* which publishes first and final drafts of short stories, essays, and poetry along with author interviews about the creative process. Her writing has been published in many print and online publications including *The American Reader, The Paris Review,* and *The Rumpus,* and is forthcoming in *The Normal School.* She was awarded the 2012 Editors' Prize in Fiction from *The Missouri Review.* She lives in Iowa City.

Corey Zeller is the author of *Man vs. Sky* (YesYes Books, 2013) and *You and Other Pieces* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, forthcoming in 2015). His work has appeared in *Puerto del Sol, Mid-American Review, Indiana Review, The Colorado Review, The Kenyon Review, Columbia Poetry Review, Diagram, Salt Hill, West Branch, Third Coast, BOMB Magazine, The Literary Review, The Paris-American, New York Tyrant, New Orleans Review, Green Mountains Review, The Rumpus, PEN America, The Journal, Verse Daily, Chorus* (MTV Books), among others. He currently works in crisis support at a facility for at-risk youth.

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Contest for new artwork inspired by one of the six sample works found on *Mid-American Review*'s website:

Mollie Ficek, "The Harvest Queen" (XXXIII.2)
Ryan Habermeyer, "In Search of Fortunes Not Yet Lost" (XXXIV.1)
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Erin Lyndal Martin, "Colony Collapse—Aristaeus" (XXXIII.2)
G.C. Waldrep, "On Protestantism" (XXXIV.1)
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Medium/form is open, as long as final work can be translated to a two-dimensional image. Images may be submitted by post or on our submissions manager, as pdfs or jpgs. Cover letter/message should include brief biographical and contact information, and a 50-100 word artist's statement about the method of composition and the inspiration behind it. Entries and cover letters need not be left anonymous.

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Contest is open to all artists, except those associated with the judge (Daniel Merriam) or *Mid-American Review*. Our judge's decision is final.

About the Judge: Daniel Merriam (danielmerriam.com), a native of Maine, is an artist of the fantastic and the surreal. His watercolors have been exhibited across the country, and compiled in three books. His imagination blends the unexpected, the dark, the airy, the curious, and the luxurious with vibrant color and depth. His work graced the covers of *MAR* XXI.1, XXI.2, and XXV.1.

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