

# **My Life=A Haiku: The Transnational Eco-Ecesis of an Anatolian Boy via Creativity in the Age of the Anthropocene**

*Yusuf Eradam*

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*To my late cats Minnosh, Poe Yavri Mou,  
and the present ones Raki and Sharab*

If you understand others, you have knowledge; if you understand yourself, you see everything clearly.—Chuang Tzu

I met a traveler from the antique land of Anatolia who said:

“I have always been somebody else, always one of those modern argonauts, and never one of those juggernauts. That is how I believe I kept my endangered kind alive or saved it from extinction (*ecesis*).”

In the beginning I was real. As I became more educated, civilized, and transnational in this age of the anthropocene, I decided to be with other beings as my life is a symbolic act, my life’s tagline being “Whoever I am, I will do whatever I can for others.” Then I learned that we too did what we did “with God on our side” (Bob Dylan), seeing that the world is made up of “others” until I realized I was also “the other,” one of the many “Objects in Mirror.”

He came from Anatolia thousands of years ago  
and embraced a standard American cat in fear  
as they dance in the window of the Cage here  
with objects in mirror closer than they appear.

I was born in Bor, on February 1, 1954, in the largest and greenest town of Niğde, an old city very near Mount Hasan and Salt Lake in Central Anatolia, Turkey. My birth was “heralded” to my mother in a dream. A very old, white-bearded man of God, also dressed in white, whispered in her ear: “Necibe, you will finally have a boy, name him Yusuf and he will be a great man.” Mom had probably transferred her aspirations to her subconscious, which ironically did not come true in my form, as I am a small man, and my name, why would it be Yusuf?

My sisters' names were Leman, Nuran, Gülhan, all rhyming, and I sure would have been "Ilhan" to complete the whole, or some other name with an *-an*, *-han* ending, if it hadn't been for the interfering saint. I, too, was later named by my students the Saint of Bor while I was teaching at Ankara University in the early 1990s, mainly because I never discriminated against any of them, and they probably saw some Rumi hidden in my character.

When I was a little child, all I knew was to enjoy being spoiled by my mother, my first teacher. As I was the only boy after four girls, I was precious and the center of my home, just as the sun was for the solar system, and I was untouchable as the center, representing what the family had to hold. The earth was rotating around the sun, and there was the moon rotating around the earth. It was the same moon that would smile at Elizabeth Bishop from the mirror. This maternal centrality as a child caused me to assume that everything happening around me had something to do with me, which was diagnosed by yet another woman, who loved me dearly and quit immediately, blaming me for this habit of mine: "Everything may not be related to you, Yusuf!" This was the last thing she said cynically before leaving. On the other hand, I had also developed a skill to notice centers in all life's realms and also of fiction and art. I loved playing games, and was good at tipcat, as tipping



**Eradam, age 6, playing tipcat in 1960. Bor, Niğde.**

Photo: Anonymous

the cat off its central hole in the ground before giving it a final blow was exhilarating. What a joy it was to sweat under the sun, next to the brook into which I would soon fall. Later I would

learn and teach about my kind of solar joy (which might be suicidal at times) in the works of Hemingway, Camus, and Pasternak, and a "bit" in Sylvia Plath. I noticed later that reading stories and telling them is the best journey to being a world

citizen, and not only canonized literature. The only prerequisite for change is the readiness in the reader. Dogma, bigotry, and hubris? No, thanks! I have had enough.

That deep brook near our house, there right behind me in the open area next to the mosque, is where I would play tipcat with my friends. Do you know how it is played? You tip the cat, the shorter rod, and swing the tip, hit the cat, and fling it as far as possible. I could never imagine, when I was a child, that now I would both be the tip and the cat. Wherever fate flung me I was welcome in various ways. I did my best to belong to and adapt myself to that very setting. I had a passport with a crescent and a star on it, and although I did not practice any of the connotations of the signifiers on my ID, I was what others thought I was. At this point I usually remember exaggerated attention and care by the so-called “sensible” colleagues with either their extravagant expectations reflected upon this newcomer, or rather and maybe even better, “benign neglect,” which has always been easier to deal with. These two human attitudes of discrimination and hypocrisy can by no means be seen in nature or in the “natural” habitat of animals. Hence, “mother nature” (*tabiat ana*) is not a sexist expression but the right way to label nature as it is as welcoming, warm, and secure as women, especially mothers.

However, sometimes even the compliments of a “native speaker” would hurt:

-Your English is so good. Where did you learn it?

-In Turkey.

-Oh, really?

As a child, I watched Indian music films (now industrialized Bollywood) on the flat roof of my aunt's house, films like *Sangam* (1964). Then slowly I was subjected to other languages, cultures, and identities, to learn that I can support the earth's support systems only with them, not in spite of them or against them.

Hence my mother's words of love echo in my head whenever I feel in exile at home: “I wish I could put you back in my tummy.” I am not like Baudelaire, who would not let his mother go. Nor am I like Flaubert, whose mother wouldn't let him go, but still I do accept that

the will in me to continue living in nature, by nature, with nature around and in me, is actually the most precious inheritance from my mother and other women who spared some precious time for me.

My mother, my first story-teller and teacher, my first mentor and totem of self-reliance and “silenced value,” would raise her voice against my father and anyone else when she was fed up with being degraded, when Dad was disloyal or ungrateful. My mother taught me to respect myself and to share with others anything I had, especially my food with the needy. She also taught me to sing or write away my pain, immediately to get rid of it so that it does not turn into *trauma*, a word I would later in my life believe is the politicians’ income source. My mother taught me, not knowingly, that I am part of nature and that nature is in me. My father only knew that the cherry orchard behind the walls of our crumbling vineyard belonged, “unfortunately,” to someone else. I was too short to jump and see what was beyond the wall, so I would ask Dad:

“What is the rest from here, Dad?”

“The rest is a cherry orchard, son.”

That meant more to me, more than what it meant literally, I now realize. I believe that was the moment of the beginning of my curiosity about others’ cherry orchards without any envy, gardens which were probably better than our vineyard and walnut trees and apple trees, in which there probably were some real toads. (Ah, Marianne Moore!)

We did not have cherry trees in our garden and father was not happy, though Mom was. Mom would exchange a pot of grapes from our vineyard for a pot full of cherries when Dad was away. Neighbors were happy to share what they had too, even time to make bread, spicy sausages, tomato paste, and pectin for winter. Neighboring women of three or four houses would put together what they had and get ready for the cold and share what they made together. This community work was called *imece*: rituals of producing together and sharing. Nature was benevolent and all we had to do was to imitate her. Dad, the most handsome shoemaker of Bor, the patriarch, did not know, he did not have to. He was remote, making shoes for others, befriended by alcohol and friends outside the family. He had his problems, I would find out later in life. He

was tall, and Mom was short and not a candidate for a beauty pageant. Dad used to make jokes about why he had married Mom. Mom's family name was "Moneychanger" (the Turkish is *Akçebozan*), so people could mistake us for the John Jacob Astor in Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," "with an orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion" (590). Mom's father was a jeweler married to a beautiful young woman who died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty. Granddad took Mom out of school, saying, "From now on you are the mother to your little sister and brothers." She was only eight when she became a caretaker to my aunt and uncles.

"The rest is a cherry orchard," Dad used to say. This became a landmark ending some of my essays years later, meaning "to cut it short" when words did not suffice and the rest would be somewhat insufficient, unimaginable, unreachable, and unattainable. You can imagine how happy I was in April 1993 in Washington, D.C., when I was on a USIS fellowship touring seven of the United States of America. Cherry blossoms are ubiquitous and are never unreachable, I then thought.

That marked the beginning of my curiosity for utopias and dystopias, an awareness-raising process of knowing why we seek happiness elsewhere, always somewhere else, always there and in the future, rather than here and now.

Mom was happy with what she had and what she could present to us here and now. She could read, and although she could write too she would not, maybe rarely a letter or a note. Instead, she would talk the talk or, when she was happy or sad, she would sing. Her favorite folk song was always "Gesi Bağlarında Dolanıyorum" ("I Am Wandering in the Gesi Vineyards"), a song from Kayseri, very close to my hometown. The song is about a young bride's loneliness and loss of her beloved ones and family (the poem may be the longest song lyrics on earth: one hundred twenty-five stanzas, each of five lines. Thank God, all of it is not put to music.) The bride in the song is wandering in the vineyard in search of her lover and family. Why not at the town center, in the bazaar, or in other crowded areas, in the temples or other buildings, but in the vineyards? I believe for the same reasons the Joad family sought happiness in California after they had to leave their land

in Oklahoma to “the machine”: Grapes were ripening in my mother’s voice, and so was I.

From Mom I first learned to share with people around me whatever I am consuming. If I know they cannot afford it and still consume it all by myself, it is almost sacrilegious. And what about those flour-white sweet cookies Mom made for me! Since I had the right to do everything I did in my own way, I could eat the flour cookies all by myself, until I heard her screaming at me from the window: “Yusuf! Come here, right now!”

That was the end of my orgy. She hit my back hard with a slipper before wrapping some cookies for my friends in the street and reprimanded me so that I would never eat anything in the street as there might always be someone who cannot afford it. This incident marked the beginning of my charitable deeds.

Before becoming a philanthropist, one must first “see to see” (the opposite of death, according to Emily Dickinson) how benevolent nature is when you do not intend to only devour its resources, and how giving a tree is when you water it (as in *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang). Now I know why I love Emerson’s teachings and Walt Whitman and H. D. Thoreau and why I found myself giving a “sermon-like talk” to a little Turkish girl before her parents during a cruise to the Greek islands, just before she attempted to pluck a flower:

Little Girl: “Ma, look how beautiful it is.”

Ma: “Don’t pluck it off, dear, it is too small.”

Little Girl: “Can I pluck it off when it grows big?”

Here I interrupted (my mouthpiece was Emerson and the main idea from his poem “The Rhodora”) and told the little girl that she could come to see the flower the next morning, but if she took it to her hotel room it would die immediately and even before it faded away it wouldn’t look or smell the way it did there by the sea, in that wind, with those hills in the background, because we cannot take that whole to our home. The logic behind this moral is in Emerson’s poem: Since some “self-same Power brought” us together, “Beauty is its own excuse for being” (71).

How would I know that my criteria for class material had already been determined at birth: why *Le Petit Prince* by Exupéry, why *Midnight’s*

*Children* by Rushdie, why *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende, why “The Sky Is Gray” by Ernest Gaines, why “Death in the Woods” by Sherwood Anderson, why any work by Dickens and never a work which does not have a child or victim in it? The seeds of my methodology of raising awareness in my students by taking poetry and music to my interdisciplinary classes had been sown in the first years of my childhood home.

In the introduction to their book *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene*, Oppermann and Iovino remind us that the inflated “anthropocentric-credo” (term quoted in Crist and Rinker, 13) “acts as the driving force behind economic growth, political strategies and technological development—all to the detriment of the Earth’s life support systems” (4).

One great revelation of the need of ours in the age of the anthropocene to side with the life support systems is our never giving up certain rituals, like celebrating the beginning of spring (Newroz) on March 21st. Early spring in 1960 was almost the end of my life but also the beginning of my consciousness of ecology and environmental humanities.

My best childhood friend was Erkan, the son of a Kurdish mother and father. Nobody but my father told me they were Kurdish. Mom was a believer and, though her joints hurt, would do her prayers, and she did not discriminate even positively. Everyone was Allah’s subject and we were all equal. One day, Erkan told me it was their spring holiday, the Newroz, the beginning of spring, which would be celebrated by throwing seasonal vegetables and fruits into the brook for abundance and fertility in the future.

He dragged me to see the floating veggies and fruits on the surface of the water, the water rushing to the wheel of the mill down the street. We, the Sunni Muslims, had other great rituals, but this was new to me. Now I suspect that my leaning down into the stream to catch the veggies and fall into it might have been to only attract the attention of the indifferent dad, almost like Shelley’s Ozymandias or like Stephen Crane shouting at the universe: “Sir, I exist!”

My father would smoke and drink alcohol (*raki*, basically) every day and would come home rather late. My elder sister and I would go out to the Republic (Cumhuriyet) Square and look for Dad in every

“boozed” restaurant along the street and when we eventually found him around one of those night tables with his friends, we would shudder and say:

“Mom says the dinner table is ready, Dad.”

“You go and have your dinner. I won’t be a minute.”

That minute for Dad would be too long, sometimes a couple of hours, and even till midnight at times. During winter nights I did not know I was developing sinus problems leaning my forehead on the icy window, waiting for Dad, and I do not remember a scene like the waltz of Roethke’s papa.

He was in, and could not find the way out of the maze  
still Saginaw Blues remains in the maple’s ablaze  
and they dance in the window of the Cage  
'cause objects in mirror are closer than they appear.

This evolving critical eye was definitely against power and power relations of any kind and, hence, I loved Shelley’s poems and loved teaching “Ozymandias” for years, as no patriarch is exempt from that hubris and desperate need for immortality.

Nor was the Mayan King Pacal. That is how my eyes and mind learned



**Mausoleum of Pacal, a Mayan king, in Chichen Itza, Mexico, 2015.**

selective perception. In the Mayan language “Chichen Itza” means “at the mouth of the well of the Itza.” *Chi* means “mouth” or “edge,” and *ch’èen* or *ch’è’en* means “well.” How would I know I would *remember* later in Mexico that I was to be saved from the mouth of

the well of the mill by our neighbor, Zehra Saydam? If only she knew how grateful I was. When you are a child you cannot appreciate such acts that deserve gratitude. She had literally saved my life. Saving me from a quick crushing was, I hope, not for a worse death like “crucifixion.”

Therefore I write a haiku, now knowing less is more:

Vanity

What a great King he was,  
Left many a stone to fling  
at the butterfly.

Then “they” (my parents and other community members, whom I loved) knew that I should experience some pain and be a man. Turkish delights stuffed in my mouth to disable the kiddo from screaming, clean, super-white pillow covers, very clean home—it had to be as strangers were going to come in, and circumcision was the most important turning point in the life of a man to be. The little willy bled for a couple of days as the men cutting off the “redundant” piece were not Mayan medicine men but Arab farm workers (*fellahs*)



**The proud Eradam family—dad, mom, and three sisters—after the circumcision.**

Photo: Anonymous

who did this as part-time job. My dad escaped out of the room, crying—yes, he was literally crying—which serves as a metaphor for state violence against resisting youth, for governments trying to get rid of rebels by breaking into suspected terrorist hideouts in my first short-story collection, *Dirty Pillow Cover*.

Since then I have been prejudiced about extremely clean and orderly homes or streets. There probably is something particularly sick about this.

Such traditional or cultural rituals involving violence helped me develop a keen eye for humanities and humanism and my truest friends became animals and plants. Humans are only good when you are desperately in need of making love—otherwise, they can rarely be friends for keeps and hence the refuge in solitude for many a creative soul.

Nature heals her wounds while still waiting to hear from the lover, which is futile, as usual. Mom knew she had lost her lover, i.e., her husband, i.e., Dad, although they lived in the same house until Mom's death in a car accident, which was the fault of my mother's favorite brother. My uncle's one mistake killed both his favorite sister (Mom) and his wife. He lived long enough to marry two more women, who swindled him out of two houses, and poor uncle died of a heart attack in his vineyard, like Brando in *The Godfather*.

### **Suddenly Istanbul and Boarding School**

We had an unexpected guest one day, one of my relative's husband. He would never come to our poor house as he was an MP and a respected judge. He wanted to register his son Haluk for Darüßsafaka High School, which is a distinguished institution for orphans and children of the poor. Naturally, Haluk was turned down as his family was well off. That is why "Uncle Vedat Mengi" came to tell my parents to get my papers ready to be able to take the exam. It was probably his wife Bedriye who told her husband to do this, as my mother would never be convinced by a sister of lesser wit.

After I succeeded in the entrance exams I was on my way to Istanbul together with my mother. That was the only time she saw Istanbul. She just came to accompany me, to leave me at her uncle's house for three days before I was admitted to the boarding school. My uncle's house was in Bebek, along the Bosphorus (later I would be so surprised to see that it is a very rich district, and how we could have rich relatives I would never understand). On our way we got on a bus in the biggest city in Turkey. This was the first time we were out of our small town and there I was, standing between the legs of adults, holding on to my mother's skirt. I could see the sea, the Bosphorus, through these legs. This was the only city on earth with a sea dividing it into two continents, and that moment was the first time I could hear that the owners of the legs were speaking a language I could not understand. They were not Turkish!

"Mom, what language are they speaking?" I asked in Turkish.

"Hush, we are getting off the bus soon."

But one of the women speaking another language answered: “We are speaking Armenian, dear. We are Turkish citizens and Armenian, too.” Mother held my wrist more tightly, I could feel her grip. She would never hold my wrist so tightly, never again, after she left me in that boarding school. That grip was similar to the grip that took me out of the stream carrying me to my death in the mill.

Now, in 2017, in class at the university, I go back to my childhood days in my hometown before boarding school in Istanbul, and just when it was the right time to comment against othering and discrimination, I tell my students that I found out years later that the dirty cinema we used to frequent when I was only five or six was in fact an Armenian chapel, and that now it is renovated and open as a museum. All I wanted was to see a smile on my two Armenian-Turkish students in class, and I got it. I was acknowledging them as part of our whole, and they were happy I was doing this openly. They never ask, why a museum and not as a chapel anymore?

In that boarding school I found the opportunity to read Shakespeare, definitely the right new beginning for a child. Although I am critical of the Western canon now, Shakespeare is the best beginning in one’s reading adventure, just like Maya Angelou (who was handed a copy of Shakespeare’s works, which encouraged her to read and write, and whose poem “On the Pulse of Morning” I would later translate into Turkish). Abridged and simplified Shakespeare at first, yes, when I was only eleven years old. Later, in 2001, I would translate a play titled *Shakespeare, Abridged* by a company in Atlanta, Georgia, where I delivered my first academic paper on the schizophrenic members in David Mercer’s stage plays at a conference on the “Outsider in Literature and Visual Arts” in October 1988.

God has his mysterious ways, as Forrest Gump’s mom would say. At the conference I met another outsider like myself, Professor Felicia Campbell of UNLV, who would change my life. I still keep the leaf I picked up during our walk in the woods across from the hotel in Atlanta, where the conference was held, after we decided the opening cocktail party was too much for us strangers. She had become a transnational long before me, probably after climbing up K2. That is why she gave me James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon* to read as soon as I arrived in Las Vegas to teach comparative literature and film.

If it hadn't been for Darüşşafaka (meaning "House of Affection"), now the most prestigious school in Turkey for orphans and run by a charity, I would probably be a chimney sweeper, or shoe polisher, or an assistant to Dad in his shoe shop. I developed *ataraxia* in this high school. Saving my time to learn about Epicurus later, I was observing my new habitat calmly to be able to, say, "continue" the life-force in me. If my mom had to leave me at a boarding school, it must be because she had no other alternative. Besides, I was successful in the exams—among two hundred fifty kids I was chosen, one of the elect I was. How would I have known that I had already chosen my path of ececism when I suddenly realized that the pine tree I was hiding behind in that garden had bark falling off the bulky trunk? Meanwhile, the other students at the boarding school were embracing their parents, and mine never turned up again to see me for eight long years. Ah yes, the pine tree had bark that was easy to tear off. So I gave the peelings shape, made animals that needed affection. Later some called this child a suave person, and some, like one of my students at UNLV, a reticent but top-notch professor. Seeing is not knowing, but it can help you know only when you are familiar with concepts like virtue or wisdom. Only then can you begin trying to understand others, which is the beginning of going back to your childhood of no discrimination and othering.

### **Ah! The Moon!**

The USA is very clever indeed! The timing of Apollo 11's landing on the moon was perfect. I had been subjected to an English-oriented, English-speaking world already. We did not have a TV set but our neighbor, the butcher, had one. All the neighbors on the block would gather in his living room, and his wife would serve cookies and tea, and we would watch TV as a communal activity. On July 20, 1969, during summer holiday from boarding school, it was a clear night and there was a full moon in Ankara. And when it was announced that Neil Armstrong had stepped on the moon, I remember myself running to the butcher's balcony to be able to see a dream come true. I could only see the moon smiling at me (unlike Elizabeth Bishop), and I went inside immediately,

shouting: "I saw him, I saw Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon!" That was some giant step for humanity, yes, but all the neighbors laughed at me. I do not know why.

What a year 1969 was! For the first time ever in Eurovision song contest history, four countries won (cuatro ganadoras!) with a tie-break in Madrid, which I would not be able to visit until 2016. I remember my favorite of the four winners was Frida Boccaro singing "Un Jour, Un Enfant" on stage before a metal sculpture created by Salvadore Dali. French, yes, I must have decided then to learn French and make songs in French with lyrics like "Papa, je vais ailleurs demain, encore une fois" (Father, I am going away again).

Since then, everything in the world, especially in Turkey, according to my childish, my adolescent, and young-man minds, happened because of the USA or thanks to the USA. It was always some foreign force or power that made things happen. There were others imitating Yusuf, the individual. What an irony!

We Turks were never to be blamed or praised for anything.

That road taken toward the possibility of making dreams come true must have opened new gateways, must have shed limelight on my less-trodden ways, I now know for sure. Today in class, from a critical point of view, this memoir makes its appearance as the frontier theme and literature in such courses like "Selected Topics in American Literature," or "Popular Culture and the USA," or "Creative Thinking and Behavior."

Soon some people "proved" that the moon landing was a hoax, fraud, or nothing but technology and studio effects. "As if," they said. Now, we say "theater." True or not, whatever happened had happened in the minds and imagination of children, and horizons were endless, dreams were various as they should be and we should never give them up. Why did I love Gabrielle singing "Dreams Can Come True," or the Des'ree song "You Gotta Be"? Now I know. I grew up on such works and images of "other cultures" and they kept me on the right and straight path. Strong women like Mom and their fire kept me intact. That is probably one of the many reasons why I studied theater for my PhD, the "as if factor." And how I would break into tears in the car of my English brother, Robert Mantle, in 1989, during the Easter holiday while we

were touring Ireland. That was when I heard on the radio that “Eternal Flame” was still number one on the “Top of the Pops” chart after maybe eleven weeks—unless I was in love and if it had not started raining again at the same moment when the Bangles started singing the song again. Now, I am “teaching” both: popular culture and romanticism, the maternal-golden-streak yet to bear many immortal movements, because

From the vast city, where I long had pined  
A discontented sojourner: now free,  
Free as a bird to settle where I will. (Wordsworth 495)

### **Suddenly Love**

It is all my mother’s fault, and my sisters’. My life is like Joseph’s dream. I fell in love with women who were caring, encouraging, sharing, nature-loving (environmental humanists), good cooks, definitely not ignorant (can be illiterate, but never ignorant, no!), music and poetry lovers, ready to set to the road, even on foot if necessary. And I have always been lucky in finding lovers, friends, colleagues, relatives, women from all walks of life, who have always been with me, around me, feeding me endlessly with all the emotions and ideas I needed as resources for my creative ecesis. If it hadn’t been for the long list of appreciative women in my life, I would never be me today. In other words, no need to mythify my life, but otherwise I would be another Joseph who would not be able to get out of the well to find his way to Egypt and interpret the Pharaoh’s dreams. Coincidence it is, or the name’s fate—I am a good interpreter of coffee cups, dreams, texts, rhetoric and discourse, film analysis, or generally texts of all kinds. Either I could not afford the venture, or they could not take the risk, all women, Turkish or international.

However, these women also taught me not to betray myself and nature while we were in love and after we fell out of love, “Betrayal” to other forms of life was unforgivable:

How many times have I betrayed you  
How many times have I betrayed you

I didn't water the bougainvillea  
I let my jujube tree dry up and didn't help with the vintage

Tell me, how many times have you betrayed me  
As I betrayed you.

### **Then Suddenly Scotland**

Love lost, love gained. I was in love with a pair of sisters and one of them said, don't go. I said to her: "You come with me, too." Neither of us gave in. Separation was a must as she was married with two kids, so she could not come to Edinburgh with me. But the younger sister kept her promise, she came all the way to London, and with all her family, so that I believe it was not the married elder sister in love with me but the younger one.

I went down to London to meet the younger one, of course as their family friend. Oh, I forgot to say, I was now (in 1989) an established songwriter and two of my songs were at the Eurovision song contest for the Turkey finale in 1983 and 1984. I can still sing well, I made a record with thirteen songs composed from my poetry and poetry by distinguished contemporary Turkish poets. I named the album *Shameless Rose*, to stand for a rose smelling shamelessly in the garden, standing for the *joie de vivre*.

I sang like Romeo under the younger sister's window only to wake the mother up. But we also had to separate as it was almost impossible for me to make her believe that I loved her "too" and, on the other hand, she was eighteen years younger than me. She believed I was just in contact with her to be close to the elder sister. But they did not know that I believed I could fall in love with anyone when one love is over. Love in my life is for anything and anyone, not just for "a girl."

This is just one of the three cases of two sisters loving me deeply. Three pairs of sisters whom I thought were my close friends, every time one of the two fell in love it was at the expense of losing the love of the whole family. All preferred their family ties, none gave up what they had for love, hence my solitude now with two cats and many books.

“RosyGirl” I called the little sister, who, like all women, when in the next room, coming and going, talking about Michelangelo, make me write and sing.

However, the idea of writing a utopia titled “Kitanka” came to me through my classmate, Aou Kitan, who was yet another married woman from the Ivory Coast. Aou and I were like peas and carrots, like Jenny and Forrest Gump. I did not look back when school was over in Edinburgh and we got our degrees, because if I had looked back I might not have found the courage to go back to Turkey in 1989.

Sometimes good friends need to stay good friends.

### **Suddenly the Kurdish Mother on TV**

When I was a child I knew no “others” but I could see them suffering all the time. In 1992, I saw on TV a mother in a village in southeastern Turkey, a mother crying by the stove in a tea house as her own house had been swept



**Kurdish women in Kadifekale, Izmir, Turkey.**

downhill by an avalanche. I was too far away from her tragedy. Suddenly I remembered another woman, a bag lady I saw in New York. “A Brief Note to the Bag Lady, Ma Sister”

was a long poem expressing my need to empathize with the Kurdish mother who was in difficulty, and, in doing so, with the bag lady.

I see, I see ma sister, you have no home  
I see, you're cold and hungry  
But still I can't be sorry enough  
I'm sorry ma sister, but I can't  
I can't be sorry enough. (135)

This poem, published by Naomi Shihab Nye in her anthology *This Same Sky*, made the audience shed tears during a poetry slam in Chicago in 1993, when I was on that seven-state fellowship tour. That is when I learned that cacti were alive. Our guide kindly and finally warned the Russian academician in the group as she was not “seeing the cacti.” Our guide, a professor from the University of Utah, said: “Please mind the plants, do not step on them.”

“But they are just cacti,” said the fellow Russian academic.

“Yes, but they are alive.”

I feel related to anyone when I am traveling, I tell you. This time to the cacti. Later I would see cacti with ID cards, and they were more precious then (in 1993) than us human beings in my own country (in 2017).

### **Suddenly Las Vegas**

There I was in the cage of slot machines (many pronounced it like “slut,” so I suspected my own pronunciation) only to write poetry to be able to put up with the heat. I had already learned that cacti were alive, some of them even had ID cards on them in the Nevada desert, and there were wild donkeys too in the beautiful sunset of Red Rocks, and drivers were warned not to stop their cars to touch these wild donkeys as they might lose their hands or arms. These donkeys were like romantic rebels, they were not like the donkeys associated with stupidity and obedience in Turkey.

Then there was Gudrun in my landlady’s home. Gudrun was huge, a mixture of a wolf and a dog. She was white, too. A huge, scary, white, wolfy dog, and she was walking in the house as if she were going to snap at my trembling hands. I did my best to love her, but had to leave for a hotel casino, maybe because of my fear of castration. A suicidal poem, “The Room Without A View,” a poem of self-exile, came out after I left Las Vegas. When on the Amtrak train from Spokane, Washington, to Chicago, I had the chance to look at myself in that house at the Red Rocks in a poem which alienated me from suicide after I wrote it. Creativity is indispensable.

Bleeding all over, he swiftly escaped  
through the door  
towards the Cliffs  
to piecing together Freedom and Peace.  
Leaving the heat as a gift  
knowing they would never  
be able to exhale it.

### **Suddenly Saginaw**

Saginaw, Michigan, is where one of the greatest American poets, Theodore Roethke, was born. Before my arrival, my award-winning story “Cinderella” had found its way into a local syllabus. This is a story about Kurdish mothers protesting on the most famous shopping street, Istiklal, asking the government to find their lost children. As they “danced alone” I empathized with them and wrote about a bourgeois young woman indifferent to their tragedy but destined to understand those mothers when she is confused with the protestors and is dragged by the hair to the police station, dropping one shoe behind. Empathy with the ecesis of suffering mothers opened another road to some new experiences and new people in Saginaw because Professor Kerry Segel of Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) had noticed that the author of the story was a professor of American Literature. I took to the road just before the great earthquake in Turkey in 1999, just before the new millenium started. They welcomed me warmly, though Michigan was cold, and gave me a cute little red house on the edge of the campus in nature, next to a lagoon.

He was the guest in a little red house on the prairie  
by a road that opens to a rickety rush but he could hear  
them dancing in the window of the Cage  
knowing objects in mirror are closer than they appear.

9.9.1999, at around 9 pm: Colleagues at SVSU were warning us that something evil, bad, ominous might happen in a day with so many nines in it. At around 9 pm there was a “meow!” at my door. You can imagine how easily she managed to get in looking at me in the eye, and how she soon ruled the little red house.

Minnosh, my Saginaw stray cat, made me write a story (“The Native Speaker”) about a lonely lover in exile in Saginaw, who thinks he has left his beloved by accepting this “Distinguished Foreign Professor” job and made me realize another metaphor for my presence in Saginaw: an opossum, the outsider, in Colin Wilson’s term. I identified myself with an opossum and my lack of communication with most of the Americans to that of the opossum’s coming out at dark to steal my cat’s food. The wild animal was scared off easily and did not receive a warm welcome like Minnosh. I had to feed the cat indoors and the wild opossum in the garden, but Minnosh was a hunter, and she would bring me opossum babies as gifts to show me her gratitude.

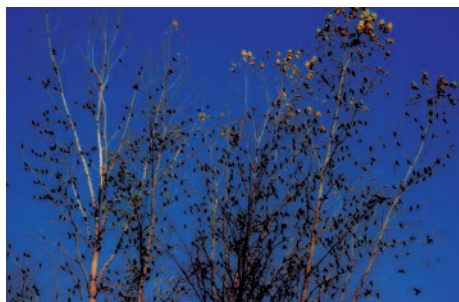
I could understand Roethke only then, in his hometown, where he was an outsider. You get to know yourself as well as others especially after reading poetry from various lands, hearing those poets’ voices carrying the sky wherever they go, and also by subjecting your very body and presence to the cultures of the people you visit. The need to define and describe myself must be a natural outcome of such moments. My best friends were the two resident poets of Saginaw, the late Al Hellus, who, before I left Saginaw, visited the little red house and provided me with great material about the Beat Generation. The other great friend was the activist-environmentalist poet Marc Beaudin, who helped me open my first photography exhibition at his gallery Cage for the benefit of the 1999 earthquake victims in Turkey.



**Saginaw poets. The late Al Hellus (left) and Marc Beaudin at Cage, in December 1999, for the opening of Eradam’s first photography exhibition, “Human-scapes from Turkey.”**

Photo: Anonymous

Professor Kerry Segel of SVSU took me to the chairperson of the photography department, a great gentleman, Hideki Kihata, who said: "Looking at the photos you take I can tell what sort of a person you are. You must not waste these photos from Turkey only in class activities,



**"Bird Tree" behind the little red house. Saginaw, 1999.**

let me speak to a friend for an exhibition." That is how Marc Beaudin became a best friend. This is how my estrangement in some funny exile was cured, and poetry poured again for the benefit of earthquake victims' orphans.

Therefore, this child here needs to be "opened carefully" like the Cherokee rose of Georgia; like Emily D.; like the sad bride of Gesi Bağları; like Bartleby; like the mountain bluebird of Idaho; like Sylvia



**Eradam's mail box in Saginaw.**

P.; like the American elm tree of North Dakota so similar to Plath's nature and poetry; like the Tule tree of Mexico; like Grandma Moses's paintings; like the cardinals of Saginaw; like a robin of Hartford, Connecticut;

like the trans street sex workers of Thailand; like the orange blossoms of Miami, Florida; like the milky breasts of Rosasharn in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, saving a starving old man (I never forgave John Ford, who did not show this epitome of humanity in his film); like the "karsanbaç" (home-made ice cream, a mixture of clean early snow and grape pectin); and last, but not least, like the lost wooden door of his birth home in "Anatolia," which means "the place where the sun rises."

He listened to the whirly gig of his  
clink and before he forgot to put  
the red flag up he put a poem in  
the mail box of his pleasure  
dome danced with his wild cat in  
the window of his Cage and thrust his  
body into the solitude of dark bleeding night  
the only realm he bloomed at.

## Suddenly Cuba

In 2011 and 2015, I went to Cuba. My reason was to make two friends happy. The first trip was to act as a go-between to bring together the hands and hearts of two of my very best friends. They did get along very well, we had great fun together, but never the twain met in love. My attempt as a go-between was futile, but it



“*Rentar una fantasia.*” La Havana, Cuba, 2011.  
inspired in me a story of love with the phrase I saw on a Cuban taxi during my first visit to the capital, La Havana: “Rentar Una Fantasia.”

There I realized that sometimes I wrote poems, stories after I lived the feelings, ideas, concepts in them. And, sometimes, I wrote them and experienced the content later, as every artist should be a little prophetic, they say. It always starts like that: You first rent a dream, then share it with everyone. Only then can it come true. That was the main reason behind the Gezi Park riots in Istanbul.

The Gezi Park riots in Istanbul against the present government took place between my two visits to Cuba. The riots started in 2013 and were forced to end in 2014 by the government’s violent suppression. They

will be remembered for the assassination of so many young rebels who wanted freedom and were supporting the parliamentary system of the secular republic, almost a century old now. I could not run with the rebels, but I made a song for the victims, “Tree of Life,” and wrote poetry.



**From the Gezi Park protests. The Republic Monument in Taksim Square, Istanbul, 2013.**

That is what I am created for, as Naomi Shihab Nye says in her poem “Famous.”

Jose Marti or Che Guevara were not only icons from a distance. I read of and about them. They had lived and died for their people, for the happiness and welfare of people all over the world. In my renovated fuchsia taxi, I, the San Jose from Istanbul, was sure to find my *amor de fantasia*. Cubans full of the *joi de vivre* can give you advice about love and life similar to that of Wordsworth’s words of wisdom in “The Prelude.”

You must first fall in love with all the people, yes, with everyone, then you must have the desire to live with them in one huge, ponderous home. Just imagine that big family. When you start working for them as well and as much as you do for yourself, then you will start turning red. Now you have become only “fuchsia” said a “red” friend.

I am you: the other.

So much depends on that red in women.

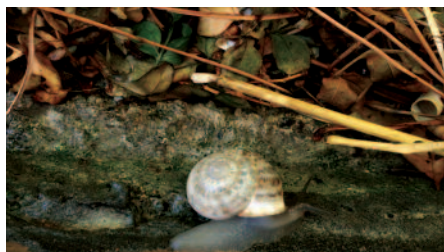
It always starts with loving women, you know, womanism it is, like that of Alice Walker’s. Only then can you share your dream of love, of nature and environment, freedom, liberty, and happiness for everyone with everyone and every other living being. Only then shall we be able to stop enjoying the illusion of the intangibility of the precipices we build between the seemingly separate identities of us human beings.

Hence the impossibility of an exit to my human condition as an exile in my own country, no exit from this planet, as transnationality now means to me, an alien everywhere.

I believe in the process of growing to be a poet-child, I was actually not saved but drowned and wasted together with the spring veggies in the brook that went to the wheel of the mill. I have rented a dream of a futile hope of a sense of belonging.

His spinning top and petosky  
stones in his hands, sweet  
grass and mandala  
as his regalia he opened  
his homeless eagle eyes of cryptic  
cacti raining on the tombs  
of his kind flooding his own  
dreams of ore.

Metin Altıok, a great Turkish poet who was among thirty-five souls assassinated in a hotel set ablaze by religious fundamentalists in 1993, defined this state of mind in his book title, *Resident Outsider* (1991).



“Snail Trail.” Ayvalik, Turkey, 2016.

Knucklebones never stand upright on their rounded ends, and rented dreams have no exit: “*Sin salida.*” Hence my ecesis with poetry in this “Inveterate Fight.”

I always think of the horse  
on this bloody arena.  
Look at the perineum of the matador  
it’s so red. Always.  
The bull is bound to be  
slain  
but the innocent black  
mare may again embrace  
the vast  
plain.

Therefore, the age of the post-anthropocene must be legalized by all nations, now! We are acting too slowly in the hands of the doubt merchants of the culture of obedience. Self-defining poems bring only temporary relief.

## The Tule Tree

The Montezuma cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*), or *ahuehuete* (which means “deep water” in the Nahuatl language), is Mexico’s national tree and which I had the chance to worship in 2015.

*Freedom* and *loyalty*: two *sine qua non* concepts for Yusuf, the Anatolian boy. I believe I have inherited them from my mother’s teachings, and that if we keep those strangers astray or segregate them from the whole to which we belong, this xenophobia results in crimes of hatred, whereas those strangers may actually be closer than our best friends or relatives. This appeared to me on a colleague’s car side mirror, suddenly finding its way into this poem about my total alienation and exile in Saginaw, although I must admit I was befriended by great men like Lito Elio Porto of Austin, Texas, later in Turkey. I still believe organized religions, yes all of them, should be de-institutionalized as faith or belief in some god is a matter of conscience



The tree of Tule, Mexico, 2015.

and resides in the individual’s heart, and this is nobody else’s concern. And now that I am an old child, as large as the tree of Tule (Arbol del Tule in Santa Maria del Tule) in Oaxaca, and because it is made up of many trunks looking like many tule trees

gathered together, but deep in its DNA it has proved to be one single individual. This is probably why the huge mango I ate after visiting this monumental national tree tasted like life itself. I am one body

made up of many. “I am large, I contain multitudes,” like Walt Whitman writes in his “Song of Myself” (88). Hence, “E pluribus unum,” like the USA and like Turkey and like many other countries. I am at home everywhere, I am transnational and in exile everywhere, including my hometown. I can identify with “just a few trees” in the Gezi Park in Taksim in Istanbul, at the center of all centers of Turkey, where, at the end of the Ottoman Empire, water would be divided and distributed equally to people. Hence the name of the square “Taksim” (divide and distribute equally).



**Fog in Istanbul, 2016.**

Mother Nature and poets like Emily Dickinson taught me with their poetry of consciousness and knowing the purpose of ecesis, as in poem number 982: “If I can stop one Heart from breaking.” That must be the reason for the need to identify myself with “the winged others” and understand and empathize, especially with cats.

Freedom

Fog in Istanbul,  
trouble only to man,  
nothing to the winged.

The power of metaphor in a child’s imagination and in creative endeavors is one of the conspicuously invisible sources leading him/her to individuality, the tree of Tule. Only then can he/she take her sky anywhere she goes for everyone she meets and touches. Transnationality is being one with the rest of all diverse identities.

I may well have been born as a three-year-old Syrian Kurd named Alan Kurdi, but instead he found his transnational identity in death on

the Aegean sand in my country, and maybe that is what T. S. Eliot means by “in my end is my beginning,” which is also Katherine Mansfield’s and my eldest sister’s epitaph. That is why I misunderstand the U2 song “Raised by Wolves” as “we are raised by wars” because I do not belong to that pack. Nevermore, nevermore!

Now I realize why I write anything I write like packing my suitcase or backpack. It takes me a long time to get ready for the end, and therefore I put in bits and pieces as they let me remember them casually, that’s how I piece myself together.

However, I am like the patient etherized upon the table or like a fly pinned and preyed upon by a bird to be preyed upon by another hunter for eco-eceicism. It is in vain to try to fly away because I feel I have become a threshold character, not a person but rather a presence, a *homo videns* like the Sioux Ohiyesa (Charles Alexander Eastman, the Santee Dakota physician), a person who is disturbed by seeing but not seeking power (as opposed to Foucault’s classification). As one of Joe Orton’s characters says, “I have finally learned to stand by what I have done instead of just doing what I think I can stand by.” Now I realize I am arrogant enough to believe I can teach to humanity, though in vain, sensitivity concerning environmental humanities by means of literature and art. I still believe I can jump into social-media sharing to stop someone torturing an animal and save the poor



**Fish on Galata Bridge, Istanbul, 2016.**

soul (remember John Updike’s poem “Good Dog”?) in the *gif*, and I cannot help cursing at the torturer. Now I have no nationality, because in today’s world there is not a single totally happy and peaceful nation or civilization like the Commagene people of Mount Nemrut. If there is one, it must be insensitive, cynical, and indif-

ferent, i.e., dead.

Therefore, my journey of eceicism is learning to go beyond the seen, the visible, the conspicuously consumed, and beyond the conspicuously invisible; i.e., a child’s imminent honorable and righteous motive of try-

ing to exist (ececism) via creativity of any kind by taking the risk of facing violence of some sort, if not destruction or extinction:

To tell his story of a rude awakening  
he shuttled across human borders in pain  
as he learned to dance in the window of the Cage  
“perhaps,” he said, “objects in mirror are closer than they appear.”

Way back home, I am still playing tipcat: my self is the “cat” tipped by environmental humanities and humanism. My imagination and creativity, in order not to forget “the other” self-images of mine, that “self-same power” (Emerson), took me to see and share the time spared for me on this planet.

The epitome of oneness with the whole of the universe and all other living beings during my travels was my meeting a barefooted and tiny old woman at the San Cristobal bazaar, a mother desperately trying to sell some herb unknown to me. I took the whole bunch between her



**“Cuban Child.”** La Havana, 2011.

arms, gave her a banknote imagining it would be enough. It was too much. She did her best to communicate with me to say that she did not have change, and she turned to other street vendors, who spoke to me in

Spanish, which I did not understand. She gave me back the banknote, I gave it back to her. Then she took her little old purse out of her pocket and showed me a few coins in it and from her gestures I could tell she could not make change. I held on to the herb and put the banknote into her purse and closed it. My friends were smiling and they kept asking me what I would do with that herb. The old native woman did not accept the money immediately, she turned to the other vendors, kissed her

hand. I said it's okay and walked away with the herb bunch in my arms. I looked bizarre, I could tell, as the other women and my fellow travelers laughed at me.

Half an hour before I had seen a very old man with a burnt face. I met him again, tapped on his shoulder, and handed him the herb bunch. He was surprised but happy. We were speaking the same language, finally. By not being suspicious and putting extra meaning into what I was doing, they were actually letting me in. I belonged. I am grateful to them, like many others from other nationalities and identities for



**The old woman at the San Cristobal bazaar, Mexico, 2015.**

letting me be one of them.

And yes, I do have two cats named not Tip and Cat, but Raki and Sharab. Raki, the boy, is happy to sleep under my double chin, and Wine, the girl, is always sucking my ear

lobes, a simulation of

her mother's breasts.

I know, being poisoned by Elizabeth Bishop, there is no cherry orchard on the other side of the wall. This gets clearer when suffering becomes one easy art to master. The golden streak of my eco-eccesis, together with all other beings via creativity, came with another haiku.

I came to your door  
The leaves rustled under my feet  
And you took it for fall.

If I had not mastered this life's art of suffering, I would have mastered another alternate reality. I might well have been a Jew, an Armenian, a Kurd, an African, a nomad, a gypsy, a tree, a cat, and many more, for sure. I would always, say "continue" in whatever life-form I found myself

in, I would always blossom with *le joie de vivre* and *tristesse* and pain. Nothing is certain and permanent except for what we remember and what we think we know, and I *know* I am alive now and I *know* that since I was once born, I am to die, and since I am still alive, I must not



**Cat in Cihangir, Istanbul, fall 2007.**

have done yet what I was born to do in this, my “Mongo,” as the planet of doom was called in the Flash Gordon adventures. This has been the most valuable epiphany of my life that keeps me going, “malgre les guerres, malgre les dangers du mort” (“Bonne Justice” by Paul Eluard).

While plum trees blossom  
 Death is but a coincidence  
 My life but a haiku.

One more thing: my chemistry teacher, Yesim Salman, at Darüşşafaka, the boarding school in Istanbul, was also a poet and she used to say, “only salt will stay.”

I hope I have evolved from a child playing tipcat to yet another child who keeps writing poetry; from a child ready to learn and change to a child dressed by keen hands and a child whose transnationality is synonymous to being trans-identity, to being a no-world-citizen, to just being, an *être en soi*, in Jean-Paul Sartre’s terms, a being on his own, always looking up to some other future, while producing here and now his haikus, his stories, his songs, his photographs, all of which are proof of his attempts to see what is made conspicuously invisible to people of the world.

He buckled up with the rest of the world  
 in his word on the brittle wings of the oven bird  
 they danced and danced in the window of the Cage  
 as objects in mirror are closer than they appear.

Both literally and metaphorically, the hands of this poet hidden behind him, probably holding some new poem or song, have been shaken by so many distinguished hands and his jacket buttons have been done up by the hands of some great people, especially women.

I might have lost the vineyard itself, my home, where I feel like a transnational entity among other identities, who think they belong to a system of oppression. Yet I am wandering in my creative vineyards, knowing that so many of my kind of people cannot breathe, like Coleridge's ancient mariner: "Water water everywhere, and not a drop to drink."

I have started feeling like an exile, or almost like a transnational alien at "home," i.e., my final state. What I should confess is that I am living in a cell of my own choice, the cell being my body, my city, my country, my native tongue, Turkish, and the culture I was brought up in, and then because of the impossibility of finding and founding a new identity at this age—sixty-three—on this planet I sometimes feel like a phantom, an outsider pretending to be an



**Plum tree blossoms, Beykoz, Istanbul.**

insider, understanding and helping the immigrants, say the Syrians when on my way to work. However, I feel a kind of a disturbing empathy for them which forces me not to exaggerate my efforts as they might be offended. Moreover, the fear of overdoing my empathy or sympathy may make them more defensive because I might be underestimating their own power to be happy in a kind of transnational survivalism, while I have been losing my power and skills to continue surviving with my so-called national traits.

My indifference or "benign neglect" of the problem is no remedy in a system or political rule, the most outstanding characteristic of which is indifference to the people's real problems, like poverty, lack of freedom.

At their best, politicians are hypocritically indifferent and are usually punitive and violent and by all means make me feel ontologically insecure in my own land (whatever that means), which makes me sound to myself like a character in the works of a late-nineteenth-century naturalist like Émile Zola, Thomas Hardy, or the one and only Martin Eden of Jack London.

My memories of living in Scotland are another matter. My privacy in the dormitory was violated by the British Council authorities, who had given me a scholarship. Yes, they entered my room without permission, and after I told them that I was going to *The Guardian* with the evidence, they apologized in a formal letter which was no apology at all. All I did was to write the evaluation letter I was asked to compose about Edinburgh and the school. I started my criticism for the betterment of conditions for all. They were not ready for criticism, I presume, and especially from the “Turkish” assistant professor!

There were many more cases of pushing my Turkish identity either as an alien to avoid or an alien to be appreciated exaggeratedly. Compliments could hurt too, as a result of which you choose to become a reticent guy, which would satisfy their impressions, judgments, or prejudices. You are forced to be someone else in the myriad faces of xenophobia. Having been invited to Las Vegas as a distinguished foreign professor, to Cambridge as a representative, writer, and translator, facing discrimination and xenophobia is almost like humiliating your guests in your own house after inviting them to dinner.



“Poet.” Painting by Merih Demirkol, 2015.

Yusuf Eradam collection

The only consolation, relief, or remedy comes in my creative activities, in nature, in my flat in Istanbul when I am with my cats, books, and very few friends, all of whom might at times make me feel like a stranger even there in my cozy cocoon. Is that one of the many reasons why I love Emily Dickinson, my dearest Amherst recluse who could see to see better than any of us on the threshold of the world of objects?

### Stone for a Sling

. . . I played  
games with child friends whose names i forgot  
i was the best at grabbing the five stones off the ground  
thanks to those five stones in one hand  
i could never ever hold a sling to kill birds . . .  
then i saw life-size cartoons of wars, of massacres, of genocide . . .  
of fingerprints crying out for their owners . . .  
of human beings indifferent to human affliction . . .  
now in my room with birds from all over the world  
i play hide-and-seek in poems  
hoping to shed light onto lullabies . . .  
hoping not to be  
the stone for a sling.

In such moments of creativity, I feel one with the whole and I believe I have just started seeing everything clearly. As Najaib Mahfouz said, “Home is the place where your efforts to escape cease.”

I am the eternal wanderer and creativity is my home, wherever, however, and whoever I am.



“Bird’s Way Back Home.” Mexico, 2015.

Now an object in mirror closer  
 than it appears he sings his quiet  
 song from the top of a juniper tree  
 and looks at the onlookers  
 and to the serene melodies of the running  
 river, people dance in the window  
 of the Cage 'cause objects in mirror  
 are closer than they appear.  
 (November 11-14, 1999; Saginaw, Michigan)

*Photographs by the author except where noted.*

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